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Healing, ritual, and change in the Amazon: Ethnomusicological study of chants among Peruvian Huni Kuin.

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Andrej Kocan

Resumo

Este é um estudo etnográfico resultante de trabalho de campo realizado entre 2021 e 2023 junto das comunidades Huni Kuin (Cashinahua) residentes no lado peruano fronteiriço entre o Peru e o Brasil, na região amazónica. Centrando-me nos cânticos de ayahuasca (nixi pae) executados durante as sessões ritualísticas, analiso o papel integral destes cânticos nas práticas espirituais da comunidade. De acordo com estudos anteriores, a cura, enquanto cura de doenças físicas, não tem sido o objetivo principal das sessões de ayahuasca para os Huni Kuin peruanos. O meu argumento centra-se na noção de que estes rituais servem principalmente as funções de promoção da coesão social e de manutenção do tecido espiritual da comunidade. A cura, na sua visão do mundo, é concebida como um processo transformador - um alinhamento em direção à totalidade e ao equilíbrio. Esta viagem transformadora é encapsulada no conceito de xinan, caracterizado como uma consciência integradora, mediada e proporcionada através de experiências durante as cerimónias de ayahuasca, outros rituais comunitários e a vida quotidiana. Desde a década de 1960, os missionários têm sido, na ausência de outros agentes de mudança, como o Estado, as empresas e os turistas, os principais geradores de transformações na sociedade Huni Kuin na altamente isolada região peruana de Purús. A diminuição da presença de anciãos detentores de conhecimentos espirituais e a redução da frequência dos rituais comunitários levaram a uma mudança na visão de mundo pela comunidade, do espiritual para o secular. Esta transição teve, consequentemente, impacto no equilíbrio da

comunidade, afectando as suas capacidades colectivas de auto-cura. Neste contexto, o presente estudo reavalia categorias antropológicas como o xamanismo, a performance, o ritual, a cura e os sistemas cosmológicos. Também explora de que modo os conceitos de doença e cura são conceptualizados dentro da perspetiva única dos Huni Kuin.

Abstract

This is an ethnographic study resulting from fieldwork carried out between 2021 and 2023 among the Huni Kuin (Cashinahua) communities living on the Peruvian side of the border between Peru and Brazil, within the Amazon region. Focusing on their ayahuasca (*nixi pae*) chants performed during ritualistic sessions, I delve into the integral role of these chants in the spiritual practices of the community. According to previous studies, healing, as a cure for physical ailments, has not been the primary aim of ayahuasca sessions for the Peruvian Huni Kuin. My argument centers on the notion that these rituals primarily serve the functions of fostering social cohesion and maintaining the spiritual fabric of the community. Healing, in their worldview, is conceived as a transformative process—an alignment towards wholeness and balance. This transformative journey is encapsulated in their concept of *xinan*, characterized as an integrative consciousness, mediated and provided through experiences during ayahuasca ceremonies, other communal rituals, and daily life. Since the 1960s, missionaries have been, in the absence of other agents of change such as the state, corporations, and tourists, the main generators of transformations in Huni Kuin society in the highly isolated Peruvian Purús area. The diminishing presence of elders possessing spiritual knowledge and the reduction in the frequency of communal rituals have led to a shift in the community's worldview from the spiritual to the secular. This transition has impacted the balance within the community, affecting its collective self-healing capabilities. Consequently, this study re-evaluates anthropological categories such as shamanism, performance, ritual, healing, and cosmological systems. It also explores how the concepts of illness and healing are conceptualized within the unique perspective of the Huni Kuin.

Palavras-chave: Cashinahua, Huni Kuin, nixi pae, cantos, ayahuasca, xamanismo, autoetnografia, cura, neocolonização

Keywords: Cashinahua, Huni Kuin, nixi pae, chants, ayahuasca, shamanism, autoethnography, healing, neo-colonization

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Foreword

> Ancestors want to live on, they do in our epigenetics, which expresses itself in our affects, and the music taps into that.

I remember me in high school. I was barely 18, already going reckless and off the rails with hedonistic and counterculture behavior, exclaiming loudly in front of anyone: I do not intend to live to an old age, I desire to live only up to my 30 and then leave this wretched world. And so exactly at 30 years old, right after my graduation in physics, I got diagnosed with cancer and with this, the long process of transformation started. Because at that point I realized I want to choose life. The close encounter with my own mortality forced me to explore the nature of my own "being in this world" and this jolt could not have come at a better time. I could not deny to myself anymore that I wanted to know all I could about myself, the components of my psyche that were causing the self-destructive behavior. I could no longer put aside these questions and entertain myself with the usual ambitions of the Western White man: struggle for money, fame, climbing the social ladder (not that I was pursuing them seriously). When facing death at young age all of this became meaningless. The questions that had risen from the depths of my soul did not go away; I needed to face myself and find a way to heal myself that really worked. Because any self-delusional "solutions" would probably have led me to the morgue. Fast forward many years, I have been in a complete remission for more than 15 years and I am on a path to do a PhD in ethnomusicology, searching for answers how music in the context of ritual can be healing. This was what led me to do ethnography of the ayahuasca chants with the Huni Kuin. This thesis is at the same time an autoethnography of my illness and healing and an ethnography

of the Huni Kuin with the main question, “Why Huni Kuin don’t chant anymore?” The ethnography and arguments in the thesis are informed by my autoethnography. The reason why these two seemingly uncorrelated topics are put together is that Huni Kuin split about a hundred years ago. One part remained in contact with the outside world and has become a global actor in the neoshamanic ayahuasca tourism, performing ceremonies in the postmodern setting with the ayahuasca songs. These songs are called inventions or new traditions by the elders of Huni Kuin that resisted contact with the outside world for another 40 years and has preserved a traditional way of performing ayahuasca ceremonies, although greatly diminished due to the influence of the missionaries. This situation enables unique convergence of my autoethnographic experience of healing through a so-called New Age method with the new and old tradition of the Huni Kuin. On one end, the neoshamanic adherents don’t get tired of repeating that music is healing, on the other, the traditional Huni Kuin chanters would say that chants were originally not meant for healing.

INTRODUCTION

In 2013, during my studies at the Royal Danish Academy of Music (RDAM) to be a sound engineer, I visited the Shipibo village in the Peruvian Amazon for almost a month. It was there that I experienced my first ayahuasca session and the sacred songs that are sung during the sessions, called *icaros*. I found the *icaros* songs themselves to be deeply touching, even healing—especially the singing of the main *maestra,* Justina. This experience proved to be crucial in leading me away from my ambitions of making a career of as a professional sound engineer focused on recording Western classical music. It slowly led me to my new goal of doing fieldwork among Indigenous[1] people, exploring and recording their local musics.

One night in the summer of 2021, before going to sleep, I thought through the events of that day of fieldwork, as I usually did in those final moments of day when I had time to reflect on my experiences. I remembered the title of Anthony Seeger's book *Why Suya sing* (1987). It occurred to me that I could paraphrase my experience that summer into the title *Why Huni Kuin Don't Chant Anymore*. My curiosity to search for and document Indigenous ayahuasca[2] chants had led me to the Peruvian Huni Kuin (Cashinahua[3]) in the Amazon. I was aware that the Huni Kuin, as do many other Indigenous people in the Amazon, also prepare and consume ayahuasca, a hallucinogenic brew. The drinking of ayahuasca is widely spread all over the western Amazon among Indigenous and mestizo populations and has become spread all over the world through contemporary spirituality movements.

[1] I capitalize the word Indigenous as a sign of respect for Indigenous Peoples.
[2] Ayahuasca brew is a mix of usually only two plant ingredients: *Banisteriopsis caapi* commonly known as ayahuasca vine, and *Psychotria viridis*, or commonly known as *chakruna*.
[3] The Cashinahua call themselves Huni Kuin (usually translated as true people in their language), but were called by the outsiders Cashinahua. To distinguish them from the other Indigenous groups who speak Panoan language and most often also call themselves true people, the Cashinahua would be the better name. However, some of the Huni Kuin still feel that Cashinahua is a derogatory name which they reject. I will use both names interchangeably.

Among the Indigenous people of the Amazon region, the use of ayahuasca forms part of the cultural and individual experience; to understand this experience we have to go beyond the understanding of the psychochemical effects of this substance. Furthermore, I knew that the ceremonial drinking of ayahuasca with the Huni Kuin was originally accompanied by a cappella chants, called *nixi pae dewe* (ayahuasca chants).

The Huni Kuin people are an especially interesting case to look into because they split about a hundred years ago when, to escape the horrors of the rubber boom, a faction of them moved from Brazil to Peru, resisting further contact with the outside world until the 1940s. I have chosen this group of Huni Kuin because their contact with the outside world has been much shorter as compared with the majority of Huni Kuin remaining in Brazil. Brazilian Huni Kuin were in an uninterrupted contact with the Western colonizer since the late 19th century and have undergone a more thorough transformation. On the other hand, Peruvian Cashinahua were not affected by the process of touristification and commodification of their rituals as there is no tourism due to the high isolation of the Purús region. The Peruvian side of the region is accessible only by airplane, because there is no road leading there. From Brazil one can enter the region by boat traveling up the river Purús, a tributary of the Amazon River. Nowadays, the Brazilian Cashinahua are world famous as protagonists of the ever-expanding movement known as "ayahuasca shamanism," with their ayahuasca songs accompanied by guitars, djembe, and other instruments. This is why the original focus of my work was to be on these "original," or more traditional ayahuasca chants that accompany the practice of ayahuasca usage. My impression before coming to the field was that since the Peruvian Cashinahua have been in an isolation until 1940s, I would encounter a rich practice of the "*puro canto*" (chants), still very much alive, and be able to document a variety of chanters and their styles.

Soon after starting my fieldwork, I realized that it would be almost impossible to find the chanters, and that it seemed like the last generation of them was dying[4]. The chanter (*txana*) is a respected figure in the Huni Kuin society, able to direct the ayahuasca sessions with their chants. The role of this figure is related to the figures that we usually know of as

[4] The two chanters that I found and were able to recite chants by heart both already passed away by 2024.

shamans, *ayahuasqueros*, *curanderos*, *vegetalistas*, or any number of other names. These roles may overlap to a certain degree, but primarily a chanter is the one who directs the ayahuasca ceremonies because he (mostly a male) is a talented singer who is able to memorize the chants by heart. He is not necessarily a healer (a shaman). The type of ayahuasca songs that reach the Western population who have contact with the Huni Kuin ayahuasca shamanism, is most often the newer style of the songs accompanied with instruments. These guitar songs, which are [also?] preferred by the younger Huni Kuin generations, seem to be replacing the older version of the a cappella chants.

I also observed that in the communities there is an ongoing process of Christianization, resulting in Christian songs being sung at church ceremonies and local preachers leading kids' dance performances. I was also a witness to a church ceremony called "*culto*", which resembles the charismatic Pentecostal ceremonies. The missionaries are introducing church music for the spread of new religion—nowadays using synthesizers with loudspeakers.

Central parts of Huni Kuin cultural life, at least until recent history, used to be constituted through various rituals and ceremonies accompanied by chants. In prior studies, researchers did not report the usage of any kind of instruments for ayahuasca ceremonies. These ceremonies and rituals were seen as defining their identity as a group. Naturally, music and the ways we humans play it and use instruments, change through time. It is worth considering whether these musical changes signify a deeper change in a society or not. Political, religious, or social changes may be the cause of musical changes in such a way that certain musical activities lose their significance altogether, which is very different than merely an introduction of new sounds into certain genres or musical activities.

Missionaries arrived to the Peruvian Huni Kuin in the 1950s, who were working under the organization named Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), a huge Evangelical Protestant mission coming from the US, Texas. Thousands of missionaries were sent around the world, mostly in the Latin America to the Indigenous people to translate Bible into their languages. Their strategy was to fill the power vacuum left by the governments. The

governments of the developing countries[5] learned to rely on well-financed foreign linguists rather than go to the expense of developing their own national school program for Indigenous peoples. The SIL made contracts with the states, that they will educate the Indigenous people and in return they were allowed to evangelize them. From the point of view of the state, it was a way to resolve the Indigenous "issue"—how to pacify them. When the new missionaries arrived, the Huni Kuin were confronted with the Bible and had to accept various prohibitions of activities such as: singing and dancing in their traditional ways, smoking tobacco (a fundamental element of a shamanic society) and polygamous marriages. For following the new rules, they were rewarded with food and medicine. As Kenneth Kensinger observed already in (1967), the significant change in the area of social relations was a "shift of focus from community-wide activity to the activities of the extended or nuclear family." The missionaries also introduced bilingual schools in the Huni Kuin communities and for that they had to train the local individuals to become teachers. They became some of the very few to receive salaries, making the newly educated teachers the new elite of Huni Kuin communities. Together with the introduction of evangelical Christianity, this is arguably the most recent disruptive change in the Huni Kuin society.

There has been quite a lot of research of ayahuasca use with the Brazilian Huni Kuin; however, not much has been done with the Peruvian Huni Kuin regarding their ayahuasca usage with the exception of Barbara Keifenheim ([1999] 2004). As Roy Hoyle, who has lived in Purús for more than 40 years, told me, so far, nobody, none of the researchers "studying" the Peruvian Huni Kuin have focused on the ayahuasca chants and the Huni Kuin ayahuasca complex. Even the researchers working with the Brazilian Huni Kuin have mostly studied kinship, politics, and anthropology of the body. An exception here is Elsje Lagrou (2004; 2018). I have had experiences with three different versions of ayahuasca sessions: first with the Shipibo people in Peru in 2013, then in Slovenia in a neoshamanic form, and finally with the Peruvian Huni Kuin. Due to sanitary prohibition during COVID-19 it was impossible to visit Brazilian Huni Kuin; I only attended ayahuasca ceremonies in Slovenia that were inspired by Brazilian Huni Kuin version of ayahuasca ceremonies. I could also observe the

[5] The term developing is a problematic one.

Brazilian Huni Kuin groups in the Andean region where they would come to serve ayahuasca to tourists.

The questions I am posing in this research also have personal meaning to me. My path towards healing gave me insights into what forms a healing process (it started first with realizing my fragmentation and then a journey to wholeness) and also highlighted for me the limitations of the many so-called New Age healing, or therapeutic, methods. As my self-imposed task or goal was to document traditional *nixi pae* chants, I insisted that I do this within the ritual practice of consuming ayahuasca, during the ceremonies. The reason for my insisting on recording "live" ceremonies (as if it were a performance) was to catch what was going on with the participants and within the participants.

After graduating from the Royal Danish Academy of Music (RDAM) in 2015, I got a job at RTV Slovenia, as a sound engineer in the group for production of documentaries. This is how I learned the tricks of the trade of documentary filmmaking. I had already started with my own filming of impressions during my first fieldwork in China during my studies at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music in 2015. I used these skills to film scenes during my fieldwork, and record in audiovisual the interviews. From this footage emerged a documentary that is part of this thesis.

Structure of the thesis

The thesis is structured into three parts; they are roughly dedicated to: methodology, main concepts, and the field work. Each part has its own state of the art section.

The first part, dedicated to the Methodology, is reviewing the participant observation principles, and the more emerging method of autoethnography. I am also delving into the Indigenous research paradigm and how it can be applied in my case. It includes my research questions, and hypotheses.

The second part is split into two parts. It starts with an excerpt of my fieldwork as an example of the happenings and challenges. It describes in a narrative style the

circumstances of my arrival, and how the initial experiences compelled me to modify my hypotheses and define in a new way the organization of my work. Instead of staying in one community I began a journey to many Huni Kuin communities on the rivers Purús and Curanja in search of the remaining chanters. The chapter continues with a theoretical framework to clarify the main concepts that I am dealing with in the thesis.

The third part is the ethnographic part, based on information, observations and interviews gathered and recorded during my fieldwork with the Huni Kuin in the Purús region. It starts with an introduction to the social and historical context of the Peruvian Huni Kuin. It continues with a review of the previous research of the Peruvian Huni Kuin. I provide an introduction to Purús region and highlight its isolation within the state of Peru, and the reasons why they arrived about a hundred years ago to this territory. I also point out that even though they were in a voluntary isolation until the 1940s, they are nowadays embedded within the national society, migrating to their brothers in Brazil and to Pucallpa and Lima.

I then introduce the main concepts of Huni Kuin cosmology. I proceed with ayahuasca use as was narrated to me through unstructured interviews with my interlocutors. I proceed with the ethnographic account of my experiences of my search for the chanters, and description of ayahuasca ceremonies that I attended. Next there are a few examples of the chant lyrics and the analysis of the chants and a comparison with the new style of guitar songs.

I then examine the sociopolitical situation and include a historical account of the evangelical churches in the Latin America and how these organizations affected the Indigenous people on a large scale. I also look on the microscale, into a life of one German missionary who became my friend during my stay in Purús and in Colombiana. In the last part of Chapter III, I talk about practices of sustainability for safeguarding music, rituals, and with them the whole cosmology. I also discuss the central role of school and education as well as topics such as agriculture.

Part of the thesis is also my documentary movie titled: *Nixi pae chants of the Peruvian Huni Kuin* (2022). I suggest it be seen after reading the Part I. There is a link to the

Vimeo platform. The film is under the password: nixipae2024. Throughout the Part III, there are links to visual excerpts from my archive. These are all on the Vimeo platform under the same password as the film: nixipae2024.

PART I: Methodology

> "…inasmuch as ethnography was understood as a method for objectively revealing the perspective of the other, ethnographers were participating in the colonial project by representing themselves as having something like a meta-perspective…" (Berger 2008, 66)

What (am I doing there, what did I observe and feel)

The following passage explores the ways in which research and creative endeavors help us understand better ourselves and the world we live in and contribute to making it a better place. These thoughts were intensively running through my mind during the fieldwork, during the long travels in the canoe, when we would stay silent with my boatman, and I would reflect on the world that I live in and the one I was encountering.

In the Western world's conventional dichotomies we hold that there is a strict division between Us and the Other[6], Indigenous/non-Indigenous, traditional/modern, the "fundamentally static notion of identity that has been the core of cultural thought during the era of imperialism" (Said 1994, xxv). Contemporary shamanic practices cross several boundaries (geographic, symbolic, political, and conceptual) and call into question rigid Western dichotomies. I do believe that by the end of the thesis it will become clear that this distinction, Us and Them, is a damaging one, and prevents the adoption of other terms of thinking that could lead to better discernment as what is going on in the world in general. In that sense, maybe dormant vs. awakened is a better contrast to examine. It does not

[6] We love dichotomies: nature vs. culture, sacred vs. secular that deal with object and subject respectively (La Barre 1972, 262).

prevent us from seeing that among the Other there are dormant as well as awakened, just as in Our societies. The focus of this thesis is directed not just towards the classical anthropological Object of scrutiny – the Other, but also to Us – WEIRD individuals (Western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic). Isn't what the Indigenous are doing in the jungle an attempt of healing of Us, the colonizers? Aren't we, ethnomusicologists, going there to learn something about ourselves as well, "to gain an awareness of himself and his own form of life" (Duerr [1978] 1985, 105)? Not to learn their ways to subdue, or pacify, the Indian, as it used to be in the history of anthropology (D. Lewis 1973). They are a perfect mirror to Us; we can better see our hidden assumptions, our blind spots. Have the sides not flipped this way? It is Us who are learning. Or maybe, unlearning. Because it seems that the missionaries are still in this same old colonial business of teaching them the "civilized way"[7], and "salvaging", or redeeming them.

We, the Westerners, are coming into the Amazon region as spiritual tourists, wishing to heal ourselves of the maladies that are so deeply ingrained in our corporeality that no Western medicine, or therapy seems to have a solution. Is the search for a deeper meaning in our lives a consequence of the highly individualized life, or of a spiritual void that the official, or state religions are not able to fill? Have we gone native by trying their healing methods and believing in their healing properties, and did we give up our objectivity? Is going native still the ultimate disqualifying remark for a so-called scientist, anthropologist? In other words, are we just falling for the salvation goods (Altglas 2008) by various gurus, who are using our crisis of downward mobility to lure us in? Or are we even victims of shamans, who are in fact originators of crisis cults, in other words, confused and troubled individuals under stress, close to the category of a paranoid schizophrenic (La Barre 1972)? Such disturbed views of shamanism as La Barre's, were circulating not so long ago. If we allow ourselves to see the full complexity of the situation within and without ourselves, we need not succumb to this dichotomizing discourse. This thesis is an attempt to do so.

[7] "Natives and their territories [are still] perceived as in need of *Ia mission civilisatrice."* (Said 1994, xix)

I am not trying to reconstruct the Huni Kuin's past (or current) vision of the cosmos, nor do I think I would be competent for such a task. Nor do I imagine I can portray the world as seen "from the native's point of view." These were the ambitions of the 20th century anthropology: focusing on traditional way of life, explaining it, and interpreting it, as if being of a "rational" Euro-American "West," uniquely qualifies me to do the job. I am trying to tell a story about the situation they are in now, about their struggle and its complexity, from my point of view, which will become clearer throughout the chapters. My perspective also cannot be shoehorned into a so-called Western or Eurocentric view, as this would just be the same kind of an overgeneralization as talking about the Indigenous point of view. However, this story about the contemporary issues Indigenous people of Purús region confront may serve for a more general understanding of cultural and political processes in Peru and more broadly, in our globalized world. There are powerful global forces that shape their (and our) world such as extractivist international corporations, state nationalisms, narco-mafias, tourism, and, as we will see in the case of Huni Kuin of Peruvian Purús region, missionary work.

The ecological breakdown that is happening all over the world is forcing us to take a look at the bigger picture not just the narrow microscopic look into the reasons why Cashinahua chant or not. "Extinction rates of other species have so catastrophically increased as to render uncertain our own species survival" (Perkinson 2013). The simple question is: What are we doing here on this planet? And how do we build a sustainable future. This questioning aligns with the critical manifesto of the Futures Anthropology, which "argue[s] for an interventional anthropology that puts at its core a theoretical and practical consideration of futures," and further advocates that looking at present changes and processes should stir anticipation and engagement with envisioning futures and "the possible ways they might be conceptualized and played out" (Salazar et al. 2017, 4). The echoes of the brutal colonial past and a neo-colonial economic plundering still happening now are reminders that, as a global society, we are still in a self-destructive mode (which reminds me of my personal self-destructive behavior) that we need to overcome. This situation demands that we hear the Indigenous voice, and take their way of life, seriously.

Not just to entertain our thoughts, but to influence us profoundly and start in us a transformation that will be able to change the course that we are on.

The complete unaccountability of big oil, coal, and mining companies makes the 99% of the world population "indigenous," in the sense that all of us, and our futures, are being plundered. The contemporary post-capitalism theory that took off after about 2000, distancing itself from the traditional post-capitalism (a movement that started in 19th century), sees political agents as the multitude "that retains a loose affiliation with the proletariat while extending political significance to the unemployed, peasants, domestic workers, women, people of colour, the colonised, the indigenous, immigrants and LGBQT+ communities" (Beech 2019, 19). The profit hoarding, the lack of clear regulations causing environmental pollution, layoffs of workers when the mines are closed without any severance payments, or explanation puts all communities in peril, leaving behind contaminated soil, polluted air, and water. Addressing our contemporary dilemmas carries tremendous relevance for our future.

What does one do when he feels that one's traditional way of connecting with the spiritual dimension, in the culture he was born into, has been severed? Change religion? How does one go about finding one's own connection again? Re-ligio originally means to re-connect. This is important because so much of the academic literature relies on another dichotomy: tradition vs. invention. Claiming that the rising new religions and new spiritual movements are all arbitrary re-creations of many disparate concepts randomly put together and that these are foreign to us at best, and cultural appropriations at worst. Criticizing such inventions as lacking substance, authenticity, while in the same breath emphasizing that putting traditions on a pedestal is romanticizing and essentializing of Other cultures. How much time is needed that an invention stops being an invention and becomes one's own tradition? 1000 years, 2000 years? A more general look reveals that any religion, old or new, is in fact a remix of different traditions: "the content of religious traditions [are] sets of data corresponding to particular archival material in respective databases subject to being sampled and remixed over time through different iterations" (Walker 2021). All cultures are emerging, the ones we call traditional ones as well.

One may ask, but where is ethnomusicology in all of this? On my second fieldwork to Purús in 2023, I was showing my first version of the movie, shot during my fieldwork in 2021, to various people and asking them what their thoughts about it are. One of the answers surprised me. “You have to think about the consequences of your work. All the Indigenous people here are thoroughly evangelized now, and you are facing them with the chants. Their own tradition might confuse them,” one of the chief administrators of the Natural reserve remarked. One of the most important works of an ethnomusicologist—the documentation of the local traditions and making the recordings available to the locals—was being questioned on the premise that it might actually do harm to the Indigenous people. As an ethnomusicologist determined to do something good for them, trying to put myself in the opposition to the predatorial nature of the majority of the mestizo population encroaching on them, including the missionaries, I was being attacked for my very work. This needs to be taken seriously. The representative of the state does not find evangelization, which is erasing the Indigenous cultures, problematic; rather, he finds problematic the preservation of their cultures. Ethnomusicology needs to talk about the whole ecosystem surrounding the Indigenous populations even if I only want to focus on their sacred chants. The very existence of these chants and the rituals associated with them pose a challenge to the governing of the Indigenous people, and by extension also to the anthropocentric way of thinking[8]. This is why, for these centers of power, the chants and the rituals which are upholding the Indigenous way of being in the world are better erased. Neocolonialism does not insist anymore on erasing the Indigenous population, but it still insists on erasing their culture: it is ethnocidal. However, the folklorized version of the culture, the one dissociated from its cosmology and therefore harmless, is allowed and in fact promoted.

I remember Bané, a Huni Kuin elder, one of my informants, telling me, when trying to answer my question, what was sacred before the Christian God concept was known to them, and he answered, “the Light” (*la Luz*), and points in direction of sun. We may

[8] Animistic perspective is definitely not anthropocentric, “if other beings beside humans are "human," then we humans are not a special lot.” Viveiros de Castro puts in opposition Western anthropocentrism to Amerindian anthropomorphism (and animism) (Viveiros de Castro 2012, 1:101)

remember that to worship the Sun and light as divine was heretical during the Inquisition and everyone, including Indigenous people were burned at stakes for holding such views. In this light, we need to investigate the very chants, their transcriptions, to try to decipher what is actually coded in those lyrics, what kind of spirituality and cosmovision. It was extremely difficult to find a reliable translator who would interpret interviews that I recorded in their language, Hantxa Kuin, to work with. I tried to work with many different people; however, this work proved to be futile on many occasions. Several of my experiences serve as an example of the difficulties of performing fieldwork and maybe even point to the clash between the Christianized new Indigenous elite and an ethnomusicologist trying to get to the core of their spirituality. Because this very translator has been raised by the missionaries (by the Dominicans since age 10 or 11, Camargo personal communication) and is very active in the religious activities of the local church. His accusations, that I am trying to steal their spiritual secrets and get rich on this knowledge (*aprovechar*), and his suspicion towards anthropologists and foreigners in general, stem from the missionaries who are trying to plant distrust in "their" Indigenous protégés, against anyone who might point out to them, what in fact they are losing when going the "church" way.

(FLASHBACK)[9] As Aquilino, the young shaman, told me "I want to have everything [like you], too. The camera, computer, new guitar, TV, I want to travel the world. Just like you." What do you answer to this. How do you tell him to keep doing the traditional things. And entertain yourself with the thought that you are giving some advice. And keep a serious face. He is already a perfectly modern being, with his multitude of (new, acquired) desires, engaging in our consumerist behavior. How do you tell him the road out of poverty is near impossible for many in our modern world because "poverty is not simply the condition of not having enough money. It is the condition of not having enough choice and being taken advantage of because of that."[10] But he has a spirit. After I recorded him, I let him listen to himself. When he was listening to himself playing the guitar, he said, "not bad, but it would

[9] I provide the explanation for the Flashback sections in Part I.

[10] https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/09/magazine/poverty-by-america-matthew-desmond.html (accessed on 25th Jun 2024)

be really great if I had a real guitar, this one sounds poorly. It is not up to standard." Reflecting on this conversation, my wish, when going back to Purús is to buy him a new guitar, a near impossible investment for him, but for me it is a relatively appropriate amount that I would spend for my brother's birthday gift. The wish for a musical instrument could be replacing the old wishes of the Indigenous people a few decades earlier, for the coveted tools that early traders and ethnographers gave to their informants for exchange of gaining trust and cooperation – metal tools and guns. It is a musical instrument that can help one get a better life.

When the COVID crisis came about, many Indigenous people living "successfully" in the outsider's world had to return to their villages. Because there were no jobs left for them and no way for their subsistence in the cities, or towns. In their own villages, however, although they did not have their own produce (they were not able to harvest anything that year, as they did not plant anything) they were able to survive. The community stepped in and helped, by sharing food and helping with building houses. In Indigenous ways of thinking, a healthy community seems to emerge as a form of spirituality.

What is really important in our life? What was it that we, the ones who consumed ayahuasca, were taught during the ceremony by the spiritual entity of Ayahuasca (a higher intelligence, as the Indigenous believe it to be)? Sometimes the feeling could only be described as a revelation. Or as neuroscientists would explain this phenomenon, new synaptic connections being formed in our brains during the intake of psychoactive substances. How do you forget what happened? Such a revelatory experience? But we always do. We forget, sooner or later. I experienced this slow falling back into the reductionist mindset during my eight years without the intake of ayahuasca since my first experience with it. We drift, relapse into our common sense. We are smart again. Rational. We think we know things. We control our destiny, and other people. But why we are here? We forget that. And start doing egocentric things again. And again. This is why I hypothesize that the lack of taking ayahuasca is strongly affecting the Huni Kuin society.

Research questions

The broadest question I used to pose to myself for a very long time is whether music, in the context of ritual, can be healing, and how. My intention for going into the field was to find out whether or not Huni Kuin use music for the purposes of healing. From this one, a cluster of questions emerged: How do Huni Kuin use music in the context of the ritual? What kind of music is there during the rituals, and what purposes do they use it for. Before answering the above questions about the healing function of the music, I had to inquire into what the functions of the use of ayahuasca in the Huni Kuin society are. What role does music play in the process of ayahuasca ceremonies? As I was entering the field to find some answers, these were the initial questions that I wanted to explore.

When I started doing fieldwork as a participant observant with the Peruvian Huni Kuin in the Purús region, one of the first main findings was that they (almost) don't chant anymore. Then I started asking the question of why Huni Kuin don't chant anymore. From literature we know that they used to chant. Has there been a musical change? I became preoccupied with what is driving these musical changes—the decline of the ayahuasca chants. When did this happen, who drove this change, and from where? In other words, why is a certain music category, such as ayahuasca chants, being performed or not, and what does this say about social processes going on in the culture.

Before, in the second half of the 20th century, the Huni Kuin would come together regularly to take ayahuasca and explore other realms of the universe. The introduction of evangelicalism brought about a radical and fast change in the soundscape and affected ethnic social context (Giuriati 2010). Could introduction of new institutions such as church and schools have caused a truly musical change in Huni Kuin society? Could it be that these changes are the cause of a loss or transformation of Huni Kuin cosmovision? It would be a simplification to jump to a conclusion that the activities of the missionaries are responsible for the decline of ayahuasca drinking and especially of the a cappella ayahuasca chants, or

that the whole ritual of ayahuasca drinking is being replaced by the church ceremonies. But this is one of my main hypotheses that I will investigate in this thesis.

As I could observe, there are other challenges to the continuity of shamanic traditions that the Indigenous societies are facing, such as extractivist corporations, and racism of mestizo society. However, with the spread of new religion, the missionaries are also condemning the traditional ceremony of ayahuasca, deeming it diabolical. This imported music together with coercing people to avoid ayahuasca and other rituals does influence social changes. Ayahuasca drinking is just one of the elements of their traditional culture that is changing in their society. “Societies and cultures, like people, change through time” (Kensinger 1995, 265), this is nothing special. However, the fast changes in their society started since their contact with the outside world in the 1940s (which was really a re-contact) and intensified in the 1950s, after the arrival of the missionaries. In fact, the first missionary to arrive in 1955 was Kenneth Kensinger himself, but he aborted his mission and became an anthropologist.

The process of change affecting musical traditions was tackled by Blacking in an article under the title of *Some Problems of Theory and Method in the Study of Musical Change* (1977). If a “truly musical change should signify a change of heart as well as mind” (Blacking 1977, 3), then the introduction of new institutions such as church and schools—these two are connected because the first teachers were formed (and co-opted) by the missionaries—may have caused a truly musical change in Huni Kuin society. In this way, “musical change may epitomize the changing conditions and concerns of social groups, perhaps even before they are crystallized and articulated in words and corporate action” (Ibid). Taking ayahuasca ritually is part of what we can call the recreation of shamanic cosmology, which is not limited to this substance or to the shaman alone, but which represents a knowledge that encompasses a whole cosmology and ritual practices shared by the group (Langdon 2002).

To answer the above questions, I will research what role did (or do) the original ayahuasca rituals have in the Huni Kuin society and how the chants are being used within these rituals. But I will also try to examine the dynamics of traditions (do certain traditions

thrive and others disappear? Or do they syncretize?), with the intention of understanding whether these traditions, with which I am involved, are sustainable? As Seeger suggests in foreword to the book *Sustainable Futures for Music Cultures – An ecological perspective*, "the important thing to study to understand how musical cultures are sustained is not primarily the structures of their sounds but rather the way the traditions are part of a larger conceptual, physical, and mediated environment of actions and values, resources and regulations, individuals and communities, power and hegemony, and markets and media" (Schippers and Grant 2016, ix). This basically defines the ecological approach to music that Titon has been developing for years (Titon 2008-2023 Research blog), which states that "cultural policy [if there need be one] towards music should be informed by four principles of conservation ecology: diversity, limits to growth, connectedness, and stewardship" (Titon 2009, 119).

I will try to understand social processes happening directly in their communities as well as global ones that drive the local ones and try to give an answer to where these changes are heading. Is the musical change a canary in the mine, forecasting larger societal and identity changes and changes of values? In this manner this work is musical anthropology, which "examines the way music is part of the very construction and interpretation of social and conceptual relationships and processes" (Seeger 1987, xiv). In that sense, I am interested in why a specific music category, ayahuasca chants, is being performed at all, or why is it not being performed, and what does this say about social processes going on in the culture.

Going back to the original set of questions, related to the fact that these chants are considered healing within the Huni Kuin society. I will try to make a hypothesis whether the ayahuasca ritual within the Huni Kuin society really has a healing effect and what is the role of music in the ritual. It has been proposed that the ingestion of ayahuasca brew is used to bridge separate realities and that music serves as a vital link in bridging them (Dobkin De Rios and Katz 1975). It is possible that the subjective states that the participants experience may be frightening or may even be dangerous for the participants (Langdon 2002, 71). Drugs, or a better term in this case would be medicines, are usually ingested under the guidance

of a specialist who is concerned with the individual's ability to handle these relatively unknown realms of the psyche. Chants in Huni Kuin culture were meant to inspire or control the effects of the hallucinogenic ayahuasca brew (Kensinger 1973). There are many purposes that have been identified for the use of ayahuasca: healing, achieving contact with the supernatural, divining the future or simply for recreational or pleasurable effects (Kensinger 1995, 221).

It has been accepted that specific music that was traditionally used in the ceremonies is the key for the successful bridging of the realities. After I saw that Huni Kuin people themselves have started to use recordings on their smartphones, or radio receivers during the ingestion of ayahuasca, I started to wonder whether it is really important which music is being performed or played during the ceremonies. From the Brazilian side come the guitar songs of their Huni Kuin brothers that are now also being played during ayahuasca sessions in Purús, mainly by the youth. Does the purpose, and effectiveness, of the use of ayahuasca change with the changing of the musical accompaniment, and how.

Hallucinogenic plants enable the participant to have an experience of contact with the sacred, and this in effect reaffirms the values of a society (Dobkin De Rios and Katz 1975, 71). During fieldwork, I wondered whether the practice of ayahuasca use might have a cohesive function to their social and communal life and a therapeutic function for individuals. Evgenia Fotiou reports similar observation, that "among Indigenous Amazonians, ayahuasca is very important in maintaining social order and in interpreting daily life events" (2016, 152). My hypothesis centers on the notion that ayahuasca rituals within the Huni Kuin primarily serve the functions of fostering social cohesion and maintaining the spiritual fabric of the community. Mota and Kirk (1988) support this hypothesis when they report that group cohesion is a factor in ayahuasca use, and that the use of the plant is

> ...dictated by group interests, by the need to achieve a level of collective security, in which the anxieties arising from daily life, with its illnesses, frustrations and perplexities (...) can be expressed, discussed, relieved and overcome. (found in Luz 2004, 65 my translation)

Ayahuasca is widely used in the contemporary spiritualities due to its psychointegrative (Langdon 2002) features. I am also inquiring into whether the use of ayahuasca in neoshamanic retreats could be seen to have a similar use as the traditional use of ayahuasca with the Huni Kuin and whether function of music stays the same in such uses.

Methods

The primary methodology of this thesis is an ethnographic research to study and document the beliefs and practices of an Amazonian people, the Peruvian Huni Kuin within the context in which they are enacted. One of the answers to questions concerning what is the primary task of ethnomusicology was given by Giuriati (2010, 18): "Perhaps we can all agree on the idea that it is an important, and even primary task of ethnomusicology to document all […] forms of traditional culture, and to understand how they work in terms of musical, social, and dynamic cultural processes." It is a participant observation—a qualitative approach where I immerse myself in the local environment, engage in the activities of daily living of individuals and families and attend the ayahuasca rituals. For the empirical information I rely on direct observation, on the views of participants, ask broad questions, while taking into account their (and mine) subjectivity and bias. The field notes about the things I saw and happened, together with my feelings and thoughts at the time, form the core of my data. The data acquired comes also from several ceremonies with ayahuasca that I personally attended and participated in (not just observationally).

In the beginning, my intention was to focus on interpretivist approach, and a participative and collaborative approach. I was mainly interested in uncovering the meaning of ayahuasca sessions for the local individuals as well as for me, inquiring into lived experiences, behaviors, emotions and feelings. My main intention was to document the ayahuasca chants which were supposed to be handed back to the Huni Kuin population. This is how I wanted to be of service to the community. I found that none of the residents

of the communities were interested much in preserving the heritage of ayahuasca chants, except of the few remaining chanters themselves who understood they are the bearers of the tradition that might be soon forgotten. During the fieldwork it became also clear to me that, when taking into consideration the wider context of the practices, I had to ground my research also in critical theory and look into how power is embedded in the structure of the Huni Kuin society and how the influence of the missionaries and the state imposed changes in those structures. I also learned that my main informant who I was supposed to do a collaborative research with was actively involved in the church activities and proved to be disinterested in my research. During the fieldwork, upon discussions about the meaning of the rituals with participants, I also realized I need to modify my research questions.

This ethnographic study resulted from fieldwork carried out between 2021 and 2023 among the Huni Kuin (Cashinahua) communities living on the Peruvian side of the border between Peru and Brazil, within the Amazon region. The study site was the Purús region, its town Puerto Esperanza, and multiple Huni Kuin communities. To find the remaining chanters I had to travel by canoe, accompanied with a boatman as my guide who was at the same time my interpreter from Hantxa Kuin into Spanish. In this regard, it is a multi-sited ethnography. It was conducted during the dry seasons of 2021 and 2023. In between the actual participant observation, I continued with the online ethnography, keeping in contact with a few informants and translators. The intensive fieldwork was rewarding as well as challenging, sometimes full of anxiety and even frustrating. One particularly challenging case was when I was treated as a suspect by my, initially, key informant who was raised by the missionaries. He would try to overcharge me for his translations services and accuse me that I am the one who is trying to take advantage of him and he would report me to the Indigenous organization ORAU (Organización Regional de AIDESEP-Ucayali). I hope my experiences will be conveyed adequately with some extended excerpts from the field notes.

I recorded some of the ceremonies, their full duration, in audio, and some parts in video. I have recorded in audio and video also the interviews made with several elders and locals for later analysis. These include: chanters, who describe what is going on in the ceremonies and what is the purpose of the chants; talks with other various actors in the

field: the missionary, the state representatives, members of NGOs, members of mestizo population. The interviews with the Huni Kuin elders were done in their language, *Hantxa Kuin*. Although nowadays more or less all Huni Kuin speak some spanish, the elders have trouble at expressing their thoughts in this language. The interviews were usually done with a help of an interpreter. Additional data comes from my general observations and from non structured interviews with the Indigenous youth, and from the later work with the translators.

Finally, to verify my observations, descriptions, analyses and interpretations, I rely on the previous scientific research made with the Huni Kuin group – the researchers who worked with the Peruvian Huni Kuin are very few. Compared to the research done with the Brazilian Huni Kuin and especially the research focusing on the neoshamanic aspects, there is a marked lack of analysis regarding the Peruvian Huni Kuin. My research will fill a gap as almost none of the researchers working with the Peruvian Huni Kuin focused specifically on the ayahuasca chants or with ayahuasca complex. Furthermore, I am also approaching this topic from a phenomenological and autoethnographic perspective, which I expect will bring a new contribution to the field.

Participant observation

"Written ethnographies have changed over time from texts exhibiting a disembodied, all-knowing perspective to experimental texts that are unconventional, polyphonic, and heteroglossic" (Lapan, Quartaroli, and Riemer 2012, 163). Participant observation is the ethnographer's direct participation in local activities in order to understand the way locals see and experience their world. There is no objective superiority of the participant observation method, but it is arguably the best method for building rapport with people. "The intimacy that develops as an ethnographer gains acceptance, develops friendships, and, at times, becomes a member of a community which makes the maintenance of objectivity difficult" (Lapan, Quartaroli, and Riemer 2012, 175).

Claimed objective stance is just perceived and it is impossible to claim it in the research that involves undergoing experiences that include alternative states of consciousness. I am fully participating in the ayahuasca sessions, taking in full doses that the local Indigenous people are taking. I am trying to analyze effects. And I follow the methodology of Alexander Shulgin (1991) and his assessment of the perceived strength or intensity of the experience. The first four levels are separated by increased effects of the substance, wherein the first level the effects would be unnoticeable, and at the fourth level the effects would be too strong for the person to perform rationally. I wrote down in my field notes the content of my experience. The ayahuasca sessions that I experienced would always fall between the category 3 and 4. However, Shulgin established a special category that is in a class by itself. As Shulgin describes it, "It is a serene and magical state which is largely independent of what drug [medicine] is used – if any drug at all – and might be called a "peak experience," in the terminology of the psychiatrist Abe Maslow. It cannot be repeated at will with a repetition of experiment. Plus-four is that one-of-a-kind, mystical, or even religious experience which will never be forgotten. It tends to bring about a deep change of perspective or life-direction in the person who is graced with it" (Shulgin and Shulgin 1991, xxv).

In this kind of exploration, the subject, or object, is at the same time observer, and objectivity in the classic sense is impossible. There have been many times that I entered altered states of consciousness, but the magic, religious experiences have been very few. During this fieldwork, it happened only once – the last ayahuasca session with Aquilino. For me, all the ayahuasca sessions are spiritual experiences regardless of whether they go to the plus-four peak experience or not and they help me reconnect with parts of myself that I am not routinely aware of. This approach would fall into phenomenological anthropology, in which one suspends inquiry into "objective" reality in order to explore the reality of human consciousness (Pedersen 2020). It also demands that I take into account my own personal history and how it defined me, calling for autoethnographic approach to shed a light on why I experience the things the way I do.

Autoethnographic reflexive account

A brief history of Slovenians	***Kratka zgodovina Slovencev***
The Slovenes liberated themselves	*Slovenci so se osvobodili*
from the foreign yoke	*izpod tujega jarma*
and put on their own	*in si nadeli svojega*
(my translation)	Ivan Volarič - Feo

(FLASHBACK): "¡Alemán!" a local man in Esperanza calls at me when I walk down the street. I see him many times, he is a local wino, talking to himself, shouting at people when they walk by. This time he is rambling about a war, and Hitler, obviously being in some kind of pathological state. But I have an urge to shout back to him that I am Esloveno. Maybe for others to hear. As if there is a need in me to explain to the people of the contact zone that I am not one of the colonizers. I have nothing to do with it. I had this feeling also when I was doing a fieldwork in the Philippines, and they would regularly call me Americano. And I would always take time, to say I am not Americano. Sometimes if they would be people potentially becoming my friends, I would explain that my country and the local, Indigenous people of this area, were colonized throughout the history by all our neighbors, since Roman times onwards.

I remember lying in the hospital after my second operation. In my room there was another patient who had his kidney removed, due to kidney cancer, the one known as silent cancer. He told me of his deep pain - he never spoke with part of his family who went to be collaborators in WWII. During the WWII there was a civil war in Slovenia and these grievances haven't been healed yet. It is also an example of historic trauma. Maybe my "need in me" is connected with this collective trauma.

My life experiences, my illness in 2008 has led me in a search for healing, and with this search I came in contact with many small-scale societies, and I also visited quite a few contemporary spirituality groups and experienced different alternative healing methods. I decided to stay with one group therapy for a very long time while I was seeking to heal myself (since 2009, for a few years, I was joining the group meetings every day and stayed in contact with them for more than a decade).

Now I consider my path towards healing a long-term ethnography, performing deep research into the area of new spiritualities not as a participant observer, but as a full participant. This embodied knowledge about the healing process is a lens through which I view the activities involving ayahuasca medicine by the new spiritualities, commonly known under the name neo-shamanisms, and the activities of the Indigenous groups that use it. With the benefit of these experiences, I will highlight the caveats of new spiritualities using traditional medicines. The case study with the Peruvian Huni Kuin people is a framework through which more general issues about healing will be raised. I will try to show that the experience of field research affects the researcher, through an autoethnographic account. I will also reflect on how autoethnography affects the research.

I am the apparatus observing, or the research instrument *par excellence* in ethnographic research (Hammersley and Atkinson 2019, 18), and as in any physics experiment, the apparatus must be well described, especially from quantum physics on, when we know that the observer is part of the experiment and inevitably influences the outcome. Reflexive ethnography is not just navel gazing. For anyone reading my analysis to better understand my conclusions, I believe it will be beneficial to include much of my life story to see more clearly what my conclusions are based on and why the things in the field happened the way they did. This is a method to defend myself against observations that my findings are weighted by lots of countercultural baggage, or that I am imbued with irrational enthusiasm that is necessarily present when one is dealing with first-hand experiences involving psychedelics, and that these might bias me towards embellished romanticized descriptions. In this regard, the line between autoethnography and reflexive ethnography

is blurred because knowing oneself, that is, the apparatus observing the "other," is prerequisite to separate, as best as possible, the observer from the observed.

For the reader to better understand my stance, there is my autobiographical report at the end of this chapter, which starts off with my primary education as a physicist, a mind thoroughly trained to be rational. A mind that would count only the "hard sciences" as real science and dismissed the "soft sciences" (all the social sciences and humanities) as just storytelling. At the age of 30 I underwent cancer treatment which radically changed my life path. Then followed another education which would prove to be equally as or more important than my formation as a physicist. It is a story of my involvement with a group therapy that, at the beginning, I viewed as just a support group for the time during the treatment of my cancer with official biomedical methods. Through the years this evolved into a long-term apprentice-master relationship, a journey towards healing, that helped me undergo a personal transformation. This experience also enabled me to critically evaluate the so-called New Age movements, methods and writings about it and its critique.

The story of following my teachers, who themselves were trained by a Chinese master, is essential to explaining my basic assumptions that I hold now as that training lasted for over a decade. There were long stretches of time, as for example, the first few years, when I was attending the meetings every morning, from Monday to Sunday, practically without missing any day without a sufficient excuse, such as a work-related trip. The illness was usually not a good enough excuse. I did not miss the trainings for more than a few days in a year. Later, when I started to travel and live in different parts of the world, I came back to the meetings whenever I was back in Slovenia, my home country, just to evaluate whether my ego had not inflated too much during my absence, and to correct my perspective if it had. We called these meetings "the energy training" to make a distinction from psychological therapeutic groups, or support groups—we were learning to master the practice of art of life. The same way as one practices martial arts, only through a dedicated training one can hope to attain the level of a master. Apart from learning the techniques, I became convinced that it is equally important to have a real master, teaching in person the

philosophy and ethics, which help you navigate the acquired knowledge. In other words, the master-apprentice relationship is essential to the quality of training.

Flashback sections

I call flashbacks memories that suddenly spring to consciousness seemingly unrelated to the topic I am involved with at the time. They are inserted into the thesis as a way of highlighting the insights into processes that we observe and experience as ethnographers. These flashbacks come from the distant past before the ethnography, as well as from more recent past after the ethnography. No matter how temporally and geographically dislocated from the core ethnography, they become revealing and shed a light on the experiences from the fieldwork and help analyze them. These flashbacks are separated from the main text and put into borders, as the following example shows.

(FLASHBACK) I joined a spirit lodge (sweat lodge, temazcal, ritual sauna) in the US in Michigan well after the fieldwork in Peru. In the middle of the singing in the spirit lodge, Panoka (the leader of the ceremony) exhorts to us all, “breeeathe!”, singing the next line, and again exclaiming “breeeathe.” This was a reminder when we get into an overwhelming affective state not to forget to breathe to calm ourselves down in the critical moments. As the heat was becoming unbearable, it was not the song as such that was important, transcriptions of notes even less. Song’s embeddedness into the ceremonial process was the key. Her strong, powerful voice urging us to breathe when the sweat was pouring down our bodies, and we were searching for the pockets of fresh oxygen, in pure darkness, trying to tap into hidden sources of self-calming abilities that we need to learn to evoke whenever next crisis will emerge and catch us unguarded. I will never forget the energy in her voice. It was her energy that has become imprinted in my psyche as some newly learned skill. And I do believe it will come back into awareness in the critical moments as a helping guide, a healing force. It was as an essential training of my spiritual immune system. And it is

impossible to learn it by reading about it. These bodily experiences help me understand and ponder on what is healing when I talk about healing songs.

These flashbacks also underline that fieldwork never stops, observations never stop, reflections never stop, and to be more personal, healing never ends. As I will argue further in the next chapter, the field cannot be narrowly delimited to the territory and the time where and when the "official" fieldwork is being carried out, or as Appadurai says to "the practice of going *somewhere*" (Appadurai 1986).

Why autoethnography and ethnoautobiography

As Shawn Wilson (2008, 22) writes in his book *Research is Ceremony*, "All stories reflect the storyteller and where they are in their lives." I think it is important for the reader to understand how and why I decided to research this topic, why it became important in my life, and also to highlight what influenced my point of view. In deciding which events to describe I will select the ones that I think have had an important role in shaping my assumptions regarding the topic of this thesis.

It may help to consider first why autoethnography has emerged at all, emphasizing it as a response to ethnography. The study of other peoples, or other humans, needed to be rethought due to anthropology's connection to colonialism (Dale 2014, 60; D. Lewis 1973). While ethnographic-like activity can be traced back to ancient Greece, it is worth looking at how ethnographic research has been practiced in the last century, specifically by anthropologists venturing out to Indigenous peoples in the late 19th and early 20th century. Malinowski's work is cited as pivotal in starting a modern anthropology with a method of participant observation, meaning, a professional stranger, with its positivistic paradigm of keeping a distance. A stranger seeking intimate narratives from the natives, but the intimacy was not shared. To do otherwise was to risk one's scientific detachment, and "going native" was perceived as the ultimate loss of objectivity. "Anthropology require[d] an association

with science in order to provide a scholarly distance from travel writing, tourism, exploring, adventurism, and other informal links between the West and the Rest" (Nugent 2001, 10). No matter how we look at it, this position assumes epistemic superiority over the subjective "primitive" thinking, which invokes the problem of representation.

In the original sense of the word, autoethnography denotes a "self-representation by trained anthropologists that includes a critique of privileged points of view from the outside and which incorporates resistance to structures of knowledge as power" (Panourgia 2000, 552). In this sense, autoethnography can be understood as a move towards decolonization as it "refers to instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that *engage with* the colonizer's terms" (Pratt 2007, 9).

With the increasing trend toward self-reflexivity, apart from "native anthropology" and "ethnic autobiography", Reed-Danahay already recognizes the third option, "autobiographical ethnography," in which "anthropologists interject personal experience into ethnographic writing" (1997, 2). But autobiographical ethnography is not the same as self-reflexivity, so what is the difference? Reed-Danahay defines autoethnography as "a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context" (1997, 9). And Chang, in her book *Autoethnography as method,* sums it in a very concise and clear sentence: "it is a research method that utilizes researchers' autobiographical data to analyze and interpret their cultural assumptions" (2008, 9). So, what distinguishes autoethnography from a "mere" narration in various types of self-narratives is its engagement with cultural analysis and interpretation. It is also a category "in which ethnographers expose their ethnographic process, their personal experiences, or feelings from the field" (2008, 44).

According to Dale (2014) there are three variants of autoethnography:

- Autoethnography as the ethnography of those who have previously been merely the colonized subjects of research;
- Autoethnography as inquiry into the culture of the researcher's own group;
- Autoethnography as self-study by the researcher examining social phenomena using her own role, feelings, actions etc. as data and lens (this being the form closest to what I use in this dissertation).

He admits that these overlap, and sometimes all three can go on in one study. But the first examples of autoethnography were within the first sense above. Kenyatta had studied his own tribe, the Kikuyu, under the academic supervision of Malinowski (Kenyatta, 1938/1971). Boas had recruited and trained a Tlingit, George Hunt, for years of fieldwork which foreshadowed by many decades the now more widespread Indigenous research done primarily by people about their own culture (Berman 1996, found in Dale 2014, 64).

The second variant: In America, urban and rural sociologists had studied the marginalized and the eccentric since the 1920s (Deegan, 2001). A few who were already members or readily accepted into such groups began to utilize their special advantages of access and acceptance. I would put into this category also the artwork of Nan Goldin, a photographer, who was exploring LGBT subcultures, the HIV crisis and was the first photographer documenting the intimate world of her and of the circle of her own friends––the people she referred to as her own "tribe." Goldin's intimate images act as a visual autobiography/autoethnography[11]. I would include in this category the New Age groups, and I am connected with them through my healing path.

The third variant of autoethnography is related with another term ethnoautobiography, coined by Kremer and Jackson-Paton (2014), which is "a particular way of telling our story to foster a greater awareness of ourselves and what is around us. The goal is to open up our perspectives so that we look at ourselves anew and *re*-imagine our complex social and natural environments" (Kremer and Jackson-Paton 2018, 101). To show that White people are not stuck with a White mindset, ethnoautobiography explicitly acknowledges that a person's identity is profoundly shaped by many additional factors beyond what is conventionally defined as ethnicity, including but not limited to: place, nature, community, ancestry, gender, hybridity, history, dreams, storytelling, creativity, and so on. Ethno-autobiography also points to the existence of White mind in many different people due to the consequences of colonialism. In contrast to mere autobiography, ethnoautobiography seeks to bring about the healing of the 'dissociative and objectifying construction of self and reality' noted to define the colonized modern self. "Decolonizing is

[11] https://www.artnet.com/artists/nan-goldin/ (accessed on 25th Jun 2024)

thus not just the recovery of the memory traces of indigenous presences, but a creative psychospiritual, moral, political and activist endeavor" (Kremer 2003).

An example of such writing is Lily Mendoza's essay *Bearing the Babaylan body memory, colonial wounding and return to indigenous wildness* in the collection of essays titled *Back from the Crocodile's Belly: Philippine Babaylan Studies and the Struggle for Indigenous Memory* (dedicated to the memory of the Filipino indigenous women and men healers impaled on stakes by early Spanish missionaries and left on river banks for crocodiles to feast on) (Mendoza and Strobel 2013). She narrates her personal journey of growing up as the daughter of a Filipino Methodist pastor, becoming an aspiring Christian missionary and belatedly coming to grips with her relationship to her country's colonial history and its consequences for her and her people's struggle for wholeness and authenticity. She eventually comes to the haunting conclusion that "one form of domination in colonial contexts is the totalizing claim to a monopoly of 'the' truth that effectively delegitimizes and demonizes all other ways of seeing the world" (S. Lily Mendoza 2017).

I feel compelled at this point to try to reflect on my personal journey of growing up, and try to look at my constructed self-image, maybe even try to perceive my own mind as colonized. For me it was important to re-tell (and re-frame) the story of myself, as I started to suspect that the version of who I have become, my own story, had a role in my waning life energy. I had to recognize the power of my personal memories as a force that is, through my interpretation of memories, and value judgements, responsible for my dysfunctional state of mind and that repairing these interpretations was integral for my survival. As Gabor Maté, a famous Canadian physician, writes, "true healing simply means opening ourselves to the truth of our lives, past and present, as plainly and objectively as we can" (2022, 363). Maybe I was dwelling in some kind of a victimhood, from a possible past trauma, and started to identify myself with the trauma, and this became my excuse for not being able to develop further and flourish. I needed to identify distorted beliefs and perceptions about myself and

others, in my memory[12], that were in my then-present causing me harm, that kept me in some denial, that kept me separated from the reality and my source of my power. I needed to try to develop the capacity to experience life in all its vitality.

I knew this was going to be extremely difficult and that I would not be able to do this journey on my own. This is why Apela Colorado, Indigenous scholar, in the foreword of the book *Ethnoautobiography: Stories and Practices for Unlearning Whiteness, Decolonization, Uncovering Ethnicities* posits that ethnoautobiography is a ceremony, which helps us identify distortions in the workings of our minds, and "helps us to free ourselves from the torment of being separated from the source of our being, the source of our power, and it helps us develop the capacity to experience life in all its vitality" (Kremer and Jackson-Paton 2018, xxi). Combining this with Shawn Wilson's claim, another Indigenous scholar, contained in the very title of his book that, *Research is ceremony* (2008), I realized I need to proceed with a more in-depth story of myself. This path of mine towards healing cannot and should not be separated from the research of the Indigenous peoples' sacred healing chants that I set out to do. In this manner it seems that my methodology is one of phenomenology, in order to get to objectivity one needs to step back and gaze upon one's own subjectivity (Palmer 1977, 37). Just as healing is about the willingness to reconsider our entire world view, so is the fieldwork an exercise in putting at bay all our assumptions.

This path has led me to come in contact with many spiritual movements and people who are on the same path of (self)-discovery and transformation, that sometimes come in direct contact with the Indigenous healers and communities, are inspired by them, or may also be led astray by the consumerist forces and/or fake prophets that try to take advantage of them. Self-transformation here is meant in terms of Csordas' constant reconstitution of the self (1990, 6). This is why it is also important to consider the new spiritual movements in this thesis. How they influence and interact with the Indigenous people, how (some of) these movements try to re-connect people with themselves, and how these movements are represented in dominant narratives (anthropology, medicine, media). From my own

[12] See also Indigenous writer Linda Hogan's *The Woman Who Watches Over the World: A Native Memoir* (2001), "Memory is also a field of healing that has the capacity to restore the world, not only for the one person who recollects, but for cultures as well."

experience and from conversations with the people I met along the path, mostly everybody steps on the path of searching the truth about themselves only after some sort of spurring in the form of a setback, loss, illness, anguish, or alienation comes along in life (Maté 2022). It is only then they are ready to face their wounds and overcome their discomfort, pain and/or let go of their illusions.

Indigenist research methodology

When we talk about Indigenous perspective, we use the word cosmovision, or cosmology[13]. The word cosmos comes from Greek language and was used by Pythagoras for the order of the Universe. It doesn't just mean the Universe, but that it has an inner order, maybe an inner, or higher intelligence. And it is an order the human mind cannot ever comprehend, although it can sometimes glimpse it. "Mythic stories of creation and anthropogenesis (how humans of a particular tradition came to be) […] contain 'original instructions.' Original instructions can be described as central information about the ways in which a particular tradition sees the world and what it tells them about the balanced ways to be in the world." (Kremer and Jackson-Paton 2018, 111)

In his book, *Research is ceremony* (2008), Shawn Wilson describes the core of Indigenous thought, or Indigenous research paradigm (IRP). He defines a research paradigm as sets of underlying beliefs or assumptions upon which research is based. The sets of beliefs that make up research paradigms are the interrelated concepts of ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology. He argues that Indigenous research paradigm is a philosophical system, shared by many Indigenous people around the world. He tries to determine common aspects within the research paradigms of Indigenous peoples in Canada and

[13] Željko Jokić who researched among the Yanomami in the Amazon warns that cosmology is not "a fixed set of ideas equally shared by everyone," but rather, "on the intersubjective level, different cosmological conceptions exist among different individuals. The distinctive feature of Yanomami cosmology is its dynamism and openness to innovation whereby the existing concepts, which are primarily determined by the shamans' knowledge gained through their personal experiences, are continually open to modifications." (Jokic 2015, 52)

Australia and answer how can these aspects be put into practice to support other Indigenous people in their own research (Ibid, 21). But it is not only for Indigenous people; by calling it indigenist, he emphasizes it can be adopted by anyone. Working with, or within an Indigenist research paradigm questions mainstream research methodologies and works toward decolonizing them[14].

And if one chooses to follow that system, it carries with it certain rules and responsibilities, one of them being relational accountability, or, relationality. If you recognize that everything around you is in a relationship and you are part of those relationships, you also are accountable for those relationships. You, as a person, are not defined as an item separated from everything else, as an individual; instead, you are defined (and valued) by the quality of your relations, or by the roles you play, enact. It means living in an ontology, or reality, that is relational. We are the sum of all our relationships. Understanding this we start to understand why these people do things the way they do. Everything has spirit and we are in relationship with all the things. One could connect the Indigenous understanding of community and relationality with spirituality; understanding spirituality not as something arbitrary and superficial, limited to occasional prayer or song, but as our personal and daily relationship with the environment and our community. This is in line with the contemporary understandings of spirituality: "spirituality . . . is concerned with our ability, through our attitudes and actions, to relate to others, to ourselves, and to God as we understand Him" (Cook 2004, 544).

The Indigenous research paradigm "pushes other paradigms to re-consider how research is conducted with, by, and for Indigenous peoples. Further, it centrally locates Indigenous ways of knowing and being within the research" (Pidgeon 2018, 420). There are several guidelines a researcher should follow: the acknowledgement of knowledge transmission and respect for knowledge keepers is a critical component of research relationships. Regarding axiology and ethical responsibilities: ensuring that the notion of free and informed consent is ongoing at each phase. Another guideline is the one of

[14] He recognizes that Indigenous is a general term that does not represent the diversity of the Nations involved. But the term Indigenous has important implications politically—in the face of colonization it stands for assertion of their collective rights as self-determining peoples at an international level (Wilson 2008, 34).

ownership. In terms of reciprocity, "it is essential that we "give back" in a culturally appropriate manner to those individuals, communities, and Nations who share their knowledge with us. […] we must go beyond the ethics of "do no harm" and ask ourselves: How are my actions serving the individuals, communities and Nations that I work with" (Hoffman 2013, 197)? We should also ask ourselves: why are we doing the research, and who is going to benefit from it? "Ethically, it is important that an IRP is not used to expand the power and knowledge of the dominant society at the expense of the colonized and excluded" (Pidgeon 2018, 423).

(FLASHBACK) Another important question is who is community and who can speak for the community? I remember meeting a missionary in Colombia in the Amazonian town of Leticia, when I was attending the SALSA conference in 2023. We met in a lobby of the most expensive hotel in town (I wasn't staying there; I was just inquiring for some information at the desk) and we started to talk. He would say that he practically lives in this hotel each year for a few months. And when he realized I belong to the category of anthropologists, and my suspicious look at his work, he would be quick to express that the "communities" are inviting them in, it is not that they are forcing their way in. My question remained: exactly who it is within the community that was inviting them? And I was surprised to see what budget these organizations must have for their missionary work, for their staff to be able to stay at expensive hotels for such extended times.

Visual ethnography

This thesis includes a visual ethnography part, a movie, titled *Nixi Pae Chants of the Peruvian Huni Kuin.* It is the practical element of the practice-based research and the visual counterpart to this written ethnography. The style is of the 'fieldwork movie' (Baily, 2009), but very compressed in order to be presentable in the 20-minute format at conferences. The film is the result of my adjustments to the reality of the field and of my encounters with

the actors in the field. The main topic is what I concluded to be the most pressing issue—evangelization and the loss of the ayahuasca practice and with it the lack of elder chanters who still can chant from the heart. The film explores the context of these changes. It remained in a short format, as much as I do want to make a feature length movie with all the footage that I have still unused. However, I wanted to make a short movie that focuses on one issue among many that greatly influence the culture of the Huni Kuin, and it could be said that this problem is a universal one all over Amazonia and elsewhere.

The protagonists are storytellers, each expressing their own point of view on ayahuasca and surrounding topics. And their personal side stories are reflexive instances that show how the practice of ayahuasca use is emerging and the line between what is traditional and what is invention is blurred, as I found throughout my research. This ethnographic film is also a practice in visual story telling. The footage accompanying the interviews is a counterpart to the oral stories we are hearing. When working in the field I am always a one-man band filmmaker—it keeps me as close and as open to the community as possible. In this way the camera is not as intrusive. The more I am vulnerable, the more they accept me, the more I can achieve the best possible integration, close relationship, and intimacy. This way of documenting allows me to mix spoken word and the footage into a style closer to a reflexive observational cinema (Zemp 1988).

The audiovisual documentation is a more intrusive method, in which camera becomes the main research tool. I had to obtain permission, a written document, to film in the communities from the Federation of Native Communities of the Province of Purús: *Federación de Comunidades Nativas de la Provincia de Purús* (FECONAPU). Every time I entered a community, the usual practice would be that the headman would gather the village for a meeting where I would present my work and intentions. In this way I communicated to most of the adults in each community my intentions so that they comprehended why I was there, and then I would find volunteers who would be willing to participate as informants. I did not bring a release form with me for them to sign. I have done this in my previous research, and, to me, it is even more intrusive, as it usually scares the participants who are mostly distrustful of signing their name to official-looking

documents. This time I would explain to each interviewee first what we are going to do, then I would start filming and read to them in clear Spanish language a prepared written statement, asking them if they consent that this interview is filmed and used for the purposes of a documentary. Everybody gave their consent gladly and I take these shots as formal consent.

I have documented many hours of interviews. Many of these were done in *Hantxa Kuin* and needed to be translated first to Spanish by the Huni Kuin translators. Already during the fieldwork, I started organizing this emerging archive, first by always keeping two copies of all the audio video footage on two separate hard disks. In the Word document I started to make notes about specific statements, indexing where exactly in the archive they were located. I started the translations with the video editing program Final Cut Pro program. Then my informant told me that they worked before with Eliane Camargo with ELAN, a professional software used for transcribing by the linguists. Since then, all my translations from *Hantxa Kuin* were done in this software. I had to find and teach several people, who seemed promising as translators, to work with the program. Many of them quickly lost interest and their translations were sometimes very confusing. One of the main reasons to do the follow-up to the fieldwork was to continue with the translations, and the other was to show my movie to get feedback. When I finally found a more reliable translator, I realized that the confusing translations were just bad, or sloppy. It was one of the more frustrating parts of the fieldwork. These translations were later imported as subtitles into the video editing software Davinci Resolve, which proved to be much better software for editing and color grading and with which I did all the postproduction on the documentary.

I was not focused only on interviews, or filming chanting during the ceremonies, or music performances. For the purposes of making a documentary, I would film many aspects of non-musical life to catch the context. In the manner of observational cinema (Banks 2001, 150), I would, at various times while observing some daily activities, take my camera and start filming scenes of everyday life. Filmmaking was adjunct to my ethnomusicological fieldwork rather than the objective of it, and maybe the style of the movie that came out is best described as a 'fieldwork movie,' "a way of reporting research in a film format that

attempts as far as possible to draw on the principles of observational cinema" (Baily 2009). There was no storyboard, or script; I approached filming as a form of research in its own right.

Nobody would ever object, because after the meeting, the general consensus in the village seemed to be that they were okay with me filming. I would also soon realize that they are used to filming each other with smartphones; even the little kids were doing it. There was one tricky occasion when I filmed the church ceremony, called *culto*. During the reconciliation part I felt I was intruding into their personal space. But I continued to film, and it became a central scene in my documentary. This episode was also crucial for me to start thinking about the structural forces shaping the lives of the Huni Kuin. As I discovered, evangelization is one of the main forces of change, and therefore I decided my documentary should focus on this topic. In this sense, the movie does not focus on music directly; rather, it is foregrounding the cultural context.

Making a documentary

The film's purpose is to show the reality of lived experience. I made this ethnographic film to communicate effectively to either audience what the situation is in the field. MacDougall contends that films reveal things that are obscured by logocentric writing, "Images and written texts not only tell us things differently, they tell us different things" (1998, 257). As he further argues, "the objects that the images record, and certainly many aspects of social experience, are not finally translatable" (Ibid, 266). Films convey non-linguistic features not through a process of translation but by a process of physical engagement.

One only gets to know the recorded material intimately in the editing stage. At the time of the filming, one is interacting, learning about the subjects, situations, there is no time to assess in a deeper level what one is recording. When filming events, happenings, I am guided by the intuition, where to point my camera, how long to hold on one specific

thing, when is the time to move to another thing. While I am filming one thing, my eyes are already searching what else is happening at the same time around me. Everything happens so fast that I have no time to reflect on it, even to perceive all the nuances and hidden meanings, such as small facial gestures, interaction between the subjects, etc. Also, in the jungle, there are limited possibilities for reviewing the footage, as there is always limited access to electricity. I only realize what footage I have brought home in the editing stage. As I am also the editor of the film, I discover once again what the footage is conveying to me. And this is where the creative stage starts again from the beginning and brings about new understandings.

(FLASHBACK) In the critical scene of the *culto*, I could hear the preacher shout "*¡Dios te cura!*" In their old world, they would say ayahuasca is *verdadera medicina, y te cura*! When watching this scene, I remembered the first day of the SALSA[15] conference. I was lost and anxious, what I am doing here. But one of the organizers was very kind, and took me to a *maloca,* the traditional house, at the edge of the campus. It was cool and breezy inside and he introduced me to a *taita* (the local name for a shaman of Siona Indigenous people of Colombia) sitting in there. He invited me to chew some coca leaves ground and mixed with some ashes. He said, whenever you feel tired, you are always welcome to come here to recharge. These are our plants, and they speak to us. For us, first there was the word of the plants (*palabras de plantas*). I realized then how the missionaries changed the word of the plants for the word of God and introduced an intermediary between persons and the direct experience of the sacred.

This is the first time that I had an opportunity to work with a really wide lens and I used it a lot in this project which has two practical aspects: I had to get close to my subjects, so the microphone captures a clearer audio. And when I am close, almost in a portrait mode, I still capture a lot of surrounding environments to position the characters in their world. In

[15] Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America (SALSA) was founded in 2001 and brings together specialists who live in Latin America, Europe, North America, and elsewhere.

this way I was able to capture more information. That is why I also tried the cinematic wide format (2.35:1), as with a wide lens there is too much “empty space” above and below the image. This cinematic style comes out well when screening on a large screen.

How do you make a documentary? One good advice comes from authors of ethnographic movies: first you film interviews of your main character, listen to what he is saying and then go and find a footage that conveys these things. I had to do the opposite way, I simply had to shoot as much as possible, as only later in the editing process, I would realize all the visual stories that I recorded and how they connect with the spoken word and the issues it conveys. I estimate that for this movie I used about 1% of the total footage that I recorded.

I did record many ceremonies, with the intention to document the traditional chants and include them in the movie. But I did not include the footage nor audio of the chants, except the final song in the movie, a short excerpt, which was played by Aquilino during our ceremony.

From physicist to meta-physicist – autoethnographic account

Just before I turned 30, when I was completing my undergraduate degree in Physics at my home in Ljubljana, I realized I was becoming seriously ill. I would wake up almost every night in a pool of sweat. I was in a lot of stress because of school, but it was my first awareness of deep bodily knowledge, a feeling that this was signaling something serious. Disregarding the feeling, I continued with my work until I defended it a few months later because I knew I must close that chapter in my life. Otherwise I would not be able to cope with whatever it was that was causing this imbalance manifesting in my body. Just after I successfully defended my diploma, I sensed a small lump on one of my testicles, and I knew immediately it is a cancer. Blood and urine tests showed that my white cells were very high and have doubled in one month. After confirming the diagnose with the ultrasound, it was clear that the cancer was in an aggressive stage and immediate action was required. I was

sent to an oncologist and was summoned to the Concilium —a committee of three doctors who would together suggest the best plan of treatment. The plan was for me to first undergo an operation and then do three cycles of chemotherapy. When I asked them if there is anything else I could do besides this, or if I should change anything in my life, they simply told me there is nothing I could do, and that it was best not to change anything. Here I had my first moment of suspicion, whether it was really the best to just passively submit to the protocol. But I was a 'good,' compliant patient, and it took me quite a while to turn into the 'annoying patient' and finally challenge my doctors. So, I underwent the first surgery, removing the affected testicle, and very soon after that started with chemotherapy and did three cycles of it. During the chemotherapy, my first act of challenging the prescribed remedies was to refuse the pills against severe nausea which was a side effect of the chemotherapy. The pills made me into a zombie-like state which was not much better than the nausea, only it came with a long list of side effects. I chose instead to smoke hashish (back then there were no cannabis products available by prescription). When I learned on the internet that it successfully alleviates nausea I had to try it, of course. In this way, I was able to make the five-day sessions in the hospital bearable. I also changed my diet into vegetarian and stopped smoking cigarettes. I was taking back my agency. After chemotherapy, I was scheduled for the second operation, to remove the metastasized lymph nodes in the abdomen. After undergoing this second operation, doctors told me I should be okay, and after recovering for a few weeks, I was ready to start living my life again.

I found a job as an R&D engineer and started living the life I wanted for myself. Finally, I was financially independent, with a nice job as an R&D engineer. What was even better was that it required my traveling to many places, and I enjoyed that part. However, after about a year, doctors found some enlarged lymph nodes in the mediastinum, in the center of the thoracic cavity. The doctors interpreted this finding as my cancer came back, and they wanted to operate me again. This time they would open my rib cage, and this rang an alarm so loud in my whole body that I knew I needed to change something in my life. This diagnosis finally served as a wake-up call. I declined that operation because, as much as I wanted to live, I did not want to live in a permanently crippled body, which I felt I would be if I had my

ribcage sawed apart and stretched open. I chose quality of life over longevity, which was not even guaranteed even with the operation. I chose to follow a plan of "watchful waiting" while engaging in intensive self-healing practices. But I didn't know how, so I started looking for help. This started a journey that completely changed my life.

I knew that to heal is to become whole and this became my priority if I was to really live. As I discovered later on, and as Eckhart Tolle writes and is echoed by many other authors of spiritual literature: "the irruption of disorder into a person's life, and the resultant collapse of a mentally defined meaning, can become the opening into a higher order" (2005, 196). Or in other words, this whole experience that shook me to the core of myself was a gift from the so-called higher order, and a wakeup call for restructuring my own life into something more aligned with myself. I later realized that what I initially perceived as a catastrophe did in fact lead me to find a more balanced life—my life in my 20s was quite self-sabotaging. The path I would probably never take without this irruption because it seemed too difficult and painful, and because of that not desirable.

During the first outbreak of cancer, I was focused on the body—the body was dysfunctional and needed to be operated, I needed to eat healthy to support it to recover––but I refused any spiritual treatments. Discovering my negative sides, taking full responsibility for my decisions, getting out of the victim state of mind: all these steps were too frightening and, frankly, too much of a nuisance to deal with while I was still in my own bubble of perceived happiness in my new job. Only after the cancer returned was I willing to do some steps in this direction. It all sounds very New Age but is in fact interrelated with psychotherapeutic work and with teachings from the eastern traditional philosophies. This holistic[16] approach (holistic as opposed to reductive view of the universe), as it is often called, is not specific only to the eastern philosophy; a similar philosophy is also behind the healing rituals of Native Americans, whose intention is removal of obstacles to human existence and restoring of balance in natures and human affairs (cf Csordas 2002, 148). This

[16] The term "holism" was coined by Jan Smuts in his book Holism and Evolution (1926) and based in naturalistic sciences and evolutionary paradigm. Today's holistic healthcare embraces the importance of emotions, beliefs, experiences and relationships, and how family, community and the surrounding world support health or harm it. https://bhma.org/about-us/what-is-holistic-healthcare (accessed on 28th Feb 2025)

was a shift from dealing with symptoms to dealing with root causes of my illness: instability, being out of balance. It is my basic assumption (belief) now, that without facing our own fears, blockages, and patterns of behavior, we are unable to truly heal many chronic diseases, heal relationships, and really reach wellbeing and the wholeness. We must take steps that take us to our wholeness (Maté 2022). This is when I found my group therapy in which I stayed for many years.

My healing really started when I declined to be treated further, or cured, by Western medicine, or, biomedicine, because deep inside of me I felt it stopped healing me. After only a short time in therapy with the group I decided to postpone my operation. I strongly felt, that if I wanted to get healed, I had to find another solution, something what I now call energetic healing. Healing the energy within my body and being, the energy flow that was broken. My doctor threatened me that it might be too late if I wait with the operation, asking, "Do you think you are going to be some kind of a miracle?" Mocking my intuition, my decision. Trying to get me back under her wing. But by then it was already too late, I was firmly set in my decision. And deep inside of me the answer was clear: "Yes, I *am* going to be this miracle." After three months I took another CT scan, and the images showed that my lymph nodes in the mediastinum are of the normal size. I never had the third operation. My doctor stopped calling me for checkups, and I never looked back because deep inside I knew I was healthy; I overcame my fears of the cancer returning.

My group therapy

In 2009, I began engaging in a group therapy practice that I could, at face value, neatly fit into the category of New Age. Only later did I realize how the so-called New Age methods differ and especially why I could not fit my group into a "woo-woo" category for the naïve. My teachers were a Slovenian couple who founded the center called Spirala. The master of my teachers was a Chinese master Aiping Wang, who claimed to be the apprentice of several Chinese masters, and who would combine all the teachings she

received and modify them for the Western audiences, or clients. In my case, as I was healing from my cancer, and trying to tackle the roots of my disease—not just treat the symptoms, as we said in the group—I was on a path of self-transformation. My intention was to become aware of my hidden patterns that caused me stress, suffering, anger, resentment. In other words, I was trying to access my own cognitive blind spot[17].

My main enemy in the first two years was fear. Even though I did my diagnostics within mainstream biomedicine, every now and then a strong fear would come over me, telling me "You are making a mistake, the cancer is spreading, you are fooling yourself," and so on. It took serious discipline in training, showing up every morning without fail to keep at bay all the fears, to not put in motion the negative mind-body effects that can arise from sheer belief (nocebo). After a while, when I knew for sure I overcame the fear and knew I was on the right path, the next enemy was clarity. I needed to learn how to be humble and not feel invincible, because the cancer was definitely in remission. I had to learn to not explain to everybody I met that my way is the right way for everybody.

What we were trying to do at my Energy group was enhancing our capacity to perceive what is happening to us; raising awareness was seen as the key to freedom. According to our teachings, raising awareness means overcoming our enemies which are "self-importance" as the chief one, along with the "lack of purpose, unchecked ambition, unexamined sensuality, cowardice" (Abelar 1993, 150). Detractors try to label the practice as New Age in order to assign a sense of shallowness to it. However, these tenets are more aligned with the teachings of ancient masters of the far east.

Some concepts of therapy: We liked to say that we trained, or "practiced energy", and we were not so much concerned with theory, philosophy, or etiology[18]. Nor did we consider ourselves patients—we were more like clients. But the closest descriptor perhaps was that once you seriously started practicing the method, you entered an apprentice-master relationship. Practicing like martial arts, or, as Asad explains, in the monastic orders

[17] If we read Castaneda's writings not as ethnography, but as allegorical syncretysm instead, we could read him as proto-ontologist, preceding the ontological turn by about 30 years, as argues Jensen. Cybernetician Heinz von Forster interpreted Castaneda's quest to "see" nonordinary reality, in terms of accessing one's own "cognitive blind spot" (Jensen 2013, 316).

[18] In this regard it resembles Adlerian psychology. Adler was a founder of individual psychology.

of early Christianity (1993, 63)—"The things prescribed, including liturgical services, had a place in the overall scheme of *training* the Christian self" (emphasis added). On a personal level, our opponent was our behavior patterns, belief system, affects, etc., but there was also a cultural component. We would say that we were surrounded by "messages," and envisioned them as little bubbles surrounding us. In anthropological terms it could be called the culture posing effect on individuals (structure vs. agency of an individual), with its rules, traditions, and authorities. And culture could be envisioned as a broadcasting station. The "messages" influenced us when we let them enter. The belief of the group was that there was also a Universal broadcasting station that emits "messages" that were aligned with the Universal truth—the highest level of truth. In opposition to it were our partial or personal truths. And it was these personal truths, that could be equaled to beliefs and morals, that caused us problems and pain—emotional pain, that could develop into a disease, or just a general feeling of lack of wellbeing. Letting go of our personal truths and aligning ourselves with the Universal truth was the core of our training, which brought all sorts of benefits, such as health, income, good relationships, and a better quality of life in general, or wellbeing.

The way the therapy works was almost the same as any group therapy, with the one difference that our meetings were on a daily basis. We would meet every morning and wait for our teacher to start the session which usually began with a call if anybody wanted to "come forward." This meant that someone would state a problem they were dealing with at the present moment. It always was encouraged that the problem be very practical, concrete, such as, "I had a fight with my wife," "I have problems at school," "I don't get along with my boss," "I lost money," "I am afraid to buy a new car," or any health issues such as, "I have a fear that my cancer is killing me," "should I not go and visit my doctor?" or "should I do the operation, take medicines?" The master (within our group the founders of the group were the only full masters) would then put herself at the service of the Energy, enter a special state of flow, and channel the messages that were the most appropriate for the individual asking the question. In practice this meant that she would be able to discern

what was behind the problem (the symptom) and give instructions on what to do when the problematic situation arose.

The method, therapy, and sessions were cyclical, and you kept coming back again and again to the same point of stumbling block in your life until you were able step over it. To resolve certain blockages, you could not simply identify the problem, teach the solution, show it only once, understand the problem mentally and then solve it. We all kept repeating the same mistake, like a child who is learning to walk, trying to make a step and falling. Until it finally makes the step and then this knowledge is internalized, embodied, or as we would say, in your heart, not only in your mind or in your words.

My group therapy, viewed by most people as a fringe, New Age, cultist sect, is in fact a very pragmatic quest for "stalking oneself," to use the wording of Castaneda, incessantly questioning one's relationship with him/her-self, and with others, trying to bring into awareness subconscious patterns that make one's life difficult. The intention was that in the intense affective moments when being gripped by emotions you would be able to rise above the situation, or step outside the emotional turmoil and act differently, not merely re-act to the situation you find yourself deeply involved in (a trauma response). This is why we didn't call it therapy; instead, it is a training process, to master one's demons and rise above the autopilot existence. It had nothing to do with seeing our group or as ourselves on a sacred mission. It was a quest to better oneself, seeing one's own deficiencies as instrumental to bring him/her into troubles in life. Of course, there are life forces that we cannot control. However, we can decide to react differently to outside situations, which ultimately brings us out of the cycle of "bad luck" in which we feel as if the whole Universe is conspiring against us.

I was still a physicist, and after my experiences with ayahuasca retreats in Peru, I was convinced that ayahuasca retreats cannot really heal. That is, you cannot heal by ingesting the medicine alone. Ayahuasca might help you see through visions what needs to be done, but it doesn't give you the power to actually do it. The long-term "work" we were doing day by day at our group therapy was what I felt was needed for the visions to become reality. I realized that what in fact did heal me was my group therapy at home. The day-by-day

therapy, my firm decision to not drop out of the healing process especially when it really started to be unpleasant. There were many resistance points, moments which are felt as intense urges to drop the method, what we would call the reaction to the healing process. My firm decision (and also a sense of trust and faith in the process) to show up every day for my morning therapy no matter how ridiculous, unpleasant, and counterintuitive it was, how much resistance I felt to the whole process. I have to say there was no ingesting anything as part of the healing. But, for me personally, without the visions, I would not be aware of what I needed to heal, or what I needed to feel to be healed. This discipline and intention to get to the bottom of my problems and grab the bull by its horns, so to speak, was essential for my healing process. Just walking the path no matter how hard it got. Because I knew deep inside of me that if I drop out, the sickness inside of me will in the end return to kill me.

It took me a long time before I was able to discuss my personal path in public. And I was at first very reluctant to include my personal story into my research about healing songs of Indigenous people because I felt this would not be scientific. Again, only recently I realized this part is in fact essential for my personal understanding of what constitutes a healing process. And it helps me understand the deep need for healing in (some of) the people that we usually label derogatorily as "New Agers." I would claim this overgeneralization belittles the genuine efforts and shames the intuitive choice of all sorts of people who are looking in the direction of "alternative" methods for their healing process. It is this activity of shaming and conflating of different groups of people and approaches to healing that I would call non-scientific (paraphrasing the anthropological denunciation of treating shamanism as a monolithic practice).

My path as an ethnomusicologist

I could say that my ethnomusicological path started in the Amazon jungle when I first heard the Shipibo *icaros* in 2013. In 2013, four years after my fight with cancer, and

after almost three years of my group therapy, I was going to visit the Shipibo people and try ayahuasca medicine. I had already gathered the courage to leave my engineer job, and to start working with music as a sound engineer professionally. In 2012 I was accepted to a Bachelor program at the Royal Danish Academy of Music (RDAM), secured a small scholarship, and started a new life—something I would not have dared to do until I confronted my fears and many other issues during my therapy. Only then the opportunity arose for me to visit Shipibo shamans deep in the Amazon forests of Peru. The Shipibo village we were going to was quite far away from the more accessible and touristy ayahuasca retreats that were operating very close by or within the urban center of Pucallpa. It took some 4 hours' drive by speed boat to Contamana, and then another 4 to 6 hours' drive by boat to the Shipibo village. I stayed there for almost a month with another 4 or 5 "gringos" dieting and experiencing ayahuasca, while observing daily life in a Shipibo village.

For my very first ayahuasca session, they told me I have to set my intention for entering the ceremony. I asked the Ayahuasca spirit to show me what is an open heart. And She led me to that space; I re-lived my life, watching the scenes from it, only this time feeling them from the open-heart perspective. Ayahuasca made me "see," and by this I understand it made me "feel" what an open heart was. It felt as if *icaros* are guiding me to the right place and bringing me back safely. I felt that the *icaros* songs were, especially the singing of the main *maestra* Justina, deeply touching, healing in and of themselves. After hearing *maestra* Justina singing her *icaros* songs, this experience affected me so profoundly that I decided I want to record, or document, Indigenous musics.

For my third year of bachelor studies at the Royal Danish Academy of Music in Copenhagen, I chose to do an exchange year at the Shanghai Conservatory of music. My new goal was to do fieldwork among Indigenous people in China, or Minorities, as they call them there, and explore and record their local musics. To find out what kind of healing ceremonies and songs they have. In short it led me on a path of looking for traditional healing methods and how music is connected with them. Still in the hope they might also help me in my own process of healing which was, and still is, ongoing. The decision to go to China was also in line with learning more about my group therapy and training – the original

master of our method is from China. I wanted to see the Chinese culture, experience the birthplace of this Eastern philosophy (or at least the Chinese version).

By going through a rigorous energy training that lasted for years I was able to confront and shed some of my ego issues, overcome my blockages, face my fears, and connect my dissociated parts of my personality on many levels. This personal path has enabled me to be humble enough to be able to establish sincere and friendly connections with locals, and native people in many places. Since 2013, I visited Indigenous people in the China provinces of Yunnan, Guangxi and Sichuan (during my master studies at RDAM, I went to China again in 2017 for another whole school year). I visited several Indigenous people in the Philippines, on the main islands of Luzon, Panay and Mindanao. I was hanging out in Morocco in Tangiers with the Gnawa musicians. I was recording sacred folk songs in Ukraine. I visited Huichol people in Mexico. After this I developed my own music language, exploring the healing properties of music through remixing of my field recordings and manipulating them live, creating a meditative experience, almost like a ritual. I came to understand ritual as an embodied practice.

Here is the link to one of my audiovisual works: https://vimeo.com/415199295

However, the expedition to the Peruvian Huni Kuin as my fieldwork has proven to be the most difficult in terms of finding a connection with the local Huni Kuin, which I experienced as very frustrating. My rational explanation for this is that the Huni Kuin, due to the events in their recent history, underwent some kind of trauma on a collective level[19], that is carried inside by most individuals of the Huni Kuin society today (to which I will come later in Part III). Ever since starting on a path to be an ethnomusicologist, the more rationally inclined ethnomusicologists have asked me the same questions over and over again: “But why on earth are you going to the Amazon?” “Why do you think they need you there?” “How can you imagine that you can adequately explain their world, you, a complete stranger to their culture?” This hints at other underlying tensions informing their line of

[19] I use the term collective trauma, while Archibald and Dewar (2010) use the term “historic trauma.”

questioning: “Do you realize you are still part of the colonial way of thinking?” “You, as a White savior, a White knight, you think you are going to help them?” Or even, “You are just romanticizing the Indian.” These are all legitimate questions that need to be dealt with. What drove me there was my personal healing process, my search for the way out of what I perceived to be my illness, and my need to find answers when nothing I found back at home seemed to help.

So, whenever anthropologists or ethnomusicologists or folklorists ask me in a bit of a condescending tone, I try to explain to them the importance of this field for me, but usually there is no time to explain, and they are not ready to listen to the whole story. The “question” is just there to pose a statement: their belief that I am off the mark in my endeavors. All this might seem too much of a personal outpour, the autoethnographic approach taken a bit too far. But it is important because it shows that the choice of the field was not to entertain some philosophy. For me, personally, it was a matter of life and death.

And, as mentioned, this ethnography will be written from my point of view, without pretending I can adequately describe the Amazonian native’s point of view. But I can represent my personal native point of view. As a native from a periphery of the Slovenian country (I am from Prekmurje, the poorest region in Slovenia), which is itself a periphery of a Western world, a native of techno subculture, a native of emerging Slovenian youth’s awareness that we did have our own old religion, before Christianity, that did survive in the remotest areas of the western part of Slovenian mountainous area until the end of 20th century. The book *From the Invisible Side of the Sky*, which talks about the Old Faith (Non-Christian faith) religion, has become famous among Slovenian youth (Medvešček 2015). And this emerging awareness cannot be described as a revival (meaning folkloric revival and copying of ritual practices without actually knowing their essence) but as a sincere act of re-connection (*re-ligio*) on a personal level through direct experience with the spiritual realm (as opposed to “blind” faith in following the rules and prescriptions of the intermediary, the Catholic church priest).

THE MOVIE: Nixi Pae Chants of the Peruvian Huni Kuin

https://vimeo.com/967111190?share=copy

Password: nixipae2024

PART II: Ayahuasca Shamanism: Ritual, Healing, Music

After my hospitalization, during the chemotherapy, I stopped listening to all kinds of music. Sound and music were always a shelter for me, but I just got too sensitive to listen to any of it. Being the type of person who lived with music, I practically chose to work with music for more than a decade during my work at the Radio Student station in Ljubljana as a sound engineer. And then it all suddenly stopped. I was so fragile, that practically all music, including classical music, started to sound painful, unpleasant. There was no Mozart effect present for me. I may have developed a form of synesthesia during that time, a sort of a physical discomfort associated with music, which I began to perceive as violent. There was no music that I knew of at the time that I could perceive as conducive to my healing, to my wellbeing. This must have been a reason why I was so shocked five years later when I heard the *icaros* (medical chants, curing songs, sung prayers, magical melodies, whistles, or blows. Practically synonymous for ayahuasca songs or chants sung by Shipibo shamans) for the first time. I intuitively connected it with healing. I liked the sound of it. Music sounded pleasant again. In fact, the effect was so profound it far exceeded the usual evoking of a relaxation response. It genuinely felt healing. These experiences lead me to think of music as a medium of wellbeing (DeNora 2014, 31), or how it can be linked to healing. After this experience in the Peruvian Amazon with Shipibo shamans, my interest in the ways the Indigenous healers use sounds and music to achieve therapeutic goals changed the course of my life. As Marina Roseman puts it, "medical ethnomusicologists, in part, focus on how healers and healing practices orchestrate the production and apprehension of sounds and the performance[20] of music as one of those technologies of healing" (2011, 18).

[20] Performance artist Marina Abramović defines performance as "The essence of performance is that the audience and the performer make the piece together." (Abramović 2016, 55)

In this thesis I am talking extensively about ayahuasca shamanism. I have had experiences with three different versions of ayahuasca sessions: first in the Shipibo village in Peru, then in Slovenia in a neoshamanic form, and finally with the Huni Kuin in Peru. My original thesis questions included how the ayahuasca intake is practiced with the Peruvian Huni Kuin and whether the ayahuasca chants are healing and how. Regardless of the form of ayahuasca session I would experience them having elements of rituals. Observing the ayahuasca sessions of local Huni Kuin, they were weirdly lacking in any strict rules or seriousness that we connect with a ritualist behavior. Brabec (2014) reports the same behavior with the Shipibo *médicos*, when ayahuasca was taken only with the locals, and without the Westerners—there would be almost no ritual present. And it seems that there is a relation between syncretism and ritualization. Due to increased shamanic tourism, earlier forms of shamanism are transformed, "reinvented, as local shamanic practices converge with Western ideas of spirituality and healing and create a highly dynamic practice" (Fotiou 2020, 224).

In the Americas, Nature was generous with psychoactive plants, and animal species excreting psychoactive substances. To name just the most known ones: the mushrooms, peyote cactus, *san pedro* cactus (*wachuma*), coca leaves, datura, and the excretion of Bufo toad. Within the Amazon basin there are other hallucinogenic plants, and mixtures, besides ayahuasca used by various Indigenous peoples, such as *yopo*. These medicinal plants are used within ceremonial setting by many different Indigenous groups in almost as many different ways. Nowadays the neoshamanic, ceremonial, or ritualized, use is widespread all over the world and contemporary psychotherapies are using medicinal plants as well. The key difference between the principles and practices of professional psychosocial treatments and Indigenous traditional healing is that the former privilege secular, rational, and technical approaches to intervention while the latter emphasize the sacred, mysterious, and relational aspects of therapeutic process (Moorehead, Gone, and December 2015). However, various forms of religious healing and psychotherapy are analogous.

If Balzer notes that trance can be accomplished without performance (1997, 119), Howard asks the rhetorical question: "Can you imagine a shaman ritual without music?"

(2001, 56. Found in Adlam and Holyoak 2005, 525). It seems that music is one of the key elements in the practices of traditional healers. It is thought that it helps participants of the ritual to tap into their emotions and reach a meditative state of mind. Music can provoke physical movements, which can affect the state of mind of the participants in a way that decreases the anxiety and stress. The use of rhythmically repetitive melody is supportive of the altered states of consciousness (Dubbini, Mabit, and Politi 2020).[21] All these effects may help relax the participants in the ritual and prepare them for a journey into other realms of reality. In this sense, music seems to be an essential tool in shamanic practice. Just as music is culturally contextualized and its meaning far from uniform (even if it is often stated that music is a universal language), so too are "medicine" and "medical", "healing", "ritual." What are the common elements? What is music's role in healing? Covering these topics in-depth is beyond the scope of the thesis, as each one of these concepts is a discipline of its own. Still, saying a few words about those terms—ritual, healing, and music—is necessary at this point, to gain understanding of music's cultural meaning and its connection to spiritual beliefs and practices, and to social and ecological structures.

Fieldwork excerpt – from ritual to Culto

A lived experience report…

> E vou escrever esta história para provar que sou sublime.
> Álvaro de Campos

This report is based on my own experience as felt in the present moment and noted in my fieldwork notes and traces the trajectory of my inquiry. As I was caught in the web of

[21] Jacques Mabit is the founder of Takiwasi center for treating addiction cases with the help of ayahuasca in the city of Tarapoto, the upper Peruvian Amazon. It was founded in 1992 as a result of his research work started in 1986 and is now recognized by the Peruvian Ministry of Health as an integrative medicine center.

relationships, I wrote down the feelings I had towards people and situations as experienced at the moment. I believe it will be shown it is necessary to describe the whole experience as it happened with as minimal post-experience cleaning and interpretation as possible. These notes form one part of the basis for the analysis of the concepts of healing and rituals among Huni Kuin in Peru. The other is reports from other researchers.

I decided to present here the first few days of my stay in the community Canta Gallo. This excerpt shows well how in the passage of one week, I learned how much the traditional practice has changed. It shows my doubts on how to continue with my research plan, as I realized I will have to move beyond this village I intended to stay in for the duration of my fieldwork and start searching for the remaining chanters, as they have become very rare. And it also shows how much I had to permanently readjust my plans and focus of my research. The passage ends with my first ayahuasca ceremony, noting its ad-hoc character that lacked in any ritualization.

Before the field

Before I succeeded in entering the field, I tried to contact people who went there before me. The main contact was Eliane Camargo, the linguist, who set me up with her informant Alberto Roque Toribio. She has worked with him for years. He was brought up by the missionaries and then she, through working with him, trained him to be an effective and accurate translator. I was relying heavily on him and expected we would get along well. As my trip evolved, I realized we would be moving further and further apart.

I arrived in Peru straight from Slovenia in June 2021. I spent only two hours in Lima, just enough to get my luggage, and check in again for the flight to Pucallpa, the major city of the Ucayali department. I wanted to get to the field as soon as possible. But when I got there, I got stuck in Pucallpa for almost ten days, not knowing when I would be able to enter Purús region. The local airlines, only two of them operating at the time, would say all the tickets are sold out. I knew there were commercial tickets for passengers available, but they

would not sell those to me, either. The way it works is that the state subsidizes the plane tickets heavily for certain number of tickets per month. And these get sold out at the end of the month for the next month very quickly. There would be a line on the 25th of each month, with local Indigenous people waiting until all the tickets were sold out. As a visitor you are left with a few tickets available on the flights that transport the goods, the merchandise, food, almost everything by plane. The price for those were about 10 times of the subsidized ones. However, whenever I would go to the counter and ask when the next flight to Purús is, they would say there aren't any. That the only way I could get in was by hiring the whole plane. Obviously, something was wrong. The area seemed to be impenetrable to foreigners. Without the help of Alberto there was no way of reaching it. I had his WhatsApp number, the preferred communication channel for anyone who has a smart phone there. Once I reached Alberto, he told me to stay put and wait for his instructions. So, I waited in this run-down guest house at the edge of Yarinacocha, a side town to Pucallpa, run by the formidable Elena, whose contact I got from my friend Lorraine. I had been in the same guest house when going to the Shipibo village 8 years before. It used to be one of the guesthouses offering hospitality to Westerners coming to Pucallpa for the ayahuasca experience.

Pucallpa is the dirty behemoth on the shores of Ucayali, the main port city, the capital of Ucayali, and its own version of peripheral modernity. Yarinacocha was more laidback, not so overrun by the inescapable *motocarros* (tuk-tuks, three-wheel motorcycles working on old and dirty two-stroke engine), with their sounds and their exhaust fumes that were driving incessantly. However, during the night the barking dogs could drive you crazy as well. I arrived at the height of COVID times. The number of tourists dwindled. For some nights, I was the only guest there. One Israeli tourist, loaded with money, stayed for a couple of nights, searching for someone, anyone, a Shipibo shaman, to continue his healing process with the plants. He came there the second or third time in the last few years, every time searching for shamans and the place where he would do his next *dieta*.[22] Looking at him, I

[22] A method of retreat and fasting in order to contact non-humans that is part of Shipibo curing are called in regional Spanish *dietas*. A person usually ingests a decoction with a certain plant, or bathes in water containing

wondered how he would heal himself with a simple plant *dieta* when his mind was restless and his whole presence kind of unpleasant. He was rich for my measures. He would pay for everything with good money. He had a local Shipibo driving him around and he would negotiate for the ceremonies that would be made just for him.

After a couple of nights, I was alone again. The Israeli had to go back home, a return he regarded with dread (he saw Israel as a prison state due to COVID measures at the time). Then came a young couple, Gwendal and his ethereal wife, who just came down from the Iquitos area. He was learning to be a *tabaquero* (a healer with tobacco), and his wife too. They were a pleasure to be with, and they made my first lonely days full of anxiety and questions that had no answers bearable, warm; they made me feel good. They made me *chai* (black tea with herbs from India) and took me to a Shipibo family who was living nearby in Yarinacocha. Gwendal went there to cook a meal for them, because years earlier they had taken him in and taken care of him for over a month when he first got there and was just starting to learn about the ayahuasca world. He bought all the foods and a big fish, and we prepared a delicious fish broth. It was a beautiful afternoon with the family. They also shared *mapacho* cigarettes with me and even though I stopped smoking when I was thirty, I considered *mapacho* tobacco to be very different from industrial cigarettes. *Mapacho* is locally produced, organic, and very strong tobacco without any toxic additives the industrial tobacco is steeped in. It is considered a medicine. It helped me connect with them and helped me calm down. I was grateful for the time they spent with me. When we were saying goodbyes, I genuinely felt sad. They were both good people. I was afraid, and a bit lost. They said they were heading for Costa Rica, to find their spot where they could start a life together, build their own home, and start serving the medicine, probably to Western tourists there. They were running a bit low on cash, and they lived a very modest life, but their parents would still support them when their reserves ran out.

I was genuinely not feeling well, due to self-doubt. My thoughts raced: Why am I here. What do I think I am, thinking I can do such research. I felt lonely. Wondering if I will

certain leaves and retires from ordinary life for a certain period of time. In seclusion some ordinary foods are avoided as well as contact with the humans.

ever get into the area. The whole local world, even though I had been there 8 years ago, felt hostile now. The sense of adventure could not drive me anymore. I wasn't looking for an adventure. Going to an uncharted territory. Thoughts were swirling inside my head.

While I was waiting, I already gathered information from previous researchers there. Andrea Zuppi, who was with the Culina, another Indigenous group that lives in the Purús region, told me that they appreciated the missionaries, that the water was bad in Puerto Esperanza, that to get to Brazil, there is an office in Esperanza, where you get a stamp and a visa, with which you can take the boat down the river and cross the border to the town of Santa Rosa. He also told me about a German missionary there. It turned out I would run into him on my second day in Puerto Esperanza and he would go on to become a friend and an important source of information.

I had been in Yarinacocha for a week already when I got the information from Alberto: "Quickly pack your things, and get to the airport, the plane is leaving in two hours." I packed all my things, said goodbye to my landlady, took a *motocarro*, and headed for the airport. I also received a message from Rafael Pino, the head of the *Reserva Comunal Purús* (SERNANP),[23] inviting me to lunch in a restaurant where he was having lunch with his wife. He already knew about my waiting in Yarinacocha for the first possible flight to Purús. Eliane had introduced me to him, and I had sent him an official letter of my intention to do ethnomusicological research in the Purús region in May, about a month before my arrival to Peru. Eager to meet him personally, I stopped by, if only for a few minutes, to say hello and thank him for his support and help. I was going to be staying at their base center in Puerto Esperanza whenever they would have a free room for me. When I was already on my way to the airport, I got another message: "The flight has been canceled." I came back to the hostel feeling anxious. I had been there only a week. How was I going to last three or four months?

[23] Servicio Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas por el Estado (SERNANP) is Peru's protected areas agency**.** Communal Reserve (*Reserva comunal*) is a buffer zone between the national park, in which human settlements are forbidden (except the noncontacted tribes, or tribes in self isolation), and non-protected areas.

The next day I met with Medardo, a local Shipibo and brother-in-law of my ethnomusicologist colleague Bernd Brabec, who gave me his contact. It was so refreshing to meet someone so down-to-earth and very knowledgeable about our Western world. He was a teacher in local schools, was around 55 years old, and had three children. He worked in a native community in Tarapoto teaching local Indigenous kids how to survive in this world, as he put it. We went for breakfast and then he took me for a ride on his scooter. Later on, I met again with Rafael Pino. This time we had more time to really talk, and he was very generous with his advice. "Be generous to them [the Huni Kuin], it all depends on you if they will like you. Give them presents." He mentioned someone named Aquilino who was from Brazil and lives in Canta Gallo. He spoke of disputes among different native communities over the logging of mahogany. One community was logging trees on the territory of the other. He also spoke about COVID, saying that there weren't many cases in the whole region so far—only five serious cases with two mortalities at that point. He reasoned that the cases were so low because they protect themselves with their healing plants. He said I need to buy the boots: "Do buy the brand Venus, the other ones will cause you blisters." And he told me another story about this very conflicting Catholic missionary, Miguel (later on I would hear many times about him), who got in conflict with the native communities because he was advocating for the road to the Purús area. He claimed the road would bring progress to the area, while the real reason was the logging industry to have easy access for the transport, as he himself stated. Then the Indigenous people filed a complaint with the Pope Francisco and some high church official came to investigate the situation. A few months after the official left, Miguel got pulled out of Purús and sent to another area.

In Purús

On the 22nd of June, I finally got the flight to Purús. Alberto waited for me at the airport on my arrival in Esperanza. We put all my stuff on the *motocarro* and drove to the

SERNANP premises where I got my room. After unloading we went straight for lunch and started talking about my plans. I was talking about making recordings, that I wanted them to be available to them and hoping that they could be stored and accessible to the locals should they want to listen to them some time in the future. Alberto was listening and nodding. We soon started talking about the prices of the services I was requiring. A price to record one song should be no more than 20 soles (about 5€), even if it lasts for a full hour. A price for one hour of interview 10 soles. 30 soles should cost the preparation of ayahuasca. He said that when we would have a real ceremony, they would not charge for it – not on top of what I would pay for the price for the ayahuasca preparation. It seemed to me very friendly, and I assumed they are still doing it regularly and my "ticket" to join their usual ceremonies would be to pay for the ayahuasca for everybody. He told me I would sleep at the house of his uncle; he is one of the wise elders in the community of Canta Gallo. He assured me I could stay there for free. Of course, from all my trips to the native communities in my previous fieldwork I knew to bring with me enough food to feed me and the family who hosts me.

He explained to me that they do not have shamans like Shipibos, that they are *vegetalistas* (herbalists). A *vegetalista* sees the cause of the illness when he drinks ayahuasca and when you drink with him. There are also women who sing. I was wondering, if they don't heal with the singing, what are the songs meant for, some kind of blessing? When we talked, I mentioned that my total budget for the ceremonies, the interviews, and song recordings is around 1000-1500 soles (about 200-300€ at the time) and that when we spend it, this is it, no more music, as I have nowhere to get extra money. So, I asked him to be reasonable with his plans about what we do. My understanding was that his motive for working with me was that he is also researching his own tradition. He was a student at the Universidad Nacional Intercultural de la Amazonía (UNIA) in Yarinacocha at the time (later I learned that before the UNIA was housed there, the campus used to be the headquarters of the Summer Institute of Linguistics missionaries for the whole Peruvian Amazon) and he needed to submit his own paper for his degree. I assumed he was genuinely interested in researching his own tradition. That he himself didn't have the money to pay for the singing

of the elders, let alone for the recording equipment, and that our cooperation was a perfect match. We would share the material and findings.

When I was talking with Andrea Zuppi, I asked him how much money I would need there. So, we made a basic assumption on what I would need, then I added an extra amount so that I would be sure to have enough money when there, and then I added some more. Andrea already warned me that the Indigenous people were friendly and hospitable, but that if you were to get stuck in a village without your own gasoline, the fuel for the boats, they would probably not take you back to the town even if you got ill. Everybody who went there warned me that gasoline was like gold there. Everybody would be asking you for it and you should never run out of it.

When wandering around the town next day around 11.30 AM, I saw two young White men walking on the street, and I said hello. I came across the missionary Markus and his friend, Nathanael, who came to visit him for a few weeks. Markus, German, 35, had lived there for 9 years already and spoke fluent Spanish and Portuguese. During this time, he also learned the language of Huni Kuin, Hantxa Kuin. We went for lunch together and they took me to the other of the two restaurants near the main town square that were serving lunch meals. The restaurant was called Selva, and here I met for first time the owner of this establishment, Roy Hoyle, with whom I became good friends (later I learned that Selva is the name of his wife). Markus shared his story with me, and I shared mine. He discovered the Bible when he was 16 and he says he has been reading it daily ever since. He left everything behind, to spread his faith here, some German version of Protestantism. I later realized a very conservative one—one that understands and interprets Bible literally, as do all fundamentalists. But he also explained that he is not part of the Evangelicals; he identifies simply as a Christian and he teaches by his own example. He has his own house and a garden in the Huni Kuin village of Colombiana where he lives his secluded life. He didn't want anything to do with ayahuasca, and claims that this is a "bad spiritual world."

I was lucky to have caught them, because they were about to go back to "his" village early next morning, only to return a month later when Nathanael had to leave for his flight back home to Germany. It looked like he wanted to see for himself whether he was up to

this kind of missionary life. Later on, Markus told me through email that Nathanael is getting married back in his hometown. No wonder, listening to Markus's stories about his adventures here, life here is incredibly difficult and solitary. One really must feel a calling to do this. When I asked him, how does his father feel about him, staying here, he said, one eye is crying the other one is smiling. His father himself is also a missionary, a pastor, and he understood the calling of his son, but he must also have felt a lot of pain. Markus did not return home every year, and sometimes stayed there for two years at a time.

Markus told me that Cashinahua are kind, "*doce*" (sweet), and that I was lucky to have chosen them, because some Indigenous groups didn't even want to talk with the foreigners, White people. He also told me that Alberto had given me good prices for the ceremonies. He commented on negative consequences of shamanism, that there is a lot of jealousy and mutual accusations about who caused someone's illness, and that these accusations can result in death. Alberto had told me that they do not have this "harmful" shamanism, or any shamanism for that matter. It was difficult to discern whether Markus was spreading a myth, or if Alberto was hiding the existence of the shamans.

In the morning, when I was waking up, I started thinking about how my perception that the Huni Kuin wanted to document their tradition did not hold water. The community as such, does not seem to exist. Individual shamans had knowledge, and they kept it to themselves. If anyone wanted to learn or benefit from it, for example through healing, they must pay. The youth was not interested in learning about it. They had electricity, TV, *discotecas* in Esperanza, internet.[24] It is a big question, how will they maintain their knowledge, before they become typical poor people of Peru without any special knowledge and way of life connected with the notion of being Huni Kuin.

It turned out that Markus and Nathaniel had to wait another day, so we had another lunch together. This time, Terry, a Peruvian from Pucallpa, hired by the organization Eco Purús—my neighbor in the cabins at the SERNANP, and Alberto, joined us. It was impressive to observe Markus speaking German, English, Portuguese, Spanish and Hantxa Kuin. He was the only one commanding the situation at the table. He could speak with each one of us in

[24] In 2023 Colombiana already had Internet coverage through a satellite connection.

our own language (although English is my second language) and therefore select which information goes to whom. We told each other stories, and hearing theirs, I was again thinking to myself that if I made it there two months, I was good. I had sore throat from the morning, and was wondering whether it was COVID and if I should stay a bit longer in a sort of quarantine and wait on the canoe trip up the river to the community. Later that night Markus and Nathanael invited me to the house they were staying in. It was neighboring our camp. It was the house of a friend whom he helped some time ago and now let him stay there whenever he was in Esperanza. They served me tea and fruit —his own papaya that he cultivated in his *chacra* (garden). We talked about things like happiness, human nature, God, and showed each other the pictures of our families. My family was atomic, just me and my brother, whereas they both had big families. I think Nathanael even had seven or so siblings. The next morning, we were supposed to leave for Canta Gallo with Alberto.

To Canta Gallo

26th of June, finally we set for the community. I met the Alberto's uncle, who was sitting outside waiting for us at the square. His name was Bartolomeo, but people called him Bartemeo, or Bané, which is his original Huni Kuin name. I had already bought boots and a mattress for myself because there would be no beds there. So, we set out to buy groceries, some 5 gallons of gas, and a lot of bottled drinking water for me. We started getting on the boat only late in the afternoon, as the sun was beginning to set. We were quite late, so we arrived in almost complete darkness. They probably thought that I, as a gringo, foreigner, wanted or needed to have access to something more comfortable. Thus, we had a large canoe, the only one with a roof. However, the bigger the boat, the slower and less efficient. The water levels were also low. Just before arriving to the village, there was a small, shallow lagoon, and Bané steered a bit too close to the riverbank, tearing some fishing nets that got caught up in the propeller. No one had a knife on them, so I lent mine. It felt funny that the Indigenous did not always have some knife on them. Of course, when

the village man came to ask Bané to refund the damage he made to his net, it was me who had to pay for it.

It took us two hours to get there by boat. Everybody greeted me very warmly. The younger ones helped me carry my things, and there were about 20 people in the house when I got there. The family gave me some food and when I was done, everybody else started eating. First the men. Porridge, and everybody was eating from one big bowl, with their hands. I was glad they let me eat first. The delicious fish they gave me was not going to be just for me, so I left quite a bit on it. They finished every bit of it. After that they gave me lemongrass tea, which would have been delicious had it not contained so much sugar in it. And the fish was also oversalty. I figured that since they got introduced to salt and sugar, these became status symbols, the more the better. Many got addicted to sugar. It is interesting to note that there are still elders who in their childhood years tasted no salt at all, until it was introduced to them by the outsiders.

I set my mattress, sleeping bag and mosquito net in the small room that also served as a side kitchen, with a gas stove (which they never used, preferring to cook at the hearth in the main area). The house was full of holes, completely permeable to insects of all sizes. I had already met a big spider on the stove, that quickly hid when I approached it, a mouse, and cockroaches. I was doubting that this thin mosquito net that I brought with me would be sufficient, but in the end, it protected me well throughout the journey. It is like a dome shaped small enough so I could barely sneak in and write a diary underneath. They had big ones, attached to all corners of the room that were big enough to house a matrimonial bed, and the whole family could easily sit inside. Of course, the large ones were too much to carry, and I needed to be light. I had one big backpack for my clothes and shoes. And another mid-size backpack for my audio-visual equipment, a small one for the recording machine, a waist bag, and another foldable little bag of solar cells that were powerful enough to charge my laptop. Together with the food, the mattress, and the water, I was heavily packed and to move between the villages was quite a difficult task. Thinking about the day behind me, it had been a beautiful trip up the river. The light was exquisite as the sun was setting, and I had shot video almost the entire time. But I wondered how would I be able to make a film,

and what kind of research this would be. There are many small kids in the house, so that meant a lot of distracting sounds that I would not be able to control if I want to record any interview or chanting.

The people who came to visit for the dinner left, and only the family stayed. Before bed, they were watching some movie on their tablet. I thought, oh well, the process has already started. But it wasn't some random TV show or *telenovela* (soap opera) that I had seen Shipibo village members watch eight years ago. They were actually watching a documentary about their own people, shot by Brazilian team of ethnographers back in the 80s, titled *Já me transformei em imagem (I've already become an image)* (Yube 2008).[25] The film presents the customs of the Huni Kuin on the Brazilian side of the border, customs which I found out later that they no longer really practice anymore. It was incredible to see how the whole family watched this, almost poignant. It got surreal when after the documentary they put on the Rambo movie. Yes, the technological age had definitely entered the community here.

(FLASHBACK) I remembered when I was in the remote Indigenous village in China, in 2015, on the western border with Myanmar, one of the local youths, who already had a TV in his home, with a room full of Hollywood posters, had Rambo playing on his DVD player. It seemed to me that when the locals start watching Rambo, their society has crossed a certain threshold of "civilizing" after which there is no return to the "idyllic natural" state of living in harmony with nature. The needs of a modern man have grown roots.

In the evening, just before going to sleep we started discussing with Alberto how and what we will work on together. They wanted to show me many things, from *vegetalismo*, to *cantos* (chants). I said why don't we try with the basic question for Bané to

[25] It is part of the project *Vídeos nas aldeias* (Videos in the villages) that started already in the 1986, whose objective was to teach the Indigenous people to make their own documentaries about themselves, so that they themselves choose what stories they wish to tell and what they want to tell to their future generations. With this work they wanted to support the Indigenous in their fight to strengthen their identities and their territorial and cultural heritage: http://www.videonasaldeias.org.br/2009/index.php. (accessed on 25th Jun 2024) This showcases the incredible forward thinking of Brazilian anthropology.

tell us his life story, for me to get to know him better. The next day we ate breakfast, and I went to take a shower. Showers are taken by this household, and surrounding houses, in the nearby little creek which was slightly dammed so there is enough water to collect it with some bowl and pour it over your body. I was happy to refresh myself. The heat is pressing down incessantly, and I am sweating as soon as I do even small physical efforts like walking. Right after that we all went to the church. Well, it wasn't really a church, just a building used by the whole village that was used also for worship service. They all put on their best dresses and the women put on make-up. Even the five-year-old girls had strong red lipstick on. Most of them, men and women, painted their faces with their designs (*kené*), which were now being mixed with the Western style lipstick to make it all more vivid. The whole ceremony lasted for two hours, with many churchy songs that, to me, sounded like infantile pop songs accompanied by a local guy (one of the teachers in the village) playing a synthesizer.

In between, Alberto invited me to join him in front of the people. He started to sing, and I had no idea what he wanted from me; he must have known I did not know the lyrics of any of these songs. Maybe he wanted me to clap in the rhythm of music, but I said to myself, I am not doing this as I already look foolish enough, and also, I did not want the whole village to think I was a church goer who happily joins in in the church song singing. When this circus finished, he let me introduce myself. At the time my Spanish was still poor, so I only said a few sentences about who I was and what I wished to do there. At the end they all cheered and shouted in supporting me. It felt good to be genuinely accepted by the community and I was relieved. I was once again completely sweaty. When Alberto asked how many of the wise elders were there in the village, and if anyone was willing to help me, about six men raised their hands. One of them was the ayahuasca cook, Luis. I was happy to see also the hand of one woman. I noticed that women were on the right side of the church and men were on the left side. The division between males and females was very sharp in the Huni Kuin life. The service ended soon after that and everybody dispersed. Before that, one of the men wanted to offer me rapé[26] as a welcome treat, but I respectfully

[26] Rapé is a diverse group of tobacco products grounded into powder and usually mixed with ashes of other plants; the purpose of adding ashes is to activate the alcaloids in tobacco (Jana Horáčková personal communication). The use is indigenous to South America. It is generally used as a nasal snuff and contains

declined. I had taken rapé a few times before, and it was not something I would just consume for fun. I did not like it so much even in the ceremonial environment. Later that day I shot about three minutes of test video, recording Bané speaking in Hantxa Kuin. He would be my main *maestro*, or so I thought.

The next day we organized an audition, to find out who would be willing and capable of working as a translator. Six guys volunteered and each one of them tried to help with the translation of the Bané's story. I would play back the video and stop after what would be about one sentence and repeated as long it was necessary for them to be able to translate it. When they were sure they knew what he said, we would together make a caption in the video editing program and then we moved to the next one. It was very difficult for them, and it took a lot of patience from my side. Two of them understood well how this works, and the progress, I thought, would gradually become faster. One of them was Kenedy, a 22-year-old village teacher and grandson of Bané. He was educated in Pucallpa, and the training to become a teacher takes a few years. While trying to translate the first three minutes of the video, I sensed that some of the elders wanted to speak to me, but since I was too focused on the work, and wanted to finish the chapter, they left. After everyone left, Bané told me he knows about 20 songs for healing. And we agreed that next time, when we would be recording interviews, we will be alone. When we were translating his speech, I realized that he kept repeating the same thing over and over again, and I thought that he was a bit nervous, and that the presence of others was the cause of that nervousness. I was hoping that when he would be alone, he would forget about the need to make an impression and be more natural.

Bané showed me many notebooks that his father left him, full of lyrics of the ancient chants. Also, he had about 20 or 30 cassettes with his chanting. Unfortunately, they did not have any tape players, so nobody is able to listen to these. I realized this is the real gem that needs to be digitalized and preserved for posterity, before the information on the tape is too degraded. He also told me that among Huni Kuin there were no shamans who would

substantial amount of plant material with or without tobacco. It can be used for recreational purposes, but also in the medicinal and spiritual practices.

perform rituals with intention of killing anyone. Of course, I knew, that even if they existed, they would not tell me that, at least not at this point. But, from the literature, and everyone I talked to, this seemed to be true.

At 5 am the next morning, I could not sleep anymore. My brain was speeding at 100mph. I saw red flags everywhere! I realized what they were doing. Alberto had made a whole plan about what I should be researching or looking into. But he would go home that day and leave me alone there! He lives in Esperanza with his wife and kids. Among the things I was supposed to do was also shoot *mariri* (*katxa nawa*), a big festival-like ritual for the whole village, that they would perform, stage for me, because I was supposedly so interested in it. And of course, I would have to pay for all the expenses. In short, they are hoping for my money to fund their festival and pass it as their live tradition, even though they practically stopped doing it. When I realized this, I tried to very carefully explain to them that I, first of all, do not have the money to fund lavish parties and second of all, research means I study, observe, what is going on in their daily life, without me influencing it too much. Hopefully, I don't disturb too much with my presence. And I am not some kind of a tourist agency looking for some colorful attractions to start bringing other people here who would want to experience this. After that conversation, Bané had wanted to show me how he was proficient in his song chanting, and I realized he needed to read from his father's notebooks because he was not able to recite by heart. I started thinking he never was a chanter: he just wanted to sell himself as one. I also started doubting very much that they even had ayahuasca ceremonies themselves. If this were true, it would mean that whatever we would be doing there was some kind of a re-creation of the past rituals. Hypothetically, since Christianity arrived, the old traditions slowly started to fade away. And if there was anyone in this village that still knew the chants by heart, it probably wasn't from the Roque family, the members of which were all supporters of the church and some of them actually main local church protagonists. And since I did not speak their language and I lived in their house, I was in a trap. If there were any members of the community who did have some knowledge and wished to share it with me, he or she would simply not come to this house. So, I was seriously worried how to continue at this point.

I felt it would be best to just drop all hope and simply leave, because I felt cheated, and because the things I had expected to find—the chanters, the ceremonies being kept alive—simply did not exist there anymore. The main question was what to do now. The only thing that would have any sense would be to go further up the river where I could hope that the church's presence was not felt so strongly. But, the main chief of FECONAPU (Federación de Comunidades Nativas de la Provincia del Purús), Sergio Salomón Castillo, himself a Huni Kuin, did not give me permission to record there. I had only gotten permission for Canta Gallo and the neighboring community of Bufeo.

Alberto arranged the meeting for me with Salomón before taking the trip up the river with the boat. Prior to my arrival to Purús, he asked me to write a letter of intention, stating what I intend to research, and send it to him, so he would present it to Salomón. I had done that in April. When I arrived in Esperanza, we got a *motocarro* and took a short ride to an old decrepit house at the edge of the town. From there I had a clear view to the military base camp. We went inside, and Salomón was friendly as he greeted us. He listened to what I had to say, that I wanted to record a documentary, with recordings of traditional Cashinahua *nixi pae* chants and hopefully archive them at this institution. However, looking at how everything was just gathering dust there, I thought the organization must probably be heavily underfunded. I suggested we could use this house for the time when we would record *nixi pae* chants in Esperanza with the elders who moved here and do not live in the communities anymore. That never happened, but the paper he gave me—permission to shoot in the native communities—proved to be useful. I heard the stories that locals would be able to take away the equipment from the foreigners who did not pay their respect to the Indigenous communities and ask for permission.

So, thinking about this, I thought I must go back to Esperanza and talk again with Salomón and ask permission to go further up the river. All the way to Colombiana where that missionary, Markus, lived. I was also thinking about Tzion, the Israeli traveler who told me, "It is all a game of money, just pay high enough amount and you will get the ceremony. Everyone here is a *maestro* and they all take you to someone from their family." I remembered the words of Andrea Zuppi, a colleague researcher, "this is a godforsaken

place." Many thoughts were rushing through my head, what to do now. I didn't even know if I should wait for the first ceremony. What would Bané do, when the lights get turned off? He doesn't know the lyrics. And even my interpreters would be making up what he was singing about. They wouldn't know what the lyrics really are about, if no one taught them. I would only get word for word translation, and this doesn't say much about its true meaning. Eliane must have known that here the practice of traditional chants is not alive anymore. And all the talk about archiving it for the posterity, that the Huni Kuin want to document their tradition, was just a figment of my imagination. Because of what I had seen up to that point, my perception was that this part was already culturally devastated.

(FLASHBACK) I remembered the story Rafael told me about that corrupt missionary who was too stubborn, and the natives resented him. So, when years later the Pope came, they gave him a letter. In a few months the committee came and a few months later the stubborn missionary was gone. They sent another one. Surely, for the church planting to be successful, a more popular missionary is needed. But the Pope became a hero here. Bané's house had a big poster hanging from the wall with the Pope's image when he visited Madre de Dios region in 2018.[27] The Pope was a savior. And this is all the fight here—how to win the hearts of the Indigenous. The young of course have no better thing to do but to dream of jeans, listen to generic electronic music. I met this young guy on the street in Esperanza. He came to me when he saw me walking down the street with a camera. He wanted to know what I was doing here and what I was interested in. When I told him I was here to record some traditional songs up in the communities, he said he was also a musician, and he makes music. I said what kind of music. He said, "rap music, and I also write lyrics for it." I took his number and promised to call him when I was back in town. I was thinking now, maybe I should just change my whole research and start investigating the music the youth in town is starting to make.

[27] https://www.iied.org/pilgrimage-madre-de-dios-starting-journey-sustainable-artisanal-mining#:~:text=Español%2C%20Portuguese%2C%20Brazil-,On%20pilgrimage%20in%20Madre%20de%20Dios%3A%20starting%20a%20journey%20to,the%20Amazon's%20peoples%20and%20forests. (accessed on 25th Jun 2024)

The next day in the morning, I talked to Alberto. I told him that I think that his uncle Bané doesn't know the lyrics because he simply does not practice this art, because this activity does not exist anymore in this village. He remained silent. I suggested we try to visit other communities and try to see if there this practice is still alive. He agreed to travel to other communities when we finish with the work here. Then I escorted him to the canoe. He was returning to Esperanza, back to his family. I had a strange feeling staying alone in this village, like something was not quite right. Like ending up in the wrong alley. I finally decided to wait at least until the first ceremony.

On my way back to the house I met this young guy, Jack, he is 16, as he told me (he is the son of Luis, ayahuasca *maestro*). He said he had ayahuasca for me and that he would bring it to my house. When I came back to the house, I saw the women were involved in painting their bodies. I asked them if I could film them, and I started shooting this activity. In any case, work, filming, helped me feel better. They suggested they paint me as well. Of course, I said yes. Slowly my mood started to get better. Then came Jack and brought about a liter of ayahuasca. I asked him how long it had been boiling. By that time, I knew that Cashinahua here do not make a very concentrated brew, that they quickly finish with the cooking and that because of that each person needs to drink about a full cup. He said he cooked it for seven hours, and left to boil only for one hour. That this amount is enough for four or five doses. He wanted 50 soles for it. I told him that I heard it cost 30 and I left him wait. I asked him how old he was when he first tried it. He said nine years old. I said I would talk with his father about the ayahuasca price. After that we recorded our first interview with Bané. He spoke for about 20 minutes in Hantxa Kuin and after that I pressed with my questions for another ten. I was asking how come he does not drink ayahuasca anymore. I felt he was evading. However, he did rehearse chanting, reading from his notebook while the women were painting themselves. To me it sounded soft, repetitive and soothing. I got a bit better feeling about the ceremony. Then we ate lunch, lentils, for the third time. The Huni Kuin hated lentils, so it must have meant that there was no other food at the house. I was the one who brought it. But to me it was good. And my stomach was full.

Then suddenly it seemed the big rain would soon start to fall. I realized the house might be leaky and I quickly started packing my things, especially the equipment. Bané's wife, Julia, realized what was going on, and started showing me which were the good places to leave my bags, and which were not. "Here where your bed is, it will be wet, put your things there. And here. Not there." In came Bané and started calming me down, "No nooo, there will be no rain, only lots of wind." About a minute later rain started pouring down and the water started flowing in from several spots. While we, the men, were eating, the women were collecting the rainwater into barrels. Then we waited for the rain to stop. But it didn't. I remembered that we could go to the village school to translate there. With me there were Kenedy and Noé, both grandchildren of Bané (altogether he has 30 of them). We worked diligently for two hours, and we translated about six minutes of interview. At least this time it went a bit faster than during the test, so I had a feeling that it could be manageable. I bargained that with this tempo I can pay them each 5 soles per hour, when we work together. And they said it is fine with them. I thought to myself how ridiculously cheap this was. Little did I know that I would not be able to translate almost any of my interviews recorded in Hantxa Kuin.

Around the end of the translating session, Martín, the head of the village introduced me to his nephew, Aquilino, in front of the school building. He looked different already at first sight. He had a special style for clothes, striped tight pants, cool outfit, more colorful, and not trying to follow this generic fad that everyone else here did. He looked more Brazilian. He told me he is a shaman. That he came here from Esperanza only because of me. And that he would like to drink ayahuasca with me tonight. I told him that I need to finish the work here first, and that then I would come to his house to talk with him after that.

When I visited him a bit later, I saw that his house was completely empty. One suitcase and on the bamboo walls were hanging some posters of some birds. A real shack. He started to convince me that he is a *maestro* of everything. Of ayahuasca, of the chants, of rapé, *vegetalismo*, of everything. That people here do not know anything. I was nodding to his words and said that it worries me that people here really might not know much. But,

I said, I lived in this house now with this Roque family, and that we had agreed to have the ayahuasca ceremony with them for tomorrow and that I cannot drink with him tonight. I suggested that I could next week though. He took out two huge headdresses from his suitcase and put one on his head. He took his guitar and started singing a song. To me it sounded like a typical Brazilian Huni Kuin song. I told him, "Yes, this is beautiful, but unfortunately, I really can't sit with you tonight," when he asked me again and said that he must go back to Esperanza the following morning. That people were calling him to lead the ceremonies. And that he had a family to support. I felt bad for him, I wanted to help, but to me it sounded like he was trying to get some money from the gullible *gringo*. So many times, I heard the poor people play this card with the White rich person. To start feeling sorry for them and then he pays the money. Stupid White man with a big heart. That is a stereotype of Us from the Other. I did not give in. I really could not do the ceremony with him. I feel it would be a tremendous insult for the family I stay with. And of course, I am very skeptical when somebody claims he is the master of everything and everyone else here doesn't know anything. I took his number—Aquilino Roque Pereira, 34 years old. Everyone in this village seems to be Roque family. It is a big clan. He showed me his Brazilian identity card – Indigenous people there usually do not have one. They usually apply for them once they get old and want to get the pension from the Brazilian state. This is also a reason for migrations across the border. Since the Brazilian pension is substantially higher than Peruvian one, the elders, once they are eligible, tend to move across the border, settle down in the Brazilian communities and try to get the Brazilian salary. I looked at his eyes, they seemed to be glassy, reddish, I suspected he must have been smoking pot or something else. I knew those eyes… He asked if I wanted some rapé. I said no thanks, I don't even feel like smoking tobacco. He played one more song as a final attempt, and then I said goodbye. Jack, who was listening to all this conversation, is his younger brother. I asked him if his *aya* (short for ayahuasca) is still 50 soles, and he said no. Ok, do you need money today, or is it ok tomorrow? Today. Ok, come to my house later on. I didn't have any money on me.

When I came back to the house, I told the family what had happened and they asked me, so what are you going to do? I said I declined because I was set on sitting with you. They

appeared satisfied and almost relieved, as if I have passed a test. They said he did the Brazilian variant of the songs, and that those weren't the original, traditional ones. I said I knew. And then they added, he thinks you are a tourist. It felt good inside that I apparently made a good impression on them, that they are able to distinguish me from a tourist. I felt happy, at peace. I felt that the traditional variant is closer to me. However, I had sat before with ayahuasca servers in Slovenia who were obviously doing the hybrid, modern version of ayahuasca ceremonies inspired by the Brazilian Huni Kuin version and I did have a transformative experience. Then they asked me if we would continue with the interviews the next day. I said yes. I looked at the list of the elders Alberto had made, and I asked who Julia is. Bané points at his wife. She looks at me with such a grace, full of wisdom that I have a feeling she would never put herself in front or praise herself. I ask in what way she is a wise elder. She said she sings. But not *aya* songs, right? No, no. And then she didn't add anything. I was eager to hear those. I felt that she is the one who has the knowledge, a source of wisdom. I drank a cup of coffee and two biscuits, enough for a light dinner, and I made my bed for the night.

Morning. It was cold, I think below 15°C. I put on all the clothes I had with me. Merino wool long underpants, my khaki linen pants from Morocco over my hiking pants, shirt, pullover, and a jacket. They brought me a vessel with embers and put it under my chair to keep me warm. During the night I had an urge to empty my bowels for the first time since I arrived at the village. I had taken a anti diarrhea pill just before boarding the boat to Santa Gallo, as I had troubles in my bowels. So, at 3:15 in the morning, I headed for the toilet shack near house. It took me almost an hour to unblock that pill. While I was squatting, I saw a large grasshopper-like insect molting. It lasted for the duration of my time there. I even thought I had stepped on it accidentally as at some point it ceased moving and appeared to be dead. When I came to check upon it in the morning, the insect was gone. I realized molting was a long process. A process of transformation. And I was a witness to it

for the first time. Scientists say it is a difficult process in which insects stop eating and breathing, many lie still, becoming more vulnerable to predators. Some die.[28]

(FLASHBACK) I was drawing parallels between molting and spiritual transformation. Whoever thinks transformation is just a walk in the park, for example, a New Age fire ceremonies, like the ones I attended in the past, where everybody receives a pinch of herbs, then thinks about what one wishes to shed, what one no longer needs in one's life, or what no longer serves him, throw the pinch in fire, and one is free from one's old blockages, is heavily romanticizing the whole process. I remembered being in a few such fire ceremonies, and I threw a pinch or two in the fires, and it made me feel good in the moment, but I doubt this has any long-lasting healing effect.

I took this opportunity, to being a witness to molting, as a sign. I was on the path of transformation, and it was normal for it to feel so difficult at times being here. I got the feeling that the ceremony would happen tonight.

Julia liked me a lot. By the fire she took my hands into hers, to warm them up and she was laughing heartily. A rare, beautiful moment. In her eyes there was warmth. If the wind persisted, we would postpone the ceremony. The wind made the whole house howl. During the night, while listening to the house "sing," I thought about how that was the true soundtrack of the jungle, of Indigenous life. It is a powerful mix of corrugated iron, loud, howling, cracking sounds.

All the food that I gave them on the first day, they managed to consume it in just three days. Now I slowly gave out the rest that I had. Whenever they didn't feel like cooking, they would mix coffee, sugar, and milk powder and eat cookies with it. I could understand that you could get fed up eating rice or *plátanos* (cooked green bananas) and fish every day. They do not produce many kinds of vegetables or fruits. Mainly just *plátanos* and yucca.

[28] https://www.science.org/content/article/insect-molting-having-your-lungs-ripped-out (accessed on 25th Jun 2024)

They say the soil is bad. I doubted it, since Markus could cultivate pineapples and papayas. It could be done…

In the evening it became clear there would be no ceremony that night. Bané says it was still too cold. I believed that he had no desire to call the session, maybe not even to sing. But I had trust it would happen. In the afternoon we did translations again for two hours. I met Luis, Jack and Aquilino's father, in the village. He said he was in the middle of cooking ayahuasca. I said I would come back with my camera. I stayed with him for a while, observing his cooking, recording, and then the young boys hanging out there started to sing some guitar songs (ayahuasca songs accompanied with a guitar). I told them to wait, that I wanted to record them. I rushed back for extra microphones. They said that for 50 soles they would play ten songs for me. I say I only want one, they say OK, then it will be 20. I was ready and started filming. They played for almost 20 minutes, and even then I had to indicate that it was enough now. Those were the typical ayahuasca songs that were spreading on YouTube. Indigenous kids nowadays have tablets, not TV, and they are actively looking for these songs to copy them. Jack showed me on his tablet, or it could have been the family tablet, the performances of Huni Kuin groups from the state of Acre, in Brazil. Again, the young boys invited me to drink with them. I said I couldn't. And, honestly, I didn't feel like listening to these guitar songs all night. I again made an excuse that Bartemeo would rather make it more intimate because we wanted to record some of his chants without guitars.

Back in the house I realized there would be no ceremony tonight either. It was 8 pm, we should have been starting, but nothing was indicating that the session would take place. Bané prepared an herb bath for his son, Noé, who took a bath. Then his wife poured another round of water into the pot with the herbs and heated it again. I took a bath with the second round. At least the water was warm. The wind completely stopped, and it got a bit warmer. But for them, this was still incredibly cold. Everybody, us included, burned fires, and were making themselves warm that way. I couldn't even imagine how the uncontacted tribes could have survived this cold. The closer we are to the foothills of the Andes, the colder

these storms become. When they would retell the stories of the past, they would recount much suffering (*mucho sufrimiento*) back in the day. I understood it had been very hard.

I started to eat less. I didn't need so much anymore. And I felt I could go to bed around 8 pm already. It got dark by 6 pm anyhow. Then, all of a sudden, Bané arrived with one person who seemed to be some kind of a client of his. He brought out a big bag, like a tool bag, but when he opened it, there was a whole pharmacy inside. He handed the man some ampule. He brought out another bag, almost empty, and found a needle there, but he could not find a syringe. Then they left. I realized he is not only a *vegetalista*, but also some kind of a "go to person" for Western medicine cures, maybe even a health promotor. And he kept telling me, how he keeps his family healthy with his herb medicines. How they eat healthy, his mantra about "*pura natura*" (only natural).

The next morning (31st June) Bané, Julia, and I went to the forest. He knew a lot about the plants; every few steps he turns around and explains to me something about the plant and what it is good for. I have filmed about an hour of this material. I was still very confident that the translations were going to go well, I asked him to explain the things about the plants in Hantxa Kuin. After we came back, Kenedy, Noé, and I went back to the school and finally finished translating the whole 30-minute interview with Bané. And it was true what I had already intuited —he really didn't say almost anything the whole time. He never mentions what life was like back then. He mostly talked about how he had been a chief of the village before, and kept repeating this. At around 6 pm we returned to the house.

Bané decided that the ceremony will take place at his house, and he already had invited a few people. His son, Manuel, a very well-fed man, who was also a pastor in the village, kept eating for the whole hour, and the women kept bringing the food. I did not eat; I felt my stomach should be empty. This was already almost a habit for me from the Shipibo way of doing these things. They have the *dieta* before and after the ceremony to clean the body of unnecessary toxins and prepare it to receive the sacred medicine. Whereas here, they say there is no need to refrain from eating anything. I later found out that only before the very first ingestion of ayahuasca it is advisable to diet and prepare yourself for some sort of initiation. After this has been done, there is no need for any kind of diet before or

after the intake. To me there are no reasons not to eat before ingesting ayahuasca. I feel I eat diet food practically all the time, mostly a vegetarian diet with emphasis on healthy foods. The main reason (for me) not to eat is to avoid unnecessary vomiting.

1st Ceremony in Canta Gallo

By the time Luis arrived, around 8 o'clock, I had already set up my microphones. After him, about four or five boys arrived. Luis started to serve the medicine, and everyone muttered, or intoned, some words to himself, or, it looks like they were talking to the cup in front of them and to the medicine. Like a personal prayer or questions for the spirit of Ayahuasca to show them what they wish to see during the visions. I did the same, asking for guidance during the trip. I drank a bit less, because I didn't know how strong it was. After that everybody reclined to their hammocks and pull their blankets over. Some boys shared a hammock between them, their heads on each side. I had no hammock and I sat on the floor with my back against the wall. A hammock is a valuable asset in Huni Kuin society, and they are not easily available; every house usually has one or two for the head of the family and his spouse. Everybody waited in silence, and I started recording. Bané started to chant, and soon after that I heard his son starting to snore. Through the night it evolved into a violent snoring concert that was rivaling Bané's chanting in loudness. After couple of hours, we drank again. I again a bit less. And for me, despite the second dose, the feelings were very mild, maybe a level of two on Shulgin scale. But I was content, it felt good as a starting point. We all drank about a full cup of the brew, and the taste was not as foul and bitter as the concentrated one, but it took just as much effort to drink it all. About 11 pm, I was not impressed with Bané's chanting. He was forcing himself to chant loudly, with strong voice and to me it sounded it doesn't do anything to direct our journey, instead, I almost felt it as a hindrance to it. And the flow was quite terrible as he had to read, and he was using the flashlight on his phone. And he kept making mistakes; either his reading skills were bad, or

the light was low, and the writing was hard to read. The general feeling was we just didn't lift off at all. But I recorded everything, and it is documented as it was.

During breakfast, Noé explained to me that this constant *e ea eeee*, that I heard during the singing is meant to call the spirits, when there are no visions, to bring them, to call the spirit of Ayahuasca, the spirit of boa, the snake that is connected with ayahuasca in their mythology. They said they would go fishing later. If possible, I wanted to film it—maybe there would be some material for my movie after all. Later on, Bané had another patient. This time he used some cream or balm and was rubbing it into his skin on his thigh. It looked like some injury. Anyhow, Bané's son let himself be spoiled, his wife giving him a massage while he is spread out on the floor. I tried to keep myself busy with reading. I was reading old texts from Harner's book, *Hallucinogens and Shamanism,* (1973)[29] and I had a feeling they said it all already back then. The texts written after that were mostly recycling what we already knew.

Finally, I would take a shower again, it is hot again. But the last night was the coldest of them all, because the night was clear. I thought about how the musical change was coming in from the east, from Acre, Brazil. The version of ceremonial songs with guitars. And guitars were brought to the Indigenous people by the missionaries. Also, through the church they were being introduced to these infantile songs. And of course, the influence of TV and media. After the shower I asked Bané about the *dieta*—didn't you need to fast before taking ayahuasca? "What *dieta*, what do you mean? It is not like it is some kind of antibiotic." It was hilarious to him. He mentioned this to his wife, and she started to laugh out loud. When I asked Luis about the ayahuasca that I bought from Jack, his son, he said he doesn't know anything about it. He wanted to sell more of it to me, of course. He brewed the whole bucket of it, about 5 liters.

[29] One of the essays in the book is Kensinger's *Banisteriopsis Usage among the Peruvian Cashinahua*.

Ayahuasca

Ayahuasca is consumed in the form of a brew, which is prepared from the stems of *Banisteriopsis caapi,* the ayahuasca plant, and combined with leaves of *Psychotria viridis*, or *chakruna.*[30] When they chemically isolated the active ingredient of ayahuasca plant they first called it telepathine, to signify that the drink induces telepathic connection, however it was later discovered that it is the same chemical as harmine alkaloids (Schultes and Hofmann 1987, 127). The key psychotropic chemical substance of ayahuasca brew comes from *chakruna* and it is dymethyltriptamine (DMT).[31] Harmine from ayahuasca vine functions as a monoamine oxidase inhibitor (MAO-I) and prevents the breakdown of DMT in the liver. There is a possible psychotropic action in the liana's alkaloids, but pharmacologists disagree on this point (see also Deshayes 2002). The brew induces purgative and visionary experiences. Usually, the unpleasant purgative physical effects are followed by overwhelming visions and feelings of connecting with something usually described as sacred. Although the purging is unpleasant it is considered cleansing and healing to the body. In the book *Plants of the gods: Origins of the hallucinogenic use* (1979) Schultes and Hoffman describe that ayahuasca is used so the soul can freely roam and for communication with the ancestors. In Quechua the term ayahuasca means hangman's rope or vine of the soul (Schultes and Hofmann 1987, 124). They also argue that since ayahuasca is profoundly rooted in the cosmology and mythology of the various Indigenous Amazon people there could be no doubt that it has been used since ancient times.

There is evidence that peyote and San Pedro have been used for millennia in the region of today's Mexico and Peru respectively (Schultes and Hofmann 1982, 144, 166) by ancient cultures and these traditions have been kept alive until now. The use of ayahuasca today is widespread in the whole region of the Northwestern Amazon and is not limited to

[30] Datura can sometimes be mixed with ayahuasca by experienced *pajés* (shamans) (Wright 2013, 26). Datura (*Toé*) is one of the plants of the New World that has also been used as a medicine in Asia and is mentioned in the old Chinese and Sanskrit texts (Schultes and Hofmann 1982, 107).
[31] DMT is also found in rapé (snuff) called epená (paricá) *Virola theiodora,* used by Yanomami people.

the Indigenous population. It can be said that it is known and used by the river dwellers and local population in general. It is usually also claimed to have been used for millennia by various Indigenous groups, but such statements are difficult to prove, and it is difficult to say with any level of certainty which groups have been the original users, when this tradition started, and how it has spread throughout the large area of Northwestern Amazon. There is no archeological evidence to confirm that ayahuasca has been used since pre-Colombian times (Brabec de Mori 2011). The first written accounts of ayahuasca were from Jesuit missionaries, the very first by Jesuit Pablo Maroni in 1737 and a bit later, in 1768, by Jesuit Franz Xaver Veigl (Brabec de Mori 2011, 32). The first more scientific description of its use among Amazonian natives was described by English botanist and explorer Richard Spruce,[32] who recorded ayahuasca use among Tukanoan tribes in the Rio Vaupés region of Brazil in 1852. Unfortunately, due to his weak health he did not experiment personally with it (Spruce 1908; Schultes 1968). Moreover, Brabec de Mori argues that in the Peruvian Amazon south of Iquitos the use of ayahuasca is probably less than 300 years old. And that it was spread to the south by the mestizo population (see also Suárez-Álvarez 2023).

By the middle of 20th century, the first Westerners had started searching for magic potions. William S. Burroughs, an iconic postmodernist writer, was probably the first known tourist who in 1953[33] started his 7-month journey through the Amazonian jungles of Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru and translated his experiences in the famous *Yage Letters* to Allen Ginsberg (more correctly, written *yagé*, and pronounced "ya-hey," a common name for ayahuasca in Colombia) (1963).[34] The last quarter of the book is Ginsberg's experience seven years later. This text is one of the most famous books in his oeuvre. In the 1970s, Terence McKenna, an independent researcher and psychedelic activist and a very persuasive speaker, traveled in search of ayahuasca in the Putumayo region of the Colombian Amazon. He significantly popularized ayahuasca in Western societies while

[32] Spruce lived closely with the native Amazonian peoples and learned several of their languages. He named the vine Banisteria caapi, which was in 1931 transferred to genus Banisteriopsis by Morton.

[33] Burroughs met with Schultes in 1953 in Colombia and apparently it was he who wrote to Schultes the following year that the ayahuasca brew derived its power from the combination of the yagé vine (Banisteriopsis caapi) with the chakruna leaf (Psychotria viridis). (Jay, 2019, 268)

[34] Certain letters were published before 1963, first one in 1958 in Black Mountain Review, then more in 1959 in Big Table under the title "In quest of Yage," and so on. (Harris 2006)

emphasizing the visual elements of the journey (Gearin and Sáez 2021, 143). The increased presence of Westerners in the Amazon looking for shamanic rituals involving ayahuasca started in the 1980s and has exploded since 2005 (Fotiou 2020). Nowadays ayahuasca tourism is pervasive in the Western Amazon and ayahuasca healing ceremonies are held all over the world. In these neoshamanic practices, the use of ayahuasca differs significantly from the traditional Indigenous use and moves away from the role it had in the western Amazon.

By traditional Indigenous use I mean the various ways of using ayahuasca by different Indigenous people that existed before the accelerated syncretization due to the influence of the Westerners. In the traditional Indigenous use, the attribution of the healing effect of ayahuasca is deeply immersed in animistic cosmovision, in which nature, the whole cosmos, is filled with spiritual beings, entities. According to this worldview, most, if not all, life forms have spirits, not just animal and plants but also stars, wind, earth, oceans, and forest. These spiritual counterparts to the material Universe are understood in mythological and metaphorical terms (Tanaka 2000, 195) and can be communicated with. Ayahuasca is seen as the mother spirit of the forest, a higher intelligence.

As Aquilino, my informant/shaman, who came back to Canta Gallo from Brazil, where he spent most of his life, told me, there are five different types of ayahuasca vine, and they have different effects on the drinker. For example, one just makes you sleepy. However, I do not know how they distinguish the different versions of the plant; it is a knowledge possessed by only a few, who are regarded as maestros of ayahuasca preparation. As Schultes and Hoffman write, botanists would say these are the same species of the plant and the names could be referring to a different age, or different parts of the plant. It is still under researched whether these actually have different chemical composition (see Schultes 1968).

Sacred plants as entheogens and Altered states of consciousness

The term “entheogen” (the God within) was coined in a 1979 article titled *Entheogens* (Ruck et al. 1979) to designate all visionary substances. It refers to the possibility of some plants (less often substances produced of animal origin) to enable inspiration by achieving transcendent states of mind that resemble “communion with deity that numerous people believe they or their shamans attain through the ingestion [of these substances]” (Ibid).[35] According to the authors of this article, it was necessary to find a more neutral term for these altered states of mind and for the plants inducing them as all the other terms in use were imposing a value judgment. Such terms include and are not limited to psychedelic, psychotomimetic, psychotropic, psychoactive, hallucinogenic.

Other means for achieving a spiritual dimension include music based intervention, meditation, holotropic breathwork, yoga, as well as spiritually-focused psychotherapies (Dubbini, Mabit, and Politi 2020, 56). The term entheogen was also criticized that it presumes a monotheistic ontology. And Indigenous accounts attest that the substances and power plants are not understood as chemical agents, but as other-than-human persons, as helpers, or allies (Harvey and Wallis 2004, 80). For medicine men, and for all the participants who subscribe to an animist worldview, it is the plant, the whole mixture with all its constituents, that is important, not just one molecule, or a combination thereof.

Medical studies with psychoactive substances started in the 1950s. They ranged from the very disturbing, even criminal ones, like the unethical experiments of Donald Ewen Cameron under the CIA project MK-Ultra, to highly openminded and insightful ones such as performed by Humphry Osmond (Osmond 1957). According to Griffiths the very first experiments failed to recognize the powerful role of the set and setting (Griffiths et al. 2006) and sometimes did induce psychotomimetic behavior in the participants. The experiments in the 60s did report more positively valued experiences. However, some of them were

[35] Or in Aldous Huxley's words, “to make this trivial world sublime, take a half gramme of phanerothyme.” Phanerothyme is another term that Huxley, unsuccessfully, coined for mescaline (ibid).

done by the well-known advocates and promoters of the hallucinogens such as Timothy Leary, and could hardly be deemed scientific (Leary, Litwin, and Metzner 1963).

Since then, psychedelics had been used in clinical research to treat a whole host of conditions, including addiction, depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, schizophrenia, autism, and end-of-life anxiety. But these experiments ceased due to a very negative picture in public of the hallucinogens as a result of heavy abuse of hallucinogens by the youth. With the subsequent war on drugs after the civil rights movement, all psychedelic substances were banned by 1968, and the research was highly suppressed, made almost impossible.[36] From the late 1990s onward, the studies into how psychoactive substances such as psilocybin can occasion mystical experiences and the consequences of these experiences in individuals' lives slowly began to appear again, and by now, we are firmly into the renaissance, or revival of research which goes hand in hand with gradual decriminalization of the psychedelic substances within the US and elsewhere in the world.[37] I would call these experimental treatments with medicinal plants the "therapeutic way." Characteristic for this version of consumption is a scientific point of view, a complete lack of ritualization, and locating the plant's efficacy within its pharmaceutical properties that can help remedy specific illnesses (like addiction, PTSD), rather than any spiritual properties.

I see a dichotomy between the traditional way of using ayahuasca and the therapeutic way because the scientific way completely ignores the spiritual dimension and attributes the (healing) effect of ayahuasca and other entheogens solely to the pharmaceutical properties, the chemical mixture and the dosage, and other more qualitatively measurable variables, such as setting, music, visuals, psychotherapy with the main intent to design a therapeutic application. The therapeutic way and the traditional way are on opposite poles. Brabec calls this dichotomy between the traditional and therapeutic one an ontological incommensurability (Brabec de Mori 2021), because they picture, or perceive, the world in noncomparable ways.

[36] The last FDA approved study of LSD in patients ended in 1980, while a study in healthy volunteers was made in the late 1980s. These were extremely rare.

[37] A great introduction on the history of psychedelics research may be found in Chapter 3 of Pollan's *How to change your mind* (2019)

When talking to people in Purús region some might say ayahuasca is like jungle people's television. Which as much as it tries to convey the message that it produces visions, it really is demeaning for the experience. Television may be likened to induce state of consciousness like hypnosis, or slowing down of mental activity, comparable to alcoholic inebriation, with addictive qualities. On the other hand, visions during ayahuasca session tend to be holotropic, that is, producing "states of consciousness [...] that are "oriented toward wholeness", in accordance to the same definition of holotropic derived from the Greek *holos* = whole, and *trepein* = moving toward" (Dubbini, Mabit, and Politi 2020). These states bring a sense of contentment, peace, and aliveness, which is the exact opposite of what the addictive narcotic drugs bring: discontent, nervousness, anxiety. The contact with the sacred (or a spiritual dimension) does not provide an escape from reality; it provides a return to reality.[38]

It should be noted, though, that when talking about entheogens, one needs to differentiate between entheogenic use and recreational use. Famous *curandera* Maria Sabina's[39] account of those visiting her at the end of the 1960s is a sad one: "These young people, blonde and dark-skinned, didn't respect our customs. Never, as far as I remember, were the saint children [mushrooms] eaten with such a lack of respect. The improper use that the young people made of the little things was scandalous." (Partridge 2018, 297) Since the 60s, not much has changed; in Mexico, I witnessed the haphazard use of powdered peyote, ingested with abundance of alcohol, and a session that took place in the backyard in the middle of a local Indigenous village that lasted for days, until their whole supply of peyote would be spent. It was a sad sight to witness.

[38] https://ramurrio.medium.com/the-sacred-and-the-profane-supernormal-stimuli-streaming-makes-me-wanna-smoke-crack-fdb5b630d646 (accessed on 25th Jun 2024)

[39] Maria Sabina from Mexico was made famous by the Wasson's publications. She was the curandera who served the sacred mushrooms to Gordon Wasson in a ceremony in 1955, the first known occasion that a White man experienced these psychoactive mushrooms.

Syncretic religious movements

Syncretic religious movements based in the use of ayahuasca started springing in the early 20th century in Brazil. The first was Alto Santo (which later evolved into Santo Daime) in the 1930s, then Barquinha in 1945, and finally União do Vegetal (UDV) in 1960s. These are the three main Brazilian ayahuasca religions that rework the local Amazonian traditions with influences from Christianity. From the end of the 1970s, Santo Daime and UDV spread into the main urban areas of southeastern Brazil. Pano-speaking people (Shipibo, Huni Kuin and Yawanawa) have been the main protagonists in familiarizing the West with ayahuasca shamanism.

The founding father of Alto Santo, Raimundo Irineu Serra, or Mestre Irineu, as he was known, was connected with the Huni Kuin families in Brazil, who lived around rivers Jordão, Envira and Tarauacá. He and his first followers were poor rubber tappers (Lagrou 2018, 21). He was a seven-foot tall, afro-Brazilian rubber-tapper, one of the innumerable migrants who came from northeastern Brazil. After the collapse of the rubber industry, he was one of the many of the displaced and dispossessed, exploited and downtrodden rubber-gatherers who sought to eke out a living in the unknown and dangerous frontier regions (Madera 2009, 85). Serra first took ayahuasca in the Cobija region of Bolivia with Peruvian *vegetalista* Don Crescencio Pizango (MacRae 1992) and through the visions he saw the spirit of the Forest, who later was revealed to him as the Virgin of the Conception. She appeared to him repeatedly and taught him, as a teacher plant, how to use ayahuasca to be a healer. And she also imparted a new religious doctrine based on the ritual intake of ayahuasca, which was to be called Santo Daime, literally Saint Give Me, and that it is the living Christ incarnate. From this emerged a mix of Amazonian Christian theology. Supposedly, the Forest spirit entrusted Mestre Irineu with the mission to replant the Doctrine of Jesus Christ on Earth (Ibid). By the 1930s, Mestre Irineu was leading a community of mostly poor, black, rural devotees that used Santo Daime for accessing divine guidance. During the 1960s, it was already spreading to urban Brazilian middle classes, and

later, would spread internationally. The followers of this religion maintain that their sacrament is not a drug, but "The Blood of Christ" or "a divine being," of great power.[40]

In 1986 the spreading of ayahuasca religions among the middle classes of the large Brazilian cities outside of Amazon region and the moral panic around drug use led the Brazilian Ministry of Health to include the brew in the list of forbidden drugs. In response, UDV petitioned the Federal Narcotics Council to annul the measure. Over a period of two years the political fighting for the religious freedom in Brazil and their victories granted them the right to consume ayahuasca in religious ceremonies in Brazil.[41] The Council set up two interdisciplinary work groups who reported that ayahuasca has been used by these religious groups for decades without any social harm, and that no medical abnormalities were detected; they even recommended further clinical studies. Since then, ayahuasca use has been legitimate for religious use from the legal point of view in Brazil.

It is striking how in the Amazonian environment through visions of ayahuasca the Christian myth was re-invented and re-mixed in a profound way so that it became attractive for followers around the world. "Daimistas consider the brew a "spiritual shortcut" to God […] stripping the veil from the material world so that the spiritual realities become present" (Madera 2009, 91). In the Daime doctrine, the promise of Jesus' return, among the Christians known as Christ's Second Coming, is re-interpreted in such a way that ayahuasca (Santo Dai-me) is the second coming where Christ's spirit is made material in the brew. "It is that Child that goes right there into your heart, with love and at the same time with great discipline, the discipline of a father or a mother who gives a special attention to the child and know what needs to be corrected" (Ibid). A more open view of Catholicism towards shamanism seems to favor a rediscovery of its own mystical and healing dimensions, those of the Jesus prophet-healer (Dubbini, Mabit, and Politi 2020, 56)[42].

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[40] https://chacruna.net/the-religious-uses-of-licit-and-illicit-psychoactive-substances-in-a-branch-of-the-santo-daime-religion/ (accessed on 25th Jun 2024)

[41] See more info on that here: https://www.bialabate.net (accessed on 25th Jun 2024)

[42] In a way that very possibility of shamanism transforming the conservative understanding of Christianity is the source of fear for them and that is why they are trying to eradicate it and deem it diabolical...because it brings self-knowledge.

This example shows that syncretic Brazilian ayahuasca religions originated as charismatic cults and incorporated elements from other spiritual traditions. “Brazil is recognized as a fertile environment for the development of nonorthodox religious movements that combine Catholic, African, and esoteric traditions”. (Langdon and Rose 2014, 83) Because of that, ritual practices and cosmological visions of these groups differ significantly from those of Indigenous cultures, featuring practices that are closer to post-enlightenment religiosity than to animistic shamanism. These practices are also directed primarily to restoration of a holistic self and personal transformation of an individual and not focusing as much on the collective group. Typically, they also lack reference to sorcery, or dark shamanism (Ibid, 94). Present is also higher level of ritualization, with added incense and special dresses. Syncretism also occurred in the musical dimension; the chants can be of Lakota, or other Indigenous groups or nations, or Daimista hymns (Ibid, 95). The example of ayahuasca religions show that traditions are emerging, and that cultures are in constant flow, as opposed to them being static. And as authors argue, “although Western New Agers appropriate shamanic practices, indigenous peoples prove to be equally capable of appropriating elements from a variety of cultural traditions” (Ibid, 98).

Shamanism—religious or spiritual practice?

To understand what shamanism means in the postmodern world, and its neoshamanic derivatives, we must look into what the shaman category even means and how it was constructed in the early days of anthropology. In the vision of 19th century evolutionism, the world’s societies were ordered in linear sequence, from savage to barbarian to civilized, with various complications (Clifford 1989). Shamanism as a stage in an evolution of religion is obviously problematic. Such definition of shamanism can be found as early as 1870 by Sir John Lubbock, who specified shamanism as the fourth stage of the evolution of religion. At this stage, he maintained, “the superior deities are far more powerful than man, and of a different nature. Their place of abode also is far away, and

accessible only to Shamans." (Sir John Lubbock 1870 quoted in Hultkrantz 1993, 5). The connection of shamanism with religion continues until 2000s; Shepard defines shamans in lowland south America as "dedicated and indeed pious practitioners of native religion who perform important social, spiritual, and medical functions and are often held in high esteem by their fellows" (Shepard in Walter and Fridman 2004, 384). In his 1994 seminal article, Gow referred to the spread of "ayahuasca shamanism," which he defined, very restrictively, as "the use by a trained shaman of the hallucinogen ayahuasca to diagnose and then cure illness" (Suárez-Álvarez 2023, 336). This definition is too narrow as it states diagnosis and healing of illness as the only functions of a shaman and disregards the darker aspects of shamanism, such as sorcery (Whitehead 2002), and social functions of ayahuasca shamanism. Nowadays, "in many cases shamanism is best understood as an emergent dialogical practice, rather than as a philosophy, logic, or spiritual consciousness independent of social, political, or historical contexts" (Langdon and Rose 2014, 82). And finally, I would like to quote Taussig's definition, as it includes academics in the creation of what we call shamanism (quoted in Fotiou 2016, 151):

> Shamanism is crucially a made-up, modern, Western category, an artful reification of disparate practices, snatches of folklore and overarching folklorizations[43], residues of long-established myths intermingled with the politics of academic departments, curricula, conferences, journal juries and articles, funding agencies, and so forth. [Taussig 1989:59]

Recent scholarship (Hamayon 1993) rejects how shamanism was defined with terms such as "trance" and "ecstasy" which place shamanism in the same category as spirit possession. The main protagonists of this "school" were Mircea Eliade's book titled *Shamanism: Archaic techniques of ecstasy* ([1951] 1964) and Rouget: *Music and Trance* ([1980] 1985). Hamayon argues that "using such terms as "trance" and "ecstasy" for the study of shamanism is both a historical heritage and an obstacle to the anthropological

[43] Working definition of folklorization: re-stylization of traditional expressions so that they become less complex aesthetically and semantically https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/05297-EN.pdf (accessed on 28th Feb 2025)

analysis of shamanism." "Both, [trance], and ecstasy, are in reality Western categories, variously applied for a wide range of indigenous practices" (Horden 2000, 370). Harner (1980, 63) was one of the first to start avoiding the word trance in his book *The way of the shaman* because it implies a nonconscious state.

However, if we do talk in the terms of trance and ecstasy, I find the approach by Laraaji, a musician from New York[44], much more appropriate. He comments on the concept of altered states of consciousness that this idea assumes that there is such a thing as consciousness which is somehow unaltered or neutral. For Laraaji, we are always in a trance, and the nature of that trance "determines how we experience the universe" (Pothast 2021, 37). This position singlehandedly dethrones the rational mind from a privileged position.

Historically, there were three main viewpoints on shamanism (Hamayon 1993, 19): 1) the shaman is a "quack" who takes advantage of peoples' credulousness, 2) the shaman is the agent of an archaic religious form to be found among primitive societies almost everywhere in the world, and 3) the shaman is a sort of a madman who, by keeping his own illness under control, is able to help other madmen. Although these views were supposed to be held by researchers, doctors, and learned people in general, at the beginning of 20th century, the psychological interpretations (denouncements of shamans as mentally ill) spread throughout most of the 20th century. For example, Weston La Barre in his essay *Hallucinogens and the Shamanic Origins of Religion* (1972, 265) argues[45] that shamanism is akin to a crisis cult, a first stage of religion, and that the cult leaders (the visionary shaman by association) is a person akin to a paranoid schizophrenic: "Like the paranoid schizophrenic, the vatic personality pretends to be talking about the grandiose outside cosmic world, but he is really talking grandiosely in symbolic ways only about his narcissistic self and his inner world" (Ibid). His comparing of the shamanic, animistic society with a cult mob and connecting it with True Believers or Fundamentalists is just completely misguided from today's point of view. That is, if it is applied to shamanism(s). Weston La Barre's

[44] Laraaji, born Edward Larry Gordon in 1943, studied piano, music theory, and composition at Howard University in Washington, DC, before he began studying meditation and mysticism. One day, Brian Eno dropped a note in the busker's zither case, initiating their now famous collaboration.

[45] The inclusion of his essay in the book *Flesh of the Gods* (Furst 1972), which was a compilation of essays on the use of medicinal plants, is quite strange.

thinking was inspired by his research of the churches in the Deep South of the US, which in fact may very well be an accurate description of the charismatic churches and their leaders.[46] His view relies also on his research of the peyote cult, or Native American Church, which is already a syncretic phenomenon, that combines native American and Christian elements,[47] and so lacks a reference to a pre-syncretic tribal/primitive/native practice.

Nowadays, conflating shamanism with Christian fundamentalism seems to be at odds with any ethnography. We could determine La Barre's views to be heavily inspired by Freudian psychoanalysis, and we could nod to his point of view that a lifetime of self-ethnography is essential for the ethnographic enterprise, but when he says "the psychiatrist must know himself, through a rigorous and often painful didactic analysis, for he will not be able to see in his patients what he cannot afford to see in terms of his own defenses" (taken from Stein 1983, 253), I wonder if he sees his own arrogance, or ethnocentric attitude and self-centeredness?[48] (I will talk about facing my own arrogance during my ayahuasca sessions later, that is why I am bringing it out here.) It is not that the psychological approach cannot benefit anthropology, but in this case, it universalizes the cultures, and falls into essentialization. However, in his zeal against shamanism he demonstrates why the use of the words such as hallucinogens, psychedelics, and others, for psychoactive medicinal plants is questionable. It also explains the emergence of anthropological texts problematizing the use of these words and why replacing them with the word entheogen seemed necessary to the authors of the article titled *Entheogens* in 1979: "the crisis cult is characteristically dereistic, autistic, and dreamlike precisely because it had its origin in the dream, trance, "spirit" possession, epileptic "seizure," REM sleep, sensory deprivation, or other visionary state of the shaman-originator." (La Barre 1972, 265).

[46] Mormon Church or the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, was founded by Joseph Smith in 1830 in New York. He "received" a revelation to find a new church and published a book that he had translated from golden plates of whose origin he was told by the Mormon angel. The plates contained the full gospel delivered by the Savior to the ancient inhabitants of North America. This book is considered as the Third testament and trumps the Old and New testaments when they are in dispute. According to the church's statistics, it now has over 17 million members and over 62,000 full-time voluntary missionaries. This is just to illustrate what kind of forces are playing a role in remote places to which such missionaries go plant their church.

[47] The peyote is seen as a sacred and holy sacrament, just as ayahuasca is a sacrament for a syncretic religion of Santo Daime, originating from Brazil.

[48] One can observe either by prejudice or observation, I assume the former in La Barre's case.

Furthermore, his using of the words "supernatural" as out-of-touch-with-reality and designating the effects of medicinal plants as psychotomimetic (La Barre 1960, 45) are revealing of his views of shamanism, treating it basically as a monolith. Here we return to the claim in the beginning of this chapter that the use of the word shamanism is wrong because it conflates the great variety of phenomena as being one single phenomenon. As anthropologist Esther Jean Langdon commented on some of my observations about Weston La Barre's derivation, "that was a period of the application of psychoanalysis, and it seems as though in our effort to be a science we ignore our limitations and just move onto new mistaken interpretations."[49]

To once again demarcate where the traditional shamanic society differs from a contemporary shamanism, "At the core of the shamanic revival is the shamanic séance, with its potentially powerful, consciousness-affecting performance" (Adlam and Holyoak 2005, 525). But in the traditional shamanism, at the core is the animistic worldview. "In the Brazilian context, according to Conklin, a generic version of shamanism is developing which diverges from actual Native practices in two major ways: it is divorced from images of conflict, killing and death; and secondly, medicinal plant use is represented as the core of shamanic practice and expertise." (Ibid, 530)

Ritual

> "…I take ritual to be the basic social act."
>
> R. Rappaport

Ritual is a class of actions usually connected with the categories of religion and spiritual practices that play a very important role for the interpretation of human behavior and for music in particular. It is of paramount importance for nascent sciences such as

[49] Esther Jean Langdon, personal communication.

anthropology, sociology, psychology, and the history of religions. “Once smiled at, despised, and regarded as forms of pathological behavior or pre-modern mentalities, rituals are nowadays generally held to be *the* master-keys to understanding cultures, including our own” (Kreinath, Snoek, and Stausberg 2006, xv). In popular notions, ritual is still “[s]omething that we recognize when we see certain kinds of activities and beliefs that strike us as nonrational” (Sax et al. 2010, 4). This might indicate that our society does not understand ritual, and for many the term is still pejorative (Bellah 2003). For those performing the ritual, whether it is for healing, or a rain dance, or an initiation, these “rituals” do indeed fit into a cosmology where they do make sense. The purpose of the use of ritual behavior is reported to be one of empowerment of its practitioners, whatever the context. However, Sax argues that the popular understanding of ritual, at least from a rational (post-enlightenment) point of view, is that it is ineffective. He also argues that even though we do not agree on a definition of ritual, “we know it when we see it” because “it is symbolic activity as opposed to the instrumental behavior of everyday life” (Sax et al. 2010).

However, understanding rituals as “expressing” inner states of feeling and emotion, or “symbolizing” theological ideas, is to neglect the question of how they might be instrumental, how they might *do* things. Despite the popularity of the assumption about ritual’s ineffectiveness, some authors argue that this is not the case. “We know that shamanic rituals heal, legal rituals ratify, political rituals unify, and religious rituals sanctify” (Ibid, 7). Sax proposes a family-resemblance type of definition: a list of characteristics that we ascribe to things we call “ritual.” And if an activity shares sufficient similar features, we can say it belongs to the family, or class of activities, that we label “ritual.” List of such features are: “patterned and ordered sequences of words and acts, whose content and arrangement are characterized in varying degree by formality (conventionality), stereotipy (rigidity), condensation (fusion), and redundancy (repetition)” (Tambiah 1979, 119). Focusing on these features brings us to see the ritual as a form of practice and not so much a representation of belief. And when we think about ritual in terms of practice, we can concentrate on embodied cognition rather than on symbolic expression. As Catherine Bell argues, the act of kneeling does not so much communicate a message about subordination

as it generates a body identified with subordination. In the circumstance of praying, the very act operates and strengthens the message we are trying to convey or receive. The point is, the very doing of the acts restructures bodies (1992, 100). And if we distance ourselves from the mind-body dichotomy, the act restructures the person, the mind as well as the body.

Asad points out that in the past the ritual was not something ineffective, superficial, and/or purely formal, but that for the medieval Christians it was a disciplinary practice that aided the cultivation of Christian virtues (Asad 1993). This is in line with the thinking of Jung about Christianity. According to him, what might be lost when the religion became a state religion, is that we: "no longer live attached with all our being to the symbols and to the Christian 'myths', having reduced them to words and gestures deprived of life, fossilized, externalized and therefore devoid of value for the deep life of the psyche." [50] My understanding of what constitutes a ritual is closer to Asad's version of ritual as a practice: a morning routine of tasks for a good start of a day. For example, a morning yoga practice with some incense, and music, followed by a meditation and tea, constitutes a ritual.

"Therapeutic procedure refers to who does what to whom with respect to medicines administered, physical techniques or operations carried out, prayers recited, symbols manipulated, and altered states of consciousness induced" (Csordas 2023, 448). But we should not see an Indigenous ritual as only a therapeutic procedure, as an isolated activity: traditional healing, culture, spirituality, and the arts are often so interconnected that attempts to speak of any one in isolation of the others [make] no sense at all (Archibald and Dewar 2010).

"[R]itualization is first and foremost a strategy for the construction of certain types of power relationships effective within particular social organizations" (Bell 1992, 197). The ritual is needed in the case of taking medicines to make sense to the newcomer of the experience. One understanding of ritualization is that it is an adverse phenomenon in the

[50] Look in Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries* (1957, 29): "Jung, for instance, believes that the crisis of the modern world is in great part due to the fact that the Christian symbols and 'myths' are no longer lived by the whole human being; that they have been reduced to words and gestures deprived of life, fossilized, externalized and therefore no longer of any use for the deeper life of the psyche."

sense that merely following the ritual is perceived as giving an aura of spirituality, legitimacy over the lesser ritualistic form in which there is no strict and prescribed ways. One can differentiate oneself as a ritual specialist from a beginner by showing mastery of the ritual and of the procedures with intention of gaining authority or power over the clients, patients, newcomers, or habitual users. Power here is understood in the form of influence, as "inherent, nonspecific, and controlling" symbolic power (Ibid). The big question for the newcomer is to discern who is merely knowledgeable of the rules and who possesses wisdom to lead the ceremony in such a way that the participants can say to have received healing from the whole experience. This calls for a distinction between an adept and a shaman. Being adept in techniques and procedures does not make one a shaman, or a person of wisdom, as many would want us to believe.

What is healing

Before defining what is healing in ritual, it would be good to bring to attention the notions on what constitutes wellbeing from an Indigenous perspective. Contrasting a strictly biomedical definition of health as the "absence of illness," the Indigenous definition of what is health, or healthy life, or good life, is summed up by many anthropologists in articles collected in the book *The Arts of Indigenous Health and Well-Being* as "an all-encompassing term rooted in wider understandings of ecological, spiritual, ethical, social and political wellness rather than being limited to physiological health" (Van Styvendale et al. 2021, 2).

Gabor Maté makes a clear distinction between healing and curing: to be cured means "the absence of disease," whereas healing means "natural movement toward wholeness," or to be "engaged in recovering our lost parts of self, not trying to change or 'better' them." "Nor is healing synonymous with self-improvement. Closer to the mark would be to say it is *self-retrieval*." As Maté further posits, "we do not heal 'in order to' be cured, even if that understandable wish is present. Healing is best seen as an end in itself" (Maté 2022, 324, 325).

Thomas Csordas, anthropologist, researched how religious healing works, first studying the contemporary North American Catholic Charismatic Renewal and later Indigenous healing practices. Through his analysis of so-called religious healing, he would support the idea that "such forms of healing are analogous to those of formal medicine and psychotherapy, but that there is also something explicitly religious about religious healing, something that has a profound capacity to effect the transformation of culture and self" (2002, 2). Unlike previous research, he would not focus on what healers said and did, he would rather try to understand the experience of the patients. This also moves the focus away from psychological mechanisms by which healing should have its effect, such as catharsis, suggestion, placebo effect, trance, or hypnosis. He would rather work on the notion of embodiment in order to understand the nature of human experience. Csordas also sees that "the object of healing is not elimination of a thing (an illness, a problem, a symptom, a disorder) but transformation of a person[51], a self that is a bodily being" (Ibid, 3). These two examples provide a bridge between modern medicine based on Western science and traditional Indigenous knowledge systems and perspectives.

But we have to limit a bit what we call healing, define it a bit narrower. An example from Csordas' book, where he quotes a report from his research with Navajo healers, makes a good case for what a healing effect from a ritual involving an entheogen could be. He followed an individual Navajo young man who was struggling in his life, so he and his mother asked for help from their family road man (a Navajo medicine man). This initiated a process that resulted in the full-scale all-night peyote meeting. Without going into details of what happened during the ceremony, what is important now is the young man's testimony months later:

> "He described a feeling of familiarity and self-knowledge that brought him back to the basics and let him know who he is. He strongly got the message that "it's all up to you" and was able to engage in significant self-evaluation. In addition, he was able to "release a lot of emotional baggage" as well as to express some feelings and issues in prayer that he knew

[51] Archibald (2012, 3), Indigenous scholar from Canada similarly claims: "traditional healing […] is aimed at restoring balance."

> his girlfriend, sitting next to him, could hear. Three months after the ceremony, he reported doing better in school, having better motivation, and having an improved family situation." (Csordas 2002, 160)

There are so many elements here that constitute a healing. First of all, it is something that has a lasting effect, and is not only an immediate release from pain or anxiety with a subsequent return to the old state of things. It is his "raising of awareness," recognition, insights that also stayed well beyond when the effects of peyote subsided. The special state reached during the ceremony helped him express feelings, and allowed him to say prayerlike pleas with a strong sense of these being heard, not just by his girlfriend sitting next to him, but some higher force that will be able to help him. Putting trust and faith into his pleas. All of this resulted him being able to see the difference before and after that helped his life change for the better. It was a powerful formative experience that changed the course of his life. If we are a bit dramatic, it saved him from falling off the cliff as he was heading in that direction without him being able to stop himself on his own (Ibid).

Csordas describes the young Navajo man's view of peyote as "less a spirit or identity than a means of protection and a medicine that allows clarity of thought, expression, and the ability to release emotions." (Ibid) We can see that there is no talk about trances or ecstatic experiences, but rather a clarity of thought that enables one to go beyond emotional blockages (obstacles). I would call the medicine the main tool within the ceremonies that enables one to reach what Mónica Robles calls "ritualization state" in her recent study of yagé (ayahuasca) use in Colombia (2015, 170) in which she states that Indigenous elders insist that to understand its spiritual dimension not just from a rational perspective one needs to enter this state, characterized by "introspection" (Ibid, 172). The central event of the ceremony is the healing or cleansing in which the *taita* (shaman) as a protagonist assumes the role of a mediator in the reestablishment of the physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional balance of the attendees (Ibid). In this way, we could understand that while undergoing an ayahuasca session, a participant, through experiencing its force, visions, is transformed, or restructured on a deeper level than merely on a level of belief. It is an embodied transformation.

What does the ritual of ayahuasca that I participated in with the Huni Kuin do? Or what is happening with the participants during the ceremony, how do they experience it? The participants are "practicing relationality" (Wilson 2008) and enlivening intergenerational knowledge transfer. They strengthen the various relationships they might have with the ancestral, contemporary, and other-than-human beings. During one session we were all repeating the chants, lyrics, and music, after the chanter Bané, so that we together would be able to overcome the difficult and strong ayahuasca effect that we all felt. This was embodied interconnectedness of individuals, forging deeper relationships. Such practice contains Indigenous knowledge and has the potential to strengthen the wellbeing of individuals involved.

At this point my personal experience of recovering from a chronic disease guides my way of attending the ceremonies during my fieldwork sessions. This leads me to the critical question of how do I approach ritual experiences when participating in various practices ranging from traditional Indigenous to New Age? Sometimes I would rather laugh at what the prescribed ritual at some New Age group is going to be. But, to find meaning in the process, I always try to put my intention into the acts prescribed by the ceremony leader; I try to be honest with the prayers that I am saying when following the procedures of the ritual. As a participant I give consent, which is not artificially manufactured—for many participants, the consent is based on various needs, as is, for example, the need for healing. Giving consent to the ritual leader, and the procedures always reminds me that I am still on the path of recovery, discovery of new life. It reminds me not to forget to be humble. That someone in the group might be at his or her crucial point of letting go of their traumas, accepting their fate, etc. By honestly attending the ceremony (as Jung would say, with my whole being), everything gets another meaning, and sometimes it leads me to deep experiences. By following procedures honestly, you convey power to the master of the ceremony; you are feeding back to him, as well as forming a feedback circle with the other participants. On some level, this connects the whole group.

What does it mean when people say after undergoing ayahuasca session that they found connection with the Earth (*Pachamama*), with the Universe. It may well mean the

discovery of humility, of being less ego centered, finding thankfulness. Because it is easy to talk about this. But how do you make one feel humility, or feel safe, if one has never felt it before, if one does not know what these words mean? An experience with an entheogen might sometimes be the only way for someone to experience it on an embodied level, not just entertaining thoughts of it.

Healing properties of music – what is healing in music?

I will now attempt to establish a connection between the healing effect and activities that involve music. The first thing we need to ask is whether music is indeed healing. There are countless accounts on how music is therapeutic, transformative, and healing. However, as Diamond notes, sound and music can also be used to cause discomfort as in the case of residential schools for Indigenous people in Canada (Diamond 2021). Most Euro-Americans since around 19th century think of music as an ennobling aesthetic experience, or as a pleasurable diversion, or both (Titon 2018, 258) and not directly connected with a healing effect. As Roseman writes, "An illness, with its seemingly blatant symptoms and sensations, seems at first glance so empirically *real* that it appears to be on a plane above or prior to illusive cultural relevancies" (1991, 12). The next big question is how music is beneficial to wellbeing and effecting healing.

Virtually all people have a personal experience where music has changed them in some meaningful way. Throughout history there have been a great number of theories that articulate how music, sound, and related sociocultural factors and practices, as well as physical and metaphysical forces, are believed to facilitate health and healing. A human being is composed of thoughts, bodily attributes, emotions, relationships, beliefs, and spiritual capacities, that form the complex of the self. "Music can effect changes in all these components that constitute the self, and this ability gives it a distinctive status as one of the most important and promising preventive practices and non-pharmacological interventions; and second, music has a broad spectrum of effects that range from the palliative and

therapeutic to the curing, healing, and transformational" (Koen 2008, 12). With the concept of deep listening, "a kind of secular trancing, divorced from religious practice but often carrying religious sentiments such as feelings of transcendence or a feeling of communion with a power beyond oneself" (Becker 2004, 2) we could include all kinds of listening experiences as having a potential for healing effect because the pleasure we may experience when entranced by music is transcendental (evoking numinous experience, out-of-body sensations).

If we move from these very broad statements to the realm of biomedicine, it is a system in which disease is quite a specific entity that can be treated. On the other hand a system such as that of Huni Kuin is nonspecific so it also heals through nonspecific mechanisms such as placebo or catharsis (Csordas 2002, 194). The spread of biomedicine has been questioned by Illich already in the 70s, criticizing that it reduced the patient to an object—a body being repaired, no longer a subject being helped to heal (Illich 1976, 235). One of the paradigms of the 20th century was that mental disease is a disease of the brain. Biomedical treatments of mental illness by overmedicalization with antidepressants are now being questioned; Kirsch (2010), is convinced that the antidepressants are ineffective because "the idea of depression as a chemical imbalance in the brain is a myth."(Ibid, 4) In general, the perception of biomedicine among many individuals is that it often tries to cover up the symptoms with medication. What really triggers the pathological processes, or what tips the ability of a healthy individual to cope with cancerous cells into dis-ability. Apart from the cases where some environmental factors, such as exposure to large doses of radiation, or to cancerous chemical agents are obviously present, many cases do not have a root cause in the brain disease, or malfunction in some organ, and addressing the disease would have to involve the wider processes in someone's life. Sustained adherence to the materialist conception of illness avoids dealing with all the problems that might have led a certain individual into an impasse that finally results in the somatic, physical disease. The biomedical approach also rarely provides adequate attention to reinforcing patients' belief in their capacities to actively participate in their own wellness in conjunction with

prescribed medications. Following this paradigm also negates the possible positive outcome of a more holistic treatment.

Today's society can, for many people, be a harsh place to live. The strong longing for spiritually meaningful experiences is "a reaction to a strong technologically mediatized, commercialized and socially constructed reality" (Knudsen and Waade 2010, 1). Music can very often serve as a respite; musical immersion facilitates special consciousness, almost a meditative state, even a sense of communion with a power beyond oneself (Becker 2004, 2). But does this kind of retreat into music help the listener to better cope with the world in the long run? DeNora in her book *Music Asylums* (2014) makes a distinction between a passive "retreating" into the world of music and active "refurnishing" of it. The former is merely getting away from unpleasant situations by blocking the unwanted environment, which can lead to excessive daydreaming, and does not involve making any changes in the world. She is calling it a "removal." In the latter case, the listener, or music-making person, is engaging in a form of asylum-seeking that involves making changes in the outer environment and is making steps toward the creation of a place that is more conducive to wellbeing and so offers possibilities for transformation. Concept of asylums "offers a platform for developing an ecological theory of wellbeing and thus a theoretical basis for understanding how music helps to promote wellbeing" (DeNora 2014, 33).

This distinction between retreat and refurnishing can also help in understanding what may be wrong with the New Age. I call the problematic part of New Age 'newagism': adopting some spiritual-sounding concepts and engaging in ritualized activities. As Eckhart Tolle writes, "Spiritual ideas and beliefs may at best be helpful pointers, but in themselves they rarely have the power to dislodge the more firmly established core concepts of who you think you are, which are part of the conditioning of the human mind" (Tolle 2005, 186). I would go further and say that lacking any grounded, steady work on raising one's awareness, focusing on ideas, beliefs and ritualized activities, drowning oneself in the constant shallow work, is running away from oneself, and results in retreating oneself from the outer world. Instead of it being healing, it is escaping. Without a steady work and making yourself aware of the roots of the problems, which are in the conditioning of the human

mind, and undoing some of the patterns that we unconsciously follow we are unable to bring transformation to ourselves, or to refurnish the outside world.

In the "classical" treatment of Indigenous healing methods involving hallucinogenic plants, there is always talk about shamanic (*médico*) healing, in which singing is a mode of communicating with the spirits (Brabec 2012). The invocations, or "curing chants," are central to the healing ritual, and they are not intended to evoke pleasure response. Seeger (1987, 33–35) compares them to a hypodermic injection (see also Brabec 2015). The invocations are supposed to be more important than herbal medicines for the Suya. Called *sangére,* they were performed for various reasons, like a sick relative, a woman in childbirth, a bleeding wound, a toothache, to enable an infant to begin eating manioc, and so on. They were also sung for non-medical reasons, such as to keep a sudden storm or a disdainful lover away. The invocations were often performed by family members, but some people had specialized knowledge of them, and if the singer was successful, he/she was given a present by the people who asked him or her to sing it. Their efficacy was seen as the result of the insertion of an attribute, or powerful essence, of an animal, plant, or other natural object into the body of a human by blowing and singing it into the patient's body.

On the other hand, Dobkin de Rios and Katz (1975; Dobkin De Rios 2006) did report that "whistling incantations served as a vital link in bridging separate realities induced by the ingestion of a plant hallucinogen," and not for healing per se. There is a concern for the individual's ability to handle relatively unknown realms of the psyche that become accessible by ingestion of plant hallucinogens. Rapid access to the unconscious may generate a variety of effects on human central nervous system. These range from positive, pleasurable experiences to the very negative ones, among them anxiety, profound fear, depression, fear of loss of self-control. They argue that "music operates as a jungle gym in consciousness during the drug state, providing a series of pathways and banisters through which the drug user negotiates his way" (Dobkin De Rios and Katz 1975, 68). Townsley also reports that for Yaminahua shamans the songs are paths (*wai*) (1993). This seems to be the most appropriate function of the music during Indigenous ayahuasca sessions also with the Huni Kuin. It is a lifeline that offers possible paths that the participants use to find a way

back to the 'ordinary realm of consciousness' (Ibid). As we will see later, Huni Kuin also operate with the concepts of everyday reality and hidden reality.[52] It is in this sense, as a form of protection, that the Huni Kuin perceive their ayahuasca chants as healing.

There is a difference between the music used in ayahuasca ritual sessions of the Huni Kuin in Peru and in Brazil. They themselves call the a cappella (only) chants (*puro canto*) as their traditional way and they call the guitar songs the inventions (*inventadas*), or new tradition. There is also a difference in ritual form in how these ayahuasca sessions are directed. However, it seems that the role of the music stays the same. Both the chants and guitar songs are a powerful means to steer individuals under the influence of the hallucinogenic brew to return safely into the ordinary reality. The function of the music stays the same, not constituting a truly musical change according to Blacking (1977), making the whole experience of the ritual transformational and healing.

Singing is a performance within which lies the potential for healing, not in the repertory itself. It is the special performance that makes us sense that there is something special in that voice, the melody, the rhythm, in the music as a whole. It is in the very rendering that lies the affective power. Music making is a refurnishing activity (DeNora), and we are able to feel this energy that was invested in the music making, the human agency. As Blacking notes "No music has power in itself. […] There can surely be no direct connection between the sounds of music and people's emotional responses to them" (Blacking 1985, 65). By this he means that there is no certain tempi or rhythm patterns that would induce trance-like states or altered states of consciousness. There are no inevitable physiological responses to music. It is difficult to talk beyond that. Even Dobkin de Rios, in her paper almost thirty years later, does not come to more specific conclusions about the role of music in the rituals with hallucinogenic plants (Dobkin De Rios 2006). As Robles points out, "Music has the power of healing because it resonates in the other and has the power of cohesion because it allows us to resonate with others. " (2015, 176). This reminds me of the story

[52] This split is similar to Castaneda's distinction between ordinary and nonordinary realities, e.g., in his book *A separate reality* (1972, 6).

again in the Flashback earlier, when Panoka urged us to breathe, her voice resonated within me, it was a communication on a bodily level.

During my whole fieldwork, the Huni Kuin elders would never bring up the word music. The concept that is used by the Huni Kuin is chants (puro canto), might not necessarily be understood as 'music' by those who perform it, but as a discursive, communicative and interactive form (Brabec de Mori, Lewy, and García 2015, 18)

Neoshamanism

Contrary to the early anthropological analyses which predicted that shamanism as an archaic practice was doomed to disappear in the face of modernity, shamans from small-scale societies today circulate in large cities throughout the world. More commonly, individuals from non-shamanic, or modern, societies are attempting to practice some form of shamanism modelled on those found in small-scale societies. During the last decades, various forms of contemporary shamanisms have become global phenomena. Ayahuasca consumption became popular in Western society and connected with the circles usually bundled under the names such as New Age.[53] New Age syncretisms denote very diverse groups, at best loosely connected, but with very different ways, procedures and rituals[54].

If anthropologists are distrustful of categories such as shamanism, because it gives the impression of a single unified system, we should also be distrustful of the category New Age. Because it clearly is an umbrella term for a wide variety of practices and ways of living that many times have nothing in common (Adlam and Holyoak 2005). A better term for the practices connected with ingestion of medicinal plants drawing from Indigenous spiritualities is neo-shamanism (or urban shamanism) which is still an umbrella term. If the

[53] Still in 2023 (conservative) anthropologists tend to throw everything under New Age and deem it escapist: https://www.publico.pt/2023/12/17/sociedade/entrevista/ayahuasca-pessoas-procuram-formas-estar-vida-2072659 (accessed on 25th Jun 2024)

[54] Early New Age was dominated by an interest in Asian religions—favorite traditions are Tibetan Buddhism, Taoism, Ancient Druidism, yoga practices, and so on, many adherents later changed their focus to Native American spirituality.

term shamanism was problematic, there is even less consensus as to what neo-shamanism means. Johansen (2000) discusses neo-shamanism as an "updated version of the traditional practices of indigenous peoples, specifically the Tuvas" (Adlam and Holyoak 2005, 530). By neo-shamanism I refer to a movement which emerged in the counterculture of North America and Europe during the 1960s. While tracing its beliefs and practices to indigenous spirituality, neo-shamanism foregrounds altered states of consciousness and is linked to ayahuasca shamanic tourism (Gearin and Sáez 2021, 138). Today the use of ayahuasca has expanded to a global level and has had an enormous impact on religious and neoshamanic currents in the West (Fotiou 2016).

As Adlam and Holyoak write, there are three main strains of neoshamanism: contemporary version of shamanism in traditional societies, practice by non-natives (Westerners) modelled on those found in traditional societies, and New Age and neo-pagan activities that are shamanic in a broader sense of the term (2005, 530). However, urban shamanism or neoshamanism may be defined as a market of alternative and mystical practices which share a closer relation to the global phenomenon of post-enlightenment religiosity than to the traditional indigenous shamanism. These practices are often directed to the participants' individual interests and goals and to the restoration of personal equilibrium or balance (Langdon and Rose 2014). Neoshamanism is expanded by its association with paganism to include environmentalism and is working towards changing the world view of Westerners. Many Westerners take the path of ayahuasca as a personal quest for learning new ways of dealing with challenges, healing of personal traumas, or what is vaguely termed "spiritual growth."

Neoshamanism in Western culture started in the 1960s with the cultural revolution that coincided with the boom of New Age, new religions, civil rights movements, hippie culture and the psychedelic boom (with LSD) that was its driving force. The rise of experimentation with hallucinogenic drugs also inspired interest in Indigenous cultures and their traditional ways of using their sacred substances that also started revolutions in the heads of the youth. By resisting the suppression of the use psychoactive substances, these youth were open to achieving spiritual experiences. This suppression in contemporary

Western societies could be seen as aberrant if we look at the history of close relationship between human culture and psychoactive substances in many societies around the world as a way for mind expansion (Partridge 2018, 292). This has led to "'psychedelic renaissance', dominated by the themes of healing, self-transformation, and the sacramental use of hallucinogens" (Fotiou 2016, 153) as well as to recovering of the shamanic perspectives.

Since the 1960s, the experiments of certain individuals (writers, artists) with medicinal plants were described in the literature: Huxley was the one who popularized the term psychedelic[55] in his book *The Doors of Perception* (1954/56), while he described his experience under the influence of mescaline, the psychoactive substance of peyote cactus. *Yage Letters* by William S. Burroughs came out in the 1963. Carlos Castañeda's best-selling books (starting in 1968) describing his training to be a shaman under the guidance of a Yaqui Native American were essential reading for all the wannabe shamans in the western hemisphere. [56] The first book that really started off the practicing of neoshamanic techniques as "a culturally decontextualized form of do-it-yourself spirituality," and "presented as an utterly individualistic quest" (Kraft, Fonneland, and Lewis 2015, 25) was Harner's *The Way of the Shaman* (1980). These and many other books that followed were instrumental in shaping Western people's understanding of what shamanism is, or what the spiritual legacy of Indigenous people is. For Westerners who dabble in, or seriously practice it, neoshamanism is not an exotic practice found among various Indigenous people, rather those are practices that can be sampled by anybody who is eager to explore the world of "energies" (Kraft, Fonneland, and Lewis 2015, 13). In other words, it is basically a remix of various Indigenous practices.

By the 1980s Indigenous (as well as non-Indigenous) scholars were calling out the White (plastic) shamanism as fake, appropriative, and highly problematic (Hobson 2002; Aldred 2000; Rose 1992). Its various manifestations and adherents have been criticized as self-serving, narcissistic, exploitative, appropriating, commodifying native cultures, the "everything-goes" approach, and so on. One of the main accusations was commercial

[55] It was coined in the letter to him by psychiatrist Humphry Osmond (Partridge 2018, 4).
[56] As many pointed out, the veracity of his ethnographic material is highly questionable and that "the way of knowledge" is at best syncretism.

exploitation of Native American spiritual traditions by Westerners, who by default always claim mentorship by "authentic" Native American medicine people, a revelation, or a direct instruction from the entity accessed through ingestion of medicinal (power) plants. It is a pattern that has been criticized as cultural colonialism and cultural imperialism. But these accusations are pointing at general outcomes of a capitalist modern society. I agree there are many things to be criticized; however, many of the New Agers are genuine, honest seekers of healing, whether it be, from a mental disease (anxiety, depression), a psychosomatic one, or a fully somatic disease. People seek help, and many do find solutions that bring about lasting positive results. Although as individual neoshamanic appropriation is a problem, a much more subtle yet pervasive issue is becoming a reality as big pharma and medical complex trying to invent therapies involving medicinal plants and rebrand them as clinical, scientifically proven therapies with no spiritual element whatsoever.

Conflating the attempts of those modern spiritual seekers who are using the plant medicines in a responsible way, and only emphasizing negative manifestations of neoshamanic use almost resembles an agenda, and it might be useful to investigate who might be driving it. On one hand there are interests of the powerful lobbies in pharma and medical establishment, who would like to prove that biomedicine is the only one with a real way (effective, safe, scientifically proven) of treating patients with ayahuasca and other medicinal plants. Its strategy is to biomedicalize these plants and wield a monopoly over distribution and treatment protocols (here we meet the same arguments of commodification,[57] appropriation, exploitation). On the other side are the big religions, in the Western world mainly the Christian church, who feel threatened by the rise of non-Christian spiritualities, deeming them diabolical (generally, all plant medicines are treated

[57] Commodification of the rituals and shamanism is a big problem but is not the first "genre" that had to deal with it, jazz, for example, had to deal with commodification and artification from its beginnings. (Keil, Feld, Commodified Grooves, 296). Most importantly, commodification of power plants such as ayahuasca is not something inherent to New Age: before the 1966, before LSD was banned, the therapists and various promotors, that got the LSD for free from SANDOZ for the purposes of research were quickly going for the business model, charging hefty prices for the LSD therapy: a single session could go even north of 500$ (online version Pollan 2019, 133)

as suspicious).[58] The more conservative circles of academia in general oppose any such New Age spiritualities on the grounds of the commodification theory.[59] Although the Indigenous communities have sometimes also adopted neoshamanic, or New Age concepts—as is the case with the Sami, whose traditional religion was completely disrupted by Nordic missionaries (J. R. Lewis 2015), these Indigenous promotors of re-invented shamanic techniques are defended by progressive thinkers from a postcolonial standpoint. Non-Indigenous New Age and neoshamanism, however, is attacked from all sides (from structural factors), from the conservative Christian society, the very liberal, scientific society, and also the media.

If we try to see the positive side of the neoshamanic movement, it could be the link between the modern White-mind, and Indigenous wisdom. Healing with medicinal plants and taking into account both the Indigenous wisdom and biomedical knowledge, may be the most effective path. Also, the Indigenous people might take a more rational grounding within the animistic cosmology: one of the objectively negative consequences of being deeply immersed in the animistic worldview is believing that the cause of illness is a witchcraft from a local *curandero*, called *brujo*. Sometimes the villagers kill such individuals who are believed to be powerful *brujos* claiming they have caused the death of their relative. Neo-shamanism could be seen as a creative hybridization that, together with the Indigenist world view, might also offer a solution to the crises we witness today in the world, including the climate crisis. A critical assessment of the New Age movements without the negative bias, or disdain for its appropriations, is necessary. As J.R. Lewis notes, the only legitimated response to treating the New Age interest in Native spirituality as some kind of a disease, is to be critical and dismissive of this phenomenon (2015, 132).

The Western fascination with shamanism, psychoactive plants and substances, and the changes in consciousness they produce, is deeply rooted in Western intellectual tradition. In eastern philosophy (Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism), there is no change in the

[58] Also the Hindu gurus would condemn and ridicule the spiritual paths using medicinal plants, one example is this manipulative video juxtaposing footage of hard drugs abuse with Sadhguru's opinion on (neo)shamanism https://youtu.be/0-p_kcKn4uw?si=zVG0q7DwazCYQX1q (accessed on 25th Jun 2024)

[59] It was art and its massive commodification under capitalism that prompted the Marxist theory of commodification in the mid-1970s (Beech 2019, 7).

world until we change ourselves. And this quest for personal transformation, according to many, seems to be a decades-long journey, through the apprentice master relationship. A great example of a personal transformation through learning the age old tradition of the Asian arts is given by Marcotty in his book *The Way Music* (1980), in which he deals with the North-Indian stick-zither, the *veena,* and its music. Within the Asian arts he includes Japanese archery, flower arranging, and tea ceremony, the Chinese arts of calligraphy and Tai Chi, the Indian Yoga schools, and finally, veena playing. He argues that all these Asian arts do not represent arts in the occidental sense of the word. They are much rather a matter of systems of teaching and learning which vary from Western types of instruction in the following manner: what matters is much more the intention to change the personality of the student; Asian art is not primarily performed with the intent to entertain or to edify an audience; trustees of the oral tradition are invariably the master personalities who will embody this qualitatively improved mode of existence and are hence called upon to meet a moral challenge (Ibid, 20-23). My experience when in China, observing the relationships among qin zither master and her students, confirms this point.

When someone takes a psychedelic and becomes conscious of one's own toxic behavior patterns this does not constitute a transformation yet, as is naively believed by many Westerners. From my years long experience of participating in a group therapy, the psychedelic may show you where there is work to be done, but the actual work is still there. One has not changed, or healed, by merely ingesting psychedelic plants and seeing one's own patterns. It is a long journey achieving the losing of self-importance, and for this journey apprenticeship is necessary: learning through practical ways the ethical concepts and tools and how to use them to catch oneself when engaging in various acts of indulging that keep us rooted in our blockages.

Indigenous Amazonian spirituality with its direct experience of the intermediary world could initially be foreign to Westerners. When Westerners get in contact with the invisible world through the intake of an entheogen, the question arises of how to integrate that experience (the appearance of a transcendental reality) into psychic, symbolic and everyday life. "They may not do anything and classify it quickly as the power of suggestion,

because they don't know how to place that experience in their usual worldview; they can have a symbolic or religious reference that allows them to process the experience; or they will have to change their thinking paradigm and to thoroughly revise their way of understanding the world and life" (Dubbini, Mabit, and Politi 2020, 48).

Three possible uses (models), or three idealized perspectives: traditional, neoshamanic, and therapeutic

It seems that there are three main perspectives on the use of ayahuasca and medicinal plants in general: traditionalist, neoshamanic (syncretic), and therapeutic. Traditionalists believe that traditional way is the right way. Only Indigenous shamans are the "real" ones, and not even all of them, in fact very few of them. And the use should strictly follow the ways as it was done in the past. On the other pole is the medical-pharmaceutical complex trying to invent therapies involving medicinal plants and rebrand them as clinical, scientifically proven therapies (and not spirituality). When Brabec (2021) talks about ontological incommensurability between the animistic traditional way and therapeutic way, I agree with him; however, I see the neoshamanic way as lying somewhere in the middle. I would argue that a good mix of both "opposing" approaches, therapeutic and traditional, might be the key to a responsible modern usage by anyone (I would warn against conflating or interchanging the therapeutic with scientific at this point). Whereas each of the three idealized perspectives wants to claim the primacy, on its own, each one of them might be limited. The task, then, is to "forge solidarities where currently there exists only rivalry and recrimination" (Beech 2019, 5). However, in order to do so, we have to look at the forces trying to separate these perspectives.

Contemporary spiritualities may be the coveted "middle way," but only if a given approach takes seriously the world-life praxis of an Indigenist world view which includes the whole lifestyle practice, not just ceremonies as trips within the "normal," or shall we say modern (consumerist, extractivist) worldview. It could also imply that such Indigenist

spirituality is the right answer for sustainable future of humanity. The modern human, oriented to ever-increasing growth and GDP, indiscriminate development, wields a (self-)destructive state of mind which Forbes, Indigenous scholar, sees as an actual disease - *wétiko* (Forbes 2008, original 1978) from which one needs to be healed, not cured.

From my autoethnographical experience, where do I and my path towards healing fit in? Does my path fit into any of the categories of neo-shamanism, New Age, therapy? How is this related to ethnomusicology? When researching what is healing in music, reflecting on my own 15-year path towards healing, I have my own understanding about it, and it is transcultural, and my path towards healing bridged all of the aforementioned categories. As Csordas describes, each Navajo is faced with three healing forms and the tensions among them, which are connected with ways of being-in-the-world (2002, 154). I am not like a young student at the university, learning all the categories and then looking at the world through the lens of those categories. I am coming from the world, and then looking at the categories that have been currently established. And each individual on his/her path towards healing is free to cross the boundaries of those categories as one sees fit. They are useful for thinking and writing about these phenomena, but in real life the borders are not clear and are overlapping. If my path had to be classified it would now fall within the Indigenist worldview, or ethical framework, of The Four R's: Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, Responsibility (Kovach 2021, 98). Following these Indigenous informed ethics I enter into every relationship. It is a path toward spirituality, which means, it is a lifelong learning for strengthening relationships.

PART III: Peruvian Huni Kuin ayahuasca use

Who are the Huni Kuin

The Cashinahua call themselves Huni Kuin as do most Panoan speaking groups.[60] For the most part, this auto-denomination is translated as true, real, or genuine human beings in their language (*huni* – human, *kuin* – real, true, pure). Or this is what it was first believed to mean by Kensinger who started to learn their language in 1955 in the native community[61] of Maneya (1965, 5) as a member of the Summer Institute of Linguistics mission with the intention to translate the Bible into their language. This translation of the word *kuin* remained in use not just in the neoshamanic circles who like to depict the Huni Kuin, and all the Indigenous people, as true and pure, but sometimes also in academic circles. However, properly translated (Deshayes and Keifenheim 2003), the *kuin* category can take different meanings relative to the context employed by the enunciator. As a reflective category, it defines a relationship between the self and various others taken into consideration by the speaker. One is *kuin* in relation to other Cashinahuas. A Cashinahua is *kuin* in relation to other Panoan groups. A Cashinahua can include in the *kuin* category all the Panoan groups in relation to another Indigenous group with a different language, such as the Madihas. A Cashinahua can include in the *kuin* category all Indigenous peoples in relation to Westerners. The term *kuin* in this usage is untranslatable, concludes Camargo, but to me it sounds like a

[60] Panoan languages are spoken in western Brazil, eastern Peru, and northern Bolivia. Among the Panoan group the biggest and most known are the Shipibo-Konibo.

[61] I am translating the Comunidades nativas, or Comunidades indígenas as native communities. Sometimes I shorten and write only communities. There could be a possible confusion with the communities that the missionaries created, called *comunidades eclesiales*, but I never talk about these. The reason I am not using the term "villages" is because it brings with it the air of understanding the inhabitants as agrarian producers, which inhabitants of the native communities obviously are not.

mirror image of our concept of "other." Among the Huni Kuin, a "real" human being is someone who is part of their group and lives in a recognizably human and social way; one becomes *kuin*, that is, fully human, through socialization. The others, practically everyone else, is considered *nawa*, a stranger, or a White man. In its nominal sense, *nawa* designates Inca (Camargo dictionary, 8), which can also mean an enemy.[62] With phonetic differences, the term *kuin* belongs to the social categorical system of the Panoan groups, and this is why, to be able to distinguish them, we usually add Cashinahua to Huni Kuin to specify exactly which group it is talked about. I use Huni Kuin and Cashinahua interchangeably.

Huni Kuin recognize the outside designation Cashinahua (Kaxinawa in Brazil), however, among themselves they do not use this name. Some even reject it and see it as derogatory. The reason for the negative connotation is a story according to which they were named *cashi* (bat) *nawa* (stranger), because this somehow refers to their traditional custom of ritual consumption of their deceased important relatives. In fact, the story about bats is innocent. Before, the Cashinahua were living in the community houses and in these houses, bats were living under the roof because Cashinahua eat lots of bananas which attracted bats (Camargo personal communication).

Previous research with Peruvian Huni Kuin

I will be following in the steps of previous researchers of the Huni Kuin in the Peruvian Purús region. Kenneth Kensinger was the first linguist to study the Huni Kuin language and lived and worked with the group for almost eight years between July 1955 and 1968. Kensinger was assigned by the Wycliffe Bible Translators/Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) to Peru, to work among the Cashinahua, but he acclimated so well to their way of life that he eventually lost his vocation and left SIL in 1963 (Erikson 2011), converted

[62] The concept of other is more complex and will be discussed further later as well as the relation with Inca.

to anthropology,[63] and obtained M.A. in anthropology in 1964. Between 1993 and 94, and in 1997, Kensinger returned after 25 years of being away. One of his last observations was, "[t]he changes that have occurred since 1968 seem to be more cosmetic than structural. The seeds for massive and disruptive culture change are present and may have sprouted; they have yet to develop to the point where they threaten to shade or crowd out their hosts" (1995, 279).

With SIL, the word linguist has become a euphemism for a missionary who is studying a language to translate the Bible into it. The next "linguist" to come was Richard Montag in June of 1969[64] (his wife Susan joined him after a few months) who achieved the mission started by Kensinger to translate the Bible into the language of the Huni Kuin (*Hantxa Kuin*). The Bible was published in 1980 and, as far as I was able to see, it is the most popular book in the communities. In his book *A Tale of Pudicho's People: Cashinahua Accounts of European Contacts in the Twentieth Century* (2002) Montag describes his activities in the village of Balta which was the biggest community for about two decades between 1970s and 2000. At its peak, the population reached 800 inhabitants (normally, a community in Curanja would consist of 30 to 70 inhabitants). Some of the people he was working with still live and I have had a brief contact with them. Pudicho (or Puricho, as they write their surnames now) was a headman[65] of the Balta community until 1960. He is Paco's grandfather, his mother's father. After Pudicho, his son Grompes became a headman until his death in 1999. Paco is one of the interviewees in my short film *Nixi Pae Chants of the Peruvian Huni Kuin* and is at the time of this writing (2024) headman of Colombiana, the community to which many of the inhabitants of Balta moved. Paco and Jairo, both of the

[63] Kensinger often said that the Cashinahua had de-converted him from Christianity to anthropology, but that their hallucinogens (ayahuasca) had then opened his eyes to the vanity of the anthropological project itself (Erikson 2011).

[64] Before Richard Montag, and already during the time Kensinger was in Purús, another couple of missionaries went to Balta. Robert Earl Cromack spent quite some time with the Cashinahua between 1956-1960 and returned to them with his wife in 1961 to 1965!
https://www.proquest.com/openview/d68dda6a52d0e0e1457bf205532f5846/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y (accessed on 18th Feb 2025)

[65] The word "the headman" is preferred over the word "chief" because the classical attributes of a chief such as institutional power don't characterize the position of this man who has great prestige, but has to prove it constantly.

Puricho family, are now engaged, in one form or another, with spreading Christian religion among their people. And Roberto Puricho, the eldest son of Grompes, is the head of Evangelical mission. Paco's mother, Alícia, was the last famous healer in this family, and known in the wider Purús area.

André-Marcel d'Ans came to visit the Huni Kuin in the early 1970s and later published a collection of myths in a book titled *La verdadera biblia de los Cashinahua* (1975). He probably chose the title when he saw what was happening with the SIL missionaries in Balta. He is considered a serious researcher of Huni Kuin, but his visit to Purús, hardly fieldwork, was rather short and he never returned. He worked with his Huni Kuin informant in Lima and mainly asked him to tell him what is written in the book of Capistrano de Abreu[66]: *Dois documentos sobre Caxinauás* (1911-1912). It seems that upon this, in the introduction of his book he constructed narratives that may not have much to do with reality. So, I am very careful with what I take from his book. This shows that not only missionaries construct narratives that are imbued with their own worldviews, imaginations and biases; anthropological narratives are no exception to these cases. However, d'Ans wrote a sharp critical assessment of SIL's activities, questioning the SIL's linguistic expertise. Supported by figures, he showed that the Institute's bibliographical production on Peru was anecdotal, if not "pseudo-scientific" (A. d'Ans 1981).

Next came Barbara Keifenheim and Patrick Deshayes, who together stayed with them five times between 1977 and 1983, each time for several months, with Barbara returning to Curanja again in the years between 1994 to 1996. In their book *Penser l'autre* they describe "an almost ideal society in the way it manages with strength and intelligence its relationship with the outside world" that still existed at the end of 1970s (Deshayes and Keifenheim 1994). Keifenheim's article *Zur Bedeutung Drogen-induzierter Wahrnehmungs veränderungen bei den Kashinawa-Indianern Ost-Perus* (The significance of drug-induced perceptual changes among the Cashinahua Indians of eastern Peru, my translation)[67] (Keifenheim 1999) on ayahuasca is a crucial document for understanding how the Peruvian

[66] Personal communication with Keifenheim.
[67] It was also translated to Portuguese and published in a the book *O uso ritual da Ayahuasca* ([1999] 2004).

Huni Kuin use ayahuasca differently from other Amazonian groups, including to other Panoan groups. In contrast to many Amazonian Indigenous groups, the Huni Kuin do not associate any shamanistic practice worth mentioning with the use of ayahuasca.

The role of the chanter figures heavily in Peruvian Huni Kuin ayahuasca ceremonies, as it is the chanter's task to guide the participants through the maze of visions and ensure that everyone returns to the everyday order of perception. However, they do not have privileged communication with the spirits, from which, for example, an ability to diagnose and cure of diseases could be arrived, as it is among the other groups such as Shipibo-Konibo and the Yaminahua. Exposure to visions, learning to control them and gaining knowledge from *nixi pae* experiences is part of every man's life (nowadays mostly men take part in the sessions). She reports that her interviewees agreed that the effect of the chants did not come from the texts. That the chants hardly differ from each other regarding text and content. The differences are more of the musical nature and relate in particular to the tempo, volume and pitch of the chanting voice. All of these remarks support my hypothesis that the central function of the rituals was social cohesion and upholding of the spiritual world. Healing, however, is understood as a process of transformation moving towards wholeness and balance, as concentrated in their concept of *xinan* as an integrative consciousness (Keifenheim).

Cecilia McCallum worked with the Huni Kuin between 1983 and 1989 in the native communities along the rivers Purús on the Brazilian side of the border,[68] and Jordão (McCallum 2001); and later (1990-91) also in Rio Branco, the capital of Acre state (McCallum 1996a, 366). She reports that "since the mid-1970s the male leaders of Brazilian Cashinahua have grown increasingly competent in the political lobbying required to defend their land rights" and in the 80s "a literacy course for bilingual Cashinahua teachers resulted in the creation of an expanded education program, including the training of a handful of "barefoot doctors."" (Ibid, 352). According to McCallum body is produced in Cashinahua (McCallum 1990; 1996b).

[68] She also visited the Peruvian Huni Kuin for a few days (personal communication Camargo).

In 1988 came ethnolinguist—this time a real academic and not a missionary—Eliane Camargo, who has worked with the Huni Kuin since then and who introduced me into this world. She reports that "during the 1980s fundamental rituals, by which the socio-cultural history of the Cashinahua group was traditionally passed on to the next generation had come to disuse […] the only ritual which has survived the cultural pressure from outside is Katxa Nawaa, a fertility rite, which is regionally known by the name Mariri" (Camargo and Reiter In press, 9). Katxa Nawaa as a ritual is much more than just a fertility rite (this designation also found in Lagrou 2018, 28), and its function will be explained in the following chapter.

Jana Horáčková came to Peru for the first time in 2000 and was invited to open an art school at the UNIA in Pucallpa in 2005 to teach Indigenous youth. When invited by a biologist Maria Elena Chuspe, who was studying biodiversity in Purús area, she went there for the first time in 2007. Until 2010, she went there 4 times, visiting all the Indigenous communities, not just Huni Kuin, searching for their art and later focused her work exclusively on Huni Kuin medicinal plants.

I will also rely on Roy Hoyle, who has lived most of his life in the Peruvian Amazon (he came to the Amazon from Lima in his early adulthood) and settled in the Purús region around 1972. He wanted to go to the university, but as he had no means to do it, he chose to go to the frontier[69] and try his luck and experience a life of adventure. For many years he worked as a *vaquero*, a cattle producer, and lived in the Cashinahua communities for years. He moved to Balta for 4 years in 1972. As Roy explained, "Mr. Gamboa, a *cuzqueño*, who bought skins in Purús, contacted us in Pucallpa and convinced me and my brother Sidney to go to Balta directly and buy fancy skins (jaguar, tigrillo, otter and huamburusho) for him. He enabled us, with various merchandise and we went upriver Curanja to Balta. We bought skins and sent them to him and he sent us more merchandise. So it was for more than four years until General Juan Velazco enacted the law of native communities (after 1974), which

[69] This is official version of the story. Roy hinted that his reasons behind his journey into the Amazon are more complex.

prohibited the hunting and marketing of furs. This is when we withdrew from the Curanja" (personal communication).

I would like to call him a mestizo elder, because he knows a lot about Huni Kuin and has since then been living in Esperanza for the most of the time. After he learned to take ayahuasca with the Huni Kuin, as they invited him regularly to take it with them, he started taking ayahuasca in a simple (self-)therapeutic type of use at his home in Esperanza. In our conversations he confessed about his profound experiences during ayahuasca sessions at his home while listening to Western classical music on his record player. There are many different ways of taking ayahuasca and his is just one example of how people can find their own way of making it a numinous experience for themselves. There is no one prescribed way of taking it. He also knows all of the researchers who passed through Esperanza on their way to the Huni Kuin communities. We became very good friends and I recorded many hours of interviews with him during our morning coffees at 6 am, before his cooks and helpers, all Huni Kuin, arrived for a daily job at his establishment called Selva in the center of Puerto Esperanza. He has an English surname because his ancestors were from Scotland. I later learned that a relative of his built an empire in Peru, in sugarcane business, and opened the first museum in Lima with archeological artefacts from his collection. Each session with him was a pleasurable talk; it is a rare experience to talk to a man full of empathy, knowledge, and experience, who wants to share all that and help a stranger, possibly a similar searching soul. Our talks gave me inspiration to continue with my work.

Since 1989 anthropologist Elsje Lagrou has worked with the Huni Kuin on the Brazilian side of the river Purús, which is still very close to the Peruvian side. There she worked with the specialist Leoncio Domingos Huni Kuin, who was one time a head of the village of Conta. Since 2014 she has worked with two specialists of the village of Txana Mudu on the Alto Purús River in Brazil, both of them fleeing from Peru due to intense evangelization of their communities. Lagrou has focused on the ayahuasca complex and shamanism (2004), and as she says, she was "fascinated from the start by the intriguing relationship of mutual implication between image and sound in the shamanistic experience of the Huni Kuin with *nixi pae*," (Lagrou 2018, 19).

Huni Kuin and The Field

> "But why would an anthropologist bother to go to the field if they actually believed in their culture?" (Wagner 2012, 11)

The Purús region lies in one of the most isolated areas of Peru, deep in the Amazon Forest, which constitutes around 58% of the country. It is one of the four provinces of the Ucayali Department (101.000km^2), with Puerto Esperanza, a small border town, being the administrative center of the district. Purús river is one of the main tributaries of the Amazon and originates in southeastern Peru. Together with the Madre de Dios region to the south, the Purús region is one of the most biodiverse and unexplored parts of the Amazon Forest. It is only accessible by air from Peru, or by boat from Brazil. Nearly 80% of the territory of Purús province is under protection. Alto Purús National Park, which extends into Madre de Dios region, covering more than 2.5 million hectares (or 25,000 km^2, an area larger than Slovenia), stands out as the largest protected area in the country. To put this number into perspective, NGOs dedicated to forest observation and monitoring calculate that annual deforestation in 2017 was around 150.000 hectares.[70] It is also worth noting that 21% of Peru's territory consists of mining concessions. Similarly, 75% of the Peruvian Amazon is covered by oil and gas concessions.[71] This fact alone might indicate that the state of Peru must maneuver the managing of the Indigenous populations in order to be able to manage concessions. Indigenous movements are often in direct conflict with the state in their struggle for self-determination; the most famous case in Peru is the so called "Baguazo", a standoff between the government of García and Indigenous people of Awajun and Wampis when García unilaterally reduced the 'Ichigkat Muja-Cordillera del Cóndor' National Park in half in order to approve the mining concessions. The protests escalated and resulted in

[70] IWGIA - IndigenousWorld2019_UK (p201)
[71] IWGIA - IndigenousWorld2019_UK (p198)

hundreds of wounded and 34 casualties (24 police and 10 civilians). In the end García repealed the most controversial decrees under the pressure from national and international actors (Merino 2020).

(FLASHBACK) One afternoon I was talking to a local Cashinahua from the neighboring village Cashueira, Efraín. He said that this, Canta Gallo, is the most disorganized village. Because they are closer to the town, they can buy everything. More distant villages are producing fruits and vegetables, also his Cashueira, even though it is about the same distance from the town. I asked him, if he can bring some fruits, I tell him I would buy from him. Then he starts telling the story about why some elder Indigenous still swear by Fujimori, a dictatorial president of Peru between 1990 and 2000. They say he was the only president who ever did anything for the Indigenous people in Peru. With an airplane he sent warm clothing and machinery for the people to work with.[72] On the other hand, president García, in his second term between 2006 and 2011, tried to sell vast territories on which Indigenous people lived to North Americans, without asking for their permission. Efrain continued that then the Indigenous people revolted and as a result about 200 people died when the police shot at them from their helicopters. But in the end, they succeeded, the land was not sold to the foreigners.[73]

Peru has one of the most diverse ethno-linguistic populations. There are 55 Indigenous groups at present, who speak 47 Indigenous languages.[74] Peru's Indigenous population includes more than 4 million persons, of whom about 83% are Quechua. The alto Purús river basin, with its affluent Curanja, is a culturally diverse Indigenous territory

[72] Which is ironic, since the authoritarian government of Alberto Fujimori (1990-2000) was characterized by a neoliberal economy and facilitated the sale of Indigenous lands, so that transnational corporations could engage in extractivist activities. (Kania 2016, 18)

[73] In 2008 and in 2009 in the Bagua region, Indigenous communities protested against new laws that would open Peru's Amazon region to unrestricted exploitation by oil, mining and logging industries. In 2009 President García signed new decrees using the US-Peru Free Trade agreement to justify the roll back of Indigenous land rights. The resulting conflict left 34 people dead and over 200 injured. The conflict later became known by the name El Baguazo or Masacre de Bagua. https://www.culturalsurvival.org/news/take-action-guarantee-rights-and-safety-indigenous-leader-peru (accessed on 25th Jun 2024)

[74] IWGIA - IndigenousWorld2019_UK

populated by groups belonging to Panoan and Arawakan linguistic families. Nowadays, at least eight ethnic groups live there side by side: namely the Cashinahua, Chaninahua, Mastanahua, Sharanahua, Amahuaca (Panoan groups), Culina, Asháninka and Yine (Arawakan groups). In many cases, the early inhabitants have disappeared entirely from the region. Not more than 70 years ago, most of the indigenous groups in the region were populations in voluntary isolation and had a subsistence lifestyle (Salisbury and Fagan 2003, 178). The Huni Kuin represent the majority of the Indigenous population in this area, however, they are a minority of the whole of the Huni Kuin group who live across the border in the state of Acre, Brazil.

Huni Kuin territory Coming of Huni Kuin to Purús

The origins of the Huni Kuin may be traced by their myths involving Inca. Some Indigenous groups have the word Inca in their vocabulary, and some do not. For example, references to the Inca are missing in the mythology of Yaminahua, but they abound in the mythologies of other neighbors such as the Kampa, the Machiguenga and in Ucayali, the Shipibo-Konibo. This makes it probable that these groups, in a distant past, lived somewhere at the foot of the Andes in contact with the Inca empire (Lagrou 1991, 18).[75] The Inca in their mythology is connected with cannibalism and with being miserly (*yauxi*). The Inca is also the one who controls the metal and Huni Kuin were always trying to approach the societies with metal, even though they had always had bad experience with them. Because they connect the White man with Inca, it seems probable that they remained without contact with any "White man" for a very long time, until the 19th century arrival of rubber extractors into their territory.

[75] For hypothesis that Arawak societies are connected to Andean cultures see (Smith 2011).

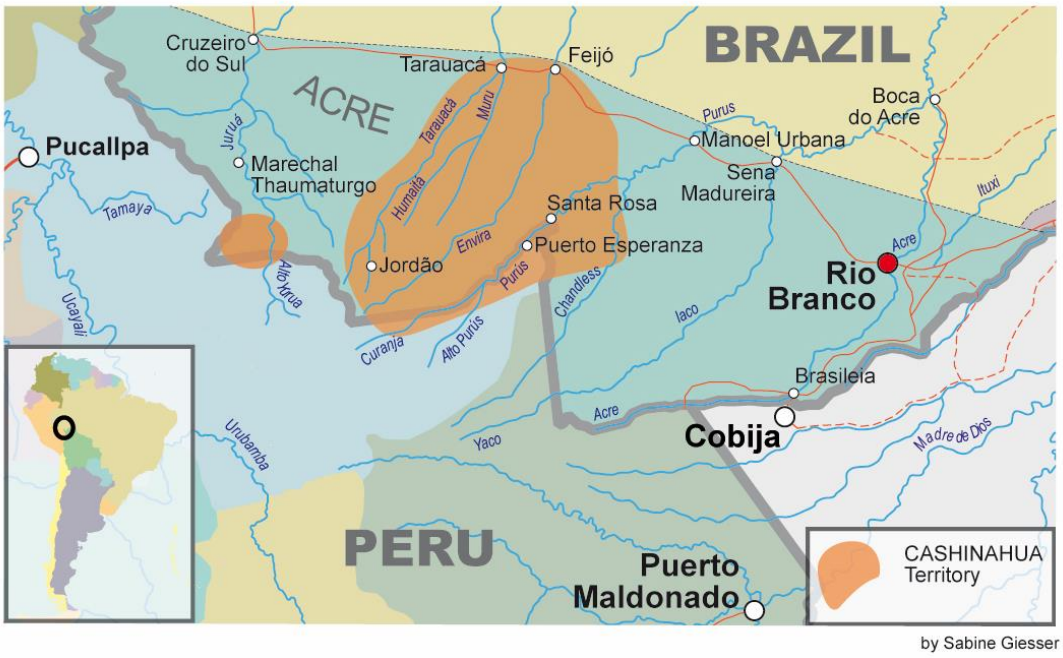

Figure 1: A map of Cashinahua territory (author: Sabine Giesser)

Cashinahua nowadays inhabit both sides of the Peruvian-Brazilian border area as can be seen on figure 1. The border was well defined only in the 1970s, with the politics of Living Borders (*Fronteras vivas*)[76]. They are scattered across the vast territory between the Upper Juruá and Purús rivers which are both major tributaries of the Amazon. It was along these rivers that the first Brazilians searching for rubber trees arrived in the middle of 19th century. In the 1890s[77] the Cashinahua lived on small tributaries of the Tarauacá river. Camargo writes that their traditional territory is the Upper Envira river, which is the right tributary to Tarauacá, which itself is then the tributary to Juruá (2022, 7). According to McCallum, the home of the ancestors of the present day Huni Kuin was Murú river with its tributaries Humaitá and Iboiçu (2001, 8), also tributaries to Tarauacá, but a little bit north

[76] Several South American countries have implemented a border policy known as *Fronteras Vivas* (Living Borders). Governments feared that neighboring countries could invade their territories without encountering any resistance and without the authorities being aware of the case.That is why the governments of each country wanted to establish the presence of their citizens along the borders to lend legitimacy to their territorial aspirations. (Terborgh 2003)

[77] For reference, 1890 a year of Wounded knee massacre. As Linda Hogan, US Indigenous writer describes, "it was the time of deliberate policies of starvation, wars with the multiple losses of people, animals, and lands", "And last, there was the banning of Indian religions, religions that had kept the world in balance with song, prayer, and reverence" (2001, 118)

from Envira. When White people came to these remote areas searching for the rubber trees at the end of the 19th century, the rubber boom was in full swing. This contact dramatically changed their lives. Indigenous people all over the Upper Amazon were treated horribly during the rubber boom at the beginning of the 20th century, and the details of this need to be understood in order to contextualize what is going on today. Especially because the Cashinahua group living today in the Purús region are direct descendants of the enslaved who killed their rubber baron and fled their home territory.

Rubber boom intermezzo

The reason for colonizing these areas has always been the extractivist exploitation of some product or resource. Since the very beginning, the Spanish expeditions went searching for gold. The colonizers have always relied on the Indigenous populations as a workforce and as the cheapest option have established regimes of slavery.[78] In the Amazon the labor came to be guaranteed through debt bondage, the *enganche* (hook) system which was imported from feudal Europe where it was the dominating system for exploiting peasant labor and production. This is a system in which a worker would receive the advance payment, or a "gift," and was then legally required to work for the creditor until the debt was paid off. However, in this case, the Indigenous were forced to receive the "gift" or face death by shooting and were later kept indefinitely in debt, trapping them effectively into slavery. Slavery and slave trafficking became rampant in the Upper Amazon. "Armed slave raids, called "*correrías*", became widespread in the 19th and 20th centuries, and a market for Indian slaves, mostly children and young women, was established in the town of Iquitos, the fastest-growing commercial center of the entire Upper Amazon region of today's Peru, Ecuador, and southern Colombia" (Hvalkof 2000, 90).

[78] The British empire abolished slavery in 1833, while the US abolished slavery in 1865. Portugal abolished slavery in the homeland in 1761, but redirected the slave trade to Brazil and the African colonies. The last country in the Western Hemisphere to abolish slavery was Brazil, in 1888.

The production of elastic rubber was the most disastrous of all extractivist activities due to the cruelty and greed of the colonizers. In order to produce as much and as quickly as possible they exploited the then abundant native labor to the point of destruction. In the short time span of the boom period, between 1900 and 1914, “possibly hundreds of thousands of indigenous inhabitants of the Upper Amazon became involved in rubber extraction as debt peons and slaves” (Ibid, 93). Tens of thousands of Indigenous people were fleeing enslavement, genocide, and disease. The demographic patterns and locations of Indigenous settlements we find today are a direct result of these forced migrations. The atrocities perpetrated during this time are so horrendous that they are unthinkable: flogging, castration, mutilations, killings of men, women and children as punishment or amusement in the most despicable ways. These were first documented by Walter E. Hardenburg and W. B. Perkins who accidentally come across those atrocities when traveling through “the rubber-tapping concession area of the Peruvian company Casa Arana, owned by the London-based Peruvian Amazon Company, locally referred to as “the civilizing company”” (Ibid, 94). The British government appointed Sir Roger Casement, the British Consul to Brazil to investigate those claims and he corroborated the statements made by Hardenburg. Casement was chosen because he investigated similar genocidal crimes in the Belgian Congo. “The report estimates that between 10,000 and 40,000 local Indians in the Putumayo rubber fields lost their lives in a time span of around ten years, during which there was an extraction of some 4000 tons of crude rubber” (Ibid, 98). More on this topic is covered in Michael Taussig’s book, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (1987).

Huni Kuin exodus to Purús

Disregarding the terror they inspired in them, these foreigners seduced them with metal objects that the Huni Kuin had coveted since Incan times. As I mentioned, it is not the first time they encountered metal. In Huni Kuin myths, the Inca are the masters of metal,

this is why the White men are sometimes also called Inca. By 1924 a large group of Cashinahua had been taken to the Jordão by rubber bosses and others were living on the Envira (McCallum 1990, 414). This seduction, the false promises made, the Indians' own desire for an alliance with the Whites, “all this made the Indians become convinced and abandon their ancestral headwaters to join their fate with the invaders further down the rivers, where they share to this day the mediocre—or miserable—life of the mestizos, fascinated but always frustrated by the mirage of Amazonian opulence” (A.-M. d’Ans and Carrión 1975, 9).

The group of Cashinahua who were settled at Seringal União on the Envira river revolted against the rubber baron in the neighboring *seringal* (rubber tree plantation) and killed him and his family. They took everything in their store house and fled. During the flight they started to fight among themselves, and the group separated. Some of them went to the river Jordão and the others continued their path towards river Purús and settled in the upper reaches of river Curanja. This separation about a hundred years ago was a critical event for this group. And is kept alive in the narratives of this event (Chapter 1 in CPI-AC 2013).[79] There they returned to their traditional way of life and avoided any contacts with non-indigenous society. However, they retained the metal tools and shotguns. And when all of these tools wore down they decided to search for the contact again (Montag 2002).

Because they remained in self-isolation until the late 1940s, they are perceived as more conservative than their Brazilian brothers who remained in contact with the non-indigenous society. Among the Cashinahua that remained in Brazil, according to the leader of the Jordão Cashinahua, Seu Sueiro Kaxinaua, the adults were massacred, leaving young people and children with only a partial knowledge of traditional lore and technology, such as rituals, myths, herbal medicine, and weaving (Kensinger 1995, 2). The remaining Cashinahua were forcedly dislocated into small family units that were spatially separated as is required for efficient rubber production. Each tapper lived an isolated life which revolved solely around rubber. Each day they followed a number of rubber paths through

[79] For more of this history, see also the movie *Seit Kape dem Krokodil... Geschichte auf Indianisch* (Since Kape the crocodile... History from an Indian perspective) by Keifenheim and Deshayes, 1979.

the forest to collect the sap. This completely disintegrated the community and their culture. At that time, many families were living together under one roof in a long house.

In the 1940s,[80] the Peruvian Huni Kuin first entered in contact with other Panoan groups, who were themselves in contact with Peruvian loggers. They were the last of the groups in the area to come out of the voluntary isolation. When in 1946 a Brazilian trader visited them, they knew what they wanted: industrialized goods, metal axes, shotguns, etc., and the interactions have steadily intensified since then. The first researchers came in 1951, led by Harald Schultz,[81] a Brazilian photographer-ethnographer who visited several of their villages in 1951. The resulting epidemic of measles decimated up to 80% of adults.[82] From the population of around 450 only about 90 survived. This catastrophic event is still alive in their memory, as Kensinger's informant, headman Awadetsati describes (1995, 231):

> "All my people were sick, many were dying. Nobody had the strength to dispose of the bodies. Some of the dying crawled from the village so the stench of their decaying bodies would not disturb the ill."

The remaining Cashinahua were discouraged and disillusioned. For a while, their contacts with the Peruvian traders became less satisfactory and more hostile. In 1955 the first missionaries came and with this, the wave of modernization.

The histories of the Huni Kuin on both sides of the border are different, and they have differentiated somewhat. However, they have reactivated their inter-Cashinahua ties and visits (first Huni Kuin visitors from Brazil came to Balta in 1979). Marriages between Huni Kuin from distant communities and migratory movements are nowadays more common, and they continue to see themselves as one people. One could say that the Peruvian Cashinahua lost their traditional territory but retained their traditional knowledge and a way of life (at least for some time) while the Brazilian Cashinahua (at least some of

[80] In 1940, in Slovenia the German occupation tried to Germanize the Slovenian population, planned to deport 260,000 Slovenians to Reich or other republics—mostly to occupied Serbia—banned the Slovenian language in public, and closed down schools (Tomasevich 2001).

[81] https://mae.usp.br/acervo/explorando-colecoes/a-etnografia-visual-de-harald-schultz/ (accessed on 25th Jun 2024)

[82] This is also when they stopped consuming the bodies of their dead. (Kensinger 1995, 231)

them) retained their traditional territories but lost their knowledge and some of them were also forcibly dislocated and lost both. Some Brazilian Cashinahua (e.g. the group on river Tarauacá, personal communication Castro) stopped speaking their own language, and in the parts where they still do speak Hantxa Kuin they have incorporated more of the Portuguese words into their vocabulary. In Peru, they live in the Purús district around the upper reaches of the Purús river and its tributary Curanja. In Brazil, in the state of Acre, they live around rivers Breu, Jordão, Tarauacá, Humaitá, Envira, and Alto Purús. The whole of the Cashinahua ethnic group consists of about 10,000 individuals, with the group around the Purús river counting today at about 2000.[83]

Extending the scope of The field

> [A]n anthropologist needs all aspects of his personality, not merely his drive to know; and he needs them under his command to produce good work. He is simultaneously an apprentice researcher and an apprentice human being until, that is, he has become a master of himself. (Cesara Manda, 1982) (from Barz and Cooley 2008, 225)

Purús is therefore an isolated place where single river valley contains speakers of more than half a dozen different languages, with distinct economic systems and cosmological beliefs. These are groups that are now effectively encapsulated in restricted territories, surrounded by either farmers (settlers, mestizos, Peruvians), and a non-contacted tribe's territory, or a reserve. The Huni Kuin consider themselves civilized, they call the wild uncontacted Mashco Piro, who still live in and with forest and sometimes sneak into their farthest villages on Curanja river to steal various objects, *calatos*, the naked ones.

[83] See (Mayor and Bodmer 2009). Their estimate for Peruvian Cashinahua is 2419, but from my estimate the Cashinahua population of the region Purús is less than 2000.

In its narrowest meaning the field is this basin of the upper stretches of the river Purús in Peru and its tributary Curanja, with the villages on the riverbanks and with Esperanza as the local town, and center of power (political, financial, etc.), to which the Indigenous people now gravitate. However, this field is extended through migrations and technology in the contemporary history. Apart from this core place, there are two outside places that Peruvian Cashinahua regularly visit.

Most importantly, Cashinahua, as well as all the other peoples of the Purús region, are interacting with the wider area of Ucayali, predominantly visiting Pucallpa, the urban center of the whole Ucayali region. Since the 1970s the first Huni Kuin who were flown out of Purús were protégés of SIL missionaries. They were flown with their small airplanes to their center in Yarinacocha to be trained for the missionaries, teachers, or health service personnel. Nowadays, many Indigenous people spend years in Pucallpa or its surroundings, either to earn money, get health services, or education to be local teachers, or to train and work as missionaries with various churches in Pucallpa. In the search for work (and better life) they might visit other more or less nearby towns, such Atalaya. The shorter-term migrants usually rely on their extensive network of relatives and friends who have become more or less permanent residents, or on missions that also provide lodgings for the whole families, to stay there for weeks on end. Living there for them has become a way of normal life. Not only the Indigenous people, but also the mestizo population in Puerto Esperanza, complain about the lack of educational and work opportunities in the whole Purús area, and about the abandoned conditions in which they live thanks to the lack of support from the Peruvian government (cf Terborgh in Leite Pitman et al. 2003).

Traversing this immense barrier that the forest represents is still difficult. Nowadays, there are two options of air service between Pucallpa and Purús, one by private companies, and the other, a state-owned airplane. Biweekly, the army with their C130 airplane supplies the town of Esperanza with fuel for the power generators which generate electricity for the whole town, goods for the military base, and for the town in general. There are also heavily subsidized passenger tickets available which are the cheapest ones. The other option is small commercial airplanes, which normally carry goods intended for private business and

also sell a few subsidized tickets for the local populace. These tickets are scarce. Every month, when the date for the sale of the tickets for the next month approaches, the local Indigenous people form a line in front of the agencies a couple of days in advance which is a huge burden on them. Due to this shortage of tickets, it is incredibly difficult to enter the area. On the other hand, the small planes are usually empty on their return trip to Pucallpa so exiting is simple. Considering this wider world, Pucallpa, and even further, Lima, represent the outer world, *nawa*, whereas the whole of Purús together with the town of Esperanza represents the local world, which we could now call *kuin.* There were plans to build the road to Madre de Dios, which would most probably set the stage for intensive logging and deforestation in the area and force the isolated tribes, which are all nomadic to semi-nomadic, to settle. The influx of loggers would be devastating to their lifeways.

The other direct extension of the field is, of course, in the Brazilian state of Acre where the Brazilian Huni Kuin live. They travel there to either visit their relatives or for work. From there, the stories of the tourism that is happening in the communities of their Huni Kuin brothers (*kuin* in this case interpreted directly as relatives, *parientes*) living around the Jordão, Envira and Tarauacá rivers circulate back to Purús. Brazilian Huni Kuin now occupy the role as world famous "ambassadors" of ayahuasca, and some of their "shamans" (we will get to the more exact meaning of what shaman means in the Huni Kuin world in the next section on Huni Kuin concepts) travel all over the world to serve ayahuasca in ceremonies marketed to Westerners. These stories are being transmitted directly through storytelling, and recently through the YouTube videos of the Huni Kuin performances of ayahuasca songs. These performances differ markedly from the traditional a cappella chants (*nixi pae dewe*). There is now a special genre of Huni Kuin ayahuasca songs accompanied by guitars, djembe, maracas. Some of these videos reach millions of views and, together with stories about a rich tourist who is already visiting the Brazilian brothers, now fill the imagination of the local Huni Kuin. He is now dreaming about the tourists' imminent arrival and money that they will earn by ayahuasca tourism, which will lead, them, the Peruvian Cashinahua, out of suffering (*sufrimiento*) and poverty by catering to his needs. So, even before the first tourist ever came to the region, it is already influencing their

culture, as the ayahuasca cook in my movie explains to me that they are waiting for the tourists to come and sell ayahuasca to them. More about the Huni Kuin culture in Acre and their practice of the rituals connected with ayahuasca is well presented in the movie *Yupuma* (2021) by Verónica Castro.

There are other, more indirect extensions of the field, such as a world-famous tourist spot—–the little town of Pisac, in the Andes region of Peru one hour drive away from Cuzco––which is a mecca for spiritual tourism, or drug tourism as some anthropologists would rather call it. This is where the more generic version (Langdon 2013) of world spirituality meets the local versions and where both are transformed to a certain extent. This has now become a dislocated contact zone between the modern and the traditional. Pisac is in the Sacred Valley, to which the Brazilian Huni Kuin have access and do, regularly or from time to time, visit it. I met there a trio of very young Brazilian Cashinahua from the community Caucho on Murú River in Acre, who would play their songs for the tourists in ayahuasca ceremonies. They were in their early twenties, and managed by an older Peruvian guy, who spoke English well and called himself Pajé Beto. This spot, as well, is influencing the life deep in the Amazon, even though it is not directly connected to it. All these stories and experiences eventually trickle into the imagination of the Huni Kuin in Peru.

Because information about what is going on in the outside world arrives to them not just through storytelling, but also through YouTube videos, as tablets nowadays prevail over the TV, the Peruvian Huni Kuin are a people who, in their contact with the Western world, mostly bypassed the mass media circuit and directly arrived at social media from their relative isolation. The local natives are now able to choose (to some extent, of course[84]) what they want to watch and what content they want to share among themselves. This version of the globalization of the field is an important factor that must be considered, and we cannot simply argue that they are passive receivers and, in a way, victims of globalization. So, if I include as part of the field wherever the ceremonies with ayahuasca are occurring, or more in general, healing therapies, that are all mostly bundled within the New Age

[84] They are targets of the AI algorithms that push the content to them, amplifying the vices that we all share as humans.

movement, then I must realize that my "personal fieldwork" started a long time ago and connects very different locations and traditions (ayahuasca ceremony in Slovenia that I attended were organized by a neoshamanic group of Slovenians who are also inspired by Brazilian Huni Kuin).

Field location has become a sprawling network of places and personal experiences rather than one specific geographic area. As anthropologists now argue, fieldwork is experience that should be, in the ideal case, transformational (Wilson 2008). But it does not start happening when one reaches the actual field place; it starts long before. My decade-long path to healing through biomedicine, new spirituality, and group therapy has ever since been influencing my perspective on what is happening in the field. And all the processes occurring around the world somehow find their way back into the Amazon and influence the field and the lives of people who never left the forest. Due to the influence from the outside, the self-perception of the native people changes.

My experience was that whenever I would visit Indigenous places with intent to record the local songs and music and express my interests and respect for the traditions (even paying for the recordings) it would contribute to a re-evaluation by the community of its traditional knowledge. James Graham, ethnobiologist, reports a similar effect on the locals during his work with medicinal plants in the community of Colombiana. When he arrived in 1997 to document this body of plant knowledge, there were elders who maintained the knowledge and practice of the use of traditional medicinal plants, but among the two younger generations there was not a single apprentice. Two years later, several young people in the community had expressed interest in learning plant knowledge from their grandparents. Another year later, the few evangelists in the community whose religious arguments were opposed to continuing traditional practices again changed the minds of the young apprentices, this time they stopped learning (Graham in Leite Pitman et al. 2003, 78). The point is that we are influencing each other; the main concern is whether it is on equal terms, or if we are imposing our views on them, directly or indirectly.

Returning to the "original," core, field – the Purús region and the Cashinahua living there—as an ethnomusicologist venturing into such a territory, you are a bounty for the

"experts" who might wish to seduce a researcher into their circle claiming knowledge regarding ayahuasca practice. Sometimes this knowledge is eclectic, being picked up from various sources, even from the questions of previous ethnographers, sometimes it is being improvised and sometimes even fabricated, to impress the researcher and receive economic benefits from them. As soon as I arrived to the Purús region, my informant Alberto set me up to stay at his family in Canta Gallo, claiming they are the bearers of the tradition. After two weeks it became clear to me that something was not right there, and that my host family was actually the missionary clan in the village. I realized that I had to change the way I intended to do my fieldwork, which had been to stay in one local community and do the fieldwork in one place. It forced me into rethinking my questions and assumptions.

Main concepts of the Huni Kuin world view

I see the concept of healing as a process of transformation somewhat analogous to what Huni Kuin call development of *xinan*. The concept of *xinan* (locally translated into Spanish as *idea, pensamiento*—"thought"), is understood by Barbara Keifenheim as "integrative consciousness" (Keifenheim 2000). The development of *xinan* starts with birth and, over the course of one's life, transforms an egocentric baby into a social person. It is a spiritual, moral, or ethical upgrade to a practical knowledge (*unan*), and *xinan* determines a person's physical, social and spiritual strength. A weak *xinan*, on the other hand, is a cause for most of illnesses; healing is essentially aimed at strengthening the patient's *xinan*. A strong *xinan* brings about not only a balanced body-mind relationship, but also protects against "exogenous" spirits entering the body and thus endangering the individual.

This concept of *xinan* is mediated and provided through experiences during ayahuasca ceremonies, other communal rituals, and daily life. Therefore, ayahuasca ceremonies were part and parcel of building, growing, and nurturing of *xinan*. However, healing is not limited to rituals or ceremonies: those are just vision providers. The process

of healing, acquiring experience, is happening all the time, through daily life activities, cultivated as a specific form of thinking and being in the world that is attributed to the Huni Kuin way of life.

As Elsje Lagrou writes, the Huni Kuin explained to her that they primarily drink ayahuasca "to see," because "*nixi pae* reveals the hidden reality…" (2018, 28). I would stop here before limiting too early what it is that they want to see. As she continues, she describes that it is "the hidden reality of the agency of nonhumans who have the power to cause pain, illness and death" (Ibid). As already mentioned, healing is not currently a primary purpose of ayahuasca sessions. Among other things they try "to see" is their future (divination), or what is going on with their close kin who they are physically separated from by distance. All kinds of hidden realities, as Roy Hoyle explains. He reported using ayahuasca to see the people's auras. When I was attending the ceremony in Canta Gallo, Luis, the cooking maestro, whose wife had died, might have been using ayahuasca to enter this alternate time and space, as ayahuasca allows the person to enter into the past or the future and connect with people from other places and other times (Madera 2009, 83). In this case, Luis used ayahuasca to reconnect with his lost wife. When he was crying, he also bonded with his son who came to his side to help him with a song.

It is said that the spirit (*bedu yuxin*—eye spirit, one of the several spirits that inhabit the body), while a person is under the influence of the ayahuasca drink, goes wandering into the other reality. One of the main functions of the chants is to not let it wander too far or get lost. The spirit needs to come back. All men are welcome to participate in the drinking sessions and if their visions overlap and confirm each other's, they are pretty sure that they are truthful. All my informants absolutely denied to me any shamanic knowledge or such activity. It doesn't necessarily mean that this is not present anymore with Huni Kuin in other territories. But interpreting Huni Kuin ayahuasca sessions as ritual curing, would be at least outdated, if not wrong.

To better understand the ways that Huni Kuin understand ayahuasca within their cosmology, I will present first some of their concepts and their worldview. These concepts are not static as might be implied when we use the word "tradition," nor is the practice of

ayahuasca drinking backward-looking in values and goals. It is practiced in postmodern settings all over the world. And even in traditional settings it is forward looking, addressing political and identity issues in their struggles for sovereignty, as is the case of Brazilian Huni Kuin. By understanding these concepts, we will be able to see what is changing and how.

Two moieties

As said in the Introduction, the Cashinahua society is divided into two moieties,[85] or totemic halves – children of the Jaguar *Inubake* (*Inu* – jaguar, *bake* – son) and children of the Puma *Duabake* (*Dua* – puma)[86]. These are further divided by gender and alternating generations and form eight *xutabu* (a group of homonyms from one generation). The *Inu-* and *Duabake* are interlinked by perpetual cross-marriage, and this is how they form alliance between the two halves. These allies are "Others within" (Deshayes 1992, 96). The body painting designs, *kené*, identify which moiety a person belongs to, and children are painted from an early age on. Each *xutabu* has a limited number of *kené* and each individual can use any of the drawings of his or her *xutabu*. The Cashinahua consider all other Cashinahua to be their kinsmen (*nabu*, family), but the core of their kinsmen is called *en nukun nabu kuin* (our (close, "real") relatives). Every man has an obligation to give to his close relatives (*nabu kuin*) donations of meat. A good hunter may increase the size of this group and with it his prestige. The alliance between *Inu-* and *Duabake* is a fundamental base of the community (*mae*). When the community is in balance it is called *mae kuin*[87] and the balanced community is ideally socially, politically, and economically, an autonomous unit. Until a few decades ago the whole native community lived under one roof in a big communal house, but nowadays every nuclear family has their own house.

[85] Moiety societies can be found particularly among the indigenous peoples of North America and Australia.
[86] Translation of *dua* is still contentious: Camargo translates it as puma. Deshayes and Keifenheim translate it as the radiant light (*hijos de la luz radiante*) (2003, 32), relying on entry in Montag's dictionary (*hijo del resplandor*).
[87] The system that Barbara Keifenheim and Patrick Deshayes are using deals with the abstract idealizations of how the society ideally should be. The actual behavior in real life is seldom like that.

At the core of each proper community (*mae kuin*) are two headmen or focal men (cf Kensinger), called *xanen ibu*, which stands for political leadership. *Xanen* means place where a human body is cooked, land to cultivate, village and its headman. The two headmen ideally come from different moieties, each being a headman of their own moiety, *Duabake* and *Inubake*. Ideally, they would marry each other's sisters. The marrying of their children to each other guarantees the formation of the village with its social fabric as a whole. The headman is usually from Inubake moiety. The Inubake are good at hunting, prestige, politics and the Duabake are good with spiritual knowledge, the ceremonies. The shaman is usually from Duabake moiety. The headman leads by soft persuasion, his influence is imperceptible and lacking any direct power over other people.[88] He is a good hunter who is generous with the meat he brings home and to as many other families as possible.

Meat (*nami*) is the most valued good in the traditional world of Huni Kuin and the most important means of exchange. With offerings of surplus of meat to other families, one establishes alliances and achieves prestige and respect. The village is the headman's primary sphere of actions, and the headman (*xanen ibu*) is, according to Camargo, the "one who knows everyone well, who has the authority and respect of all the villagers. He is responsible for the sociability of his villagers, providing them with living conditions, such as an area for planting (the swidden for the essential products for consumption, such as manioc, corn and bananas), offering protection and promoting the transmission of knowledge and the organization of fundamental rituals for the social cohesion of the group" (Camargo dictionary). For example, headman's ritual (*txidim*), is normally held in recognition of a new headman. It can also be held when tensions have disrupted the normal flow of social interaction, or following the death of a powerful man, which is also a great disturbance. *Txidim* reintegrates the social body of the community as a whole (Kensinger 1995, 236).

Maintaining a harmonious community is a delicate task and a following anecdote clearly illustrates the challenges the headman faces to sustain it, as well as how people see

[88] Whereas the term "chief" in Western ideas connotates power and coercive force, which is why I avoid using the term altogether.

the role of a headman should be executed. Balta, which was the center of the Huni Kuin life on the river Curanja during the SIL period, started to depopulate in the 1990s. Both Keifenheim and Kensinger report that this was directly due to the behavior of the village headman, Grompes, who started to resemble more and more the White-man-chief behavior. In 1994, Grompes was faced with a difficult decision when one of the villagers some time ago decided to raise pigs in Balta for selling them in Esperanza. Since then, the village was plagued with intestinal parasites due to the pig feces lying around, and the pigs even ate the manioc from the baskets the villagers left on the ground. Villagers were dissatisfied with the situation, but no one confronted the man directly. When Grompes ordered the villager to move the pigs, he threatened he would kill them if they were not gone within one month. And he did so in the presence of a *nawa*, a doctor who connected the parasites problem with the pigs and who threatened Grompes that he would stop supplying him with the medicines if they were still there the next time he would come. The villager finally removed the pigs from the village, but then he himself also moved with them to a place down river, taking with him his whole extended family. Although the villagers were happy that the problem was gone, they found Grompes' behavior unacceptable. Many other families went on to move out of Balta. Between 1994 and July 1997 the population of Balta dropped from 284 to 125, due to dissatisfaction with Grompes' leadership (Kensinger 2003, 102–4). This episode also shows that a village is not only an autonomous unit, but that these units are competing among themselves for the inhabitants.

Katxanawa

Katxanawa is the ritual that is the most important for keeping the social cohesion within the native community (*mae kuin*). As we saw, keeping the community peaceful is not an easy thing. During the ritual, in the morning, the *Duabake* half goes into forest and adorns themselves with leaves, camouflaging or transforming themselves into an outsider, Other. When they come back, they come screaming and the remaining half that stayed in

the community, is surprised by the attack, and wants to defend themselves. When they come closer to each other they recognize each other as allies, rejoice and form peace. For the alliance to hold, the *Inubake* men offer meat to *Duabake* families. In the afternoon they repeat the procedure but with *Inubake* going in the forest. What on surface looks like symbolic acts are in fact very practical tactics.

We would expect that the mutual exchange of meat results in equilibrium, but this is not always the case. Sometimes in the morning, one family offers large quantities of meat and receives very little from them in the evening. Everybody can see that there is an imbalance and that there are some tensions between the families. It is the duty of the headman to go and talk to them after the ritual is over, to resolve the disputes. Another case is when someone has an ambition to become a headman and offers large quantities of meat to several families and thus shows his supreme mastery of hunting and generosity, showing, without using the words, that his skills surpass the ones of the present headman. However, if he in the evening receives only meager portions of meat his bid is rejected (Deshayes and Keifenheim 2003, 47). These examples shows that *katxanawa* ritual is far from being a purely symbolic, or ineffective, activity. On the contrary, after the ritual and resolution of the disputes, the village is considered cleansed or, better, brought back into balance again with alliances strengthened. It also shows that there is something more for someone to become a headman; the highest amount of meat one can muster is not enough. It has to do with the concept of *xinan*.

Unan

When I asked my informant, who I worked with as my translator, what is *unan*, he replied that a simple translation of *unan* is crafty, skillful (*mañoso*), but also a type of a brown ant, *curuinsi*. I pressed further, can it also mean knowledge (*conocimiento*), he says, also, and offers other translations: "*unan*, is also to guess, to recognize, and *unan haidai* means to have knowledge." *Unanya* are "those who know." According to Kensinger, *unan*

"is that which one's body learns from experience" (1995, 239), but throughout the chapter he keeps calling it "knowledge", which it is, but it is difficult to catch what is the central meaning. Kensinger explains that *unan* is connected with the body, and also dies with the body.

> 'a wise man, *huni unaya,* has knowledge throughout his whole body. "*Hawen yuda dasibi unaia,* his whole body knows," they say. When I asked them where specifically a wise man had knowledge, they listed his skin, his hands, his ears, his genitals, his liver, and his eyes. "Does his brain have knowledge?" I asked. "Hamaki (it doesn't)," they responded. [1995:239]

This conversation was done in his first period of stays, before 1968, but he admits that after he came back in 1992, some of the Huni Kuin, especially the ones who attended the secondary school placed some of the (*unan*) knowledge in the brain. Specifically, the knowledge you learn at school resides in brain, but the knowledge of Christianity, they say, resides in the heart (Ibid). We see that Huni Kuin are adapting new concepts under influence of bilingual teachers who were trained by the missionaries. Cecilia McCallum in her article *The Body That Knows* also connects *unan* with knowledge, writing that "Growth can be defined as the corporeal accumulation of knowledge in the form of "soul" [she is translating *yuxin* as soul]" (1996a, 347).

Ni

Another opposition in the Huni Kuin world is between the deep forest (*ni*) and the domesticated and limited, but safe, social space, the village (*mae*). These are the two spatial poles surrounding the Huni Kuin. However, the jungle is also a territory of other inhabitants. I prefer the term beings; some human, like the other (non-contacted) tribes, some animals, but especially of the spirits. The spirits of the forest control the outcome of the hunt. The spirits of the deceased may also go and live in the jungle, taking the form of an animal or a tree. This is why the act of hunting is never a simple task—it implies the possibility of

encountering beings different to themselves that are potentially dangerous. It is important to find some sort of viable consensus with them to avoid every hunting expedition degenerating into war. And men must concentrate on staying connected to his families through their thoughts so that they are less likely to lose their ways and succumb to the many dangers of the outside world. (Deshayes 1992, 97).

The women never go hunting—theirs is the cultivated territory. But they do help with the fishing. Women avoid the forest in order to avoid many kinds of exogenous spirits, but especially to avoid the dangerous *yuda baka yuxin* (the body spirit): After death, this spirit is inconsolable over the loss of the body and always seeks contact with the bodies of the living—especially women as life-giving "super-bodies." When a disabled child is born, it is said that the *yuda baka yuxin* has participated in sex and the child is called a *yuxin bake* (for more details see Keifenheim 2000). Before the Huni Kuin became sedentary, however, it was more common for women to enter the unknown forest zone.

Yuda

Every living being has a body (*yuda*) that is specifically defined by its genus, which is animated by several spirits (*yuxin*). The Cashinahua do not have a concept that can be equated with "mind" and in opposition to "body"; rather, the whole body acts as "mind." Different kinds of knowledge are gained through and reside in different parts of the body (Kensinger 1995). "All living beings, including people, animal, vegetation, and all other aspects of nature, are said to have 'body spirits'" (Kensinger 1995). And there is at least one spirit attached to the body, the main one being the body spirit (*yuda baka yuxin*).

Yuxin

The Cashinahua believe that there are two aspects to the world. There is the visible, material, part we experience in our daily lives, and there is the invisible side, which we cannot experience under normal conditions, but which we can see and experience in our dreams or under the influence of psychedelics (Kensinger 1995, 207). The material world is the domain of all living beings, and the invisible world is the domain of spirits (*yuxin*). There are other possible translations of the concept of *yuxin*: McCallum speaks of souls and spirits, interchangeably (1996a). Lagrou speaks of spirituality that inhabits certain plants or animals and reveals itself as *yuxin* which manifests itself as a vital force or a soul or a spirit with its own will and personality (1991, 28). Man is made up of a body (*yuda*), but also by the person's several spirits: the eye spirit (*bedu yuxin*), sometimes also called the real[89] spirit (*yuxin kuin*) (Kensinger 1995, 240) together with three, or up to six, "minor" spirits.[90] Body without the spirit, or a spirit without a body is something non-human. And the Huni Kuin are very careful to keep both sides in harmony.

Spirit beings are able to transform themselves into physical beings, to enter other beings, and harass humans in many ways. The harassment is never in a physical way, the interference makes humans "tired and weak" (*bika-wa-kin*), in a sense that they lose the will to live and want to join the world of the spirits, that is die (Keifenheim 2000)[91]. The eye spirit, in particular, is volatile and tends to wander around and interact with other *yuxin*, spirits of the forest, of the dead. Besides during dreams and under the influence of psychedelic substances, it also leaves during illness, delirium, or during fainting. These are

[89] We can leave the "real" here, and it means it is the spirit least bound to the materiality of the body. It is, so to speak, the "most spiritual" of all human Yuxin (Keifenheim 2000).
[90] Different authors report different number of spirits. All of the informants and authors agree that the *bedu yuxin* – eye spirit is the main one.
[91] This sounds like depression. But this term is too much linked with western psychology. "Longing for death" perhaps rather means that "life has gone off the rails in one way or another."

signs of approaching death. The cause of death is when the *bedu yuxin* leaves the body permanently and travels to the land of the dead.[92]

Xinan

A simple translation of *xinan* is the word "idea" or "thought." It can also mean to think, memorize. But it is a complex concept that encompasses integrative consciousness, intelligence, knowledge (Keifenheim 2000). It is also something resembling an entity that survives death for a certain time, along with the personal spirit (*bedu yuxin*). It can be seen as the decisive integrative force that acts on various levels of personality and determines a person's physical, social, and spiritual strength. Strong *xinan* is responsible for keeping the body and spirit together.[93] The body has four spirits, but the most important of them all is the eye spirit – *bedu yuxin*, which is volatile and is prone to wandering away from the body. If *xinan* is not able to keep the spirit at home, illness arises that results in death. Thus, the cause of majority of illnesses is seen as stemming from a weak *xinan*, and healing cures are essentially aimed at strengthening the patient's *xinan*. A strong integrative consciousness, *xinan kuxipa*, not only brings about a balanced body-mind relationship, but also protects one from exogenous spirits (*yuxin*) that enter the body and endanger the individual.

When a child is born it does not contain *xinan*, or it only exists as a potential which needs to be developed and strengthened for one to become a social person. At first the baby develops experiential, or practical, knowledge, which is called *unan*. When the child learns to overcome being egocentric (*yauxi*), and starts to care about others, everybody sees this as a growing *xinan*. However, the pinnacle of *xinan* development for a man lays in his spiritual development as one learns the chants (*dewe*). For a woman the pinnacle of spiritual development lies in the practice of *kené* designs. Men and women with a highly

[92] For a detailed descriptions of what goes on with the *bedu yuxin* see (Keifenheim 2000).
[93] *Xinan* concept is also known among Shipibo-Konibo. (cf Keifenheim 2000)

developed *xinan* are regarded as great personalities and are the ones to be taken as role models long after their death.

The values and qualities associated with a strong *xinan* distinguish a human from animals and spirits, but also distinguish a Huni Kuin, and his way of being in the world, from other societies (*huni betsa*). *Xinan* is, as Keifenheim concludes, both individual and collective 'integrative consciousness'. As she reports, during her last visits to the Huni Kuin, between 1994 and '96, the elders were lamenting that the young ones have forgotten the *xinan* of their ancestors and are only interested in the practical knowledge of the mestizos, which only has the value, or quality, of *unan* (personal communication). Those kids who did not learn the *xinan* way-of-being, and this higher-level knowledge, are now the elders and headmen of villages.

From my experiences, I would argue that the changes have brought to a general degradation in *xinan* of the individuals. As Keifenheim writes, "with a weak integrative consciousness (*xinan babu*), one easily becomes a victim of sensory illusions." I would add that it also results in falling victim to acquired needs, alcoholism, drug abuse, and in general being *yauxi* – stingy and egocentric. Taking a step further, as it is said among the Huni Kuin "when someone's *xinan* has changed (i.e. has become weak, B.K.), it causes the eye to see differently" (Keifenheim). It could be understood that that person's perspective changes, and that person's world/universe/nature changes. *Xinan* is responsible for organizing sensory stimuli in a meaningful way. It follows that from a weak *xinan*, a poor organization results.

Dau

The ayahuasca brew has been at the heart of the Amazonian healing system, that Luna called *vegetalismo* (Luna 1986), or herbalism. Cashinahua distinguish two versions of healers. The ones that traditionally deal with the body and the physical illnesses are using "sweet" plant medicines (*dau bata*), and the specialists are called *huni dauya* (lit. a man

with medicine), or herbalists or *vegetalistas.* A *huni dauya* is a recognized authority on this medicine with a vast pharmacopoeia and is qualified to treat diseases such as nausea, dysentery, sores, pain, laziness, sleeplessness, failure in hunting, anger, selfishness, and feelings of personal inadequacy, all diseases that are thought to be of natural origin. The specialists that deal with the spiritual causes of illnesses, that is, those caused by exogenous spirits or by attacks of other shamans, are called *huni mukaya*, (lit. a man with the bitterness).

The Cashinahua possess a detailed knowledge of their physical environment which helps them survive in it. Knowledge of animal behavior helps them become successful hunters. Many also know the plants and their use as medicine, *dau* (*dau* can mean remedy or poison), to fight various ailments. *Dau* also means adornment, and every adornment is medicine, as it has the potential for giving health and strength. Beauty is part of the whole concept of health. In that sense, the beautiful headdresses are powerful medicine, as the eagle is a powerful figure in their mythology. They hunt the eagle specifically for feathers which are a symbol of a strong *dau.* The headdress with eagle feathers is usually only worn by the leading man. Things that are beautiful have good *dau*. It has been a long time since Huni Kuin have been in a warfare with other groups, but Kensinger explains that beauty is also power: “Killing another human being has to be a ritual act. You don’t just kill somebody, this is why they went into fight with adornments, when you attack the enemy, you are showing off your beauty and beauty is also power” (from the interview with Kensinger, Gray 2009).

Lately, the Cashinahua people are increasingly seeking the help of and access to pharmaceuticals and outsider medicines (*nawan dau*), and in urgent cases such as labor complications, they accept going to Western hospitals. The missionaries still run the rescue service with small airplanes, picking up the urgent cases in the communities and transporting them to a hospital in Pucallpa. As McCallum reports, “In the Cashinahua view, relatively new bodily conditions experienced as pain and illness require new material substances and new forms of knowledge to cure them” (1996a, 352). These pains can sometimes be as trivial as muscle pain, which, as Markus reports to me, is fairly new and

mostly occurring with women, who have become increasingly sedentary. So, when they go to work in their *chacras* after a few days of rest, their whole body aches and they seek painkillers for that. Today, the herbalists who are proficient with the herbal remedies are also keen on treating their patients with syringes and ampules. I also witnessed how they mix the indigenous medicinal use of tobacco while holding Bible as a powerful talisman.

Muka

Bitterness (*muka*) is a word for taste, but there is no food they would call bitter. The only thing that tastes like *muka* is the drink made of ayahuasca and another medicinal plant *deda*. *Muka* is also used to describe the taste of the last and difficult purging after drinking ayahuasca. Among the Huni Kuin, a shaman is called *huni mukaya*, a man who possesses bitterness which is a spiritual quality obtained from the spirits during the process of becoming a specialist. This bitterness is therefore a quality of the outside world, of the jungle, of the spirits. It is said that bitterness has entered his body as a substance. Thanks to this acquired quality it is said that he is able to communicate with the spirits even without taking ayahuasca, and due to this quality is able to heal the sicknesses that fail to respond to the treatment of an herbalist (Kensinger 1995, 216). The *huni mukaya* has to intervene also if a new evil appears in the group, or even more urgently if a man loses his spirit, either by becoming delirious or by letting himself become apathetic. It is them who we could call shamans. However, in contrast to many Amazonian Indigenous groups, the Huni Kuin prefer to use tobacco for the healing and only in exceptional cases will they consume ayahuasca drink to negotiate with the spirits (Keifenheim 1999, 501). In a figurative sense, *muka* also refers to antisocial behavior. If a person is said to have a 'bitter liver' (*taka muka*), this is a disapproving expression of 'stinginess' (*yauxi*) (Keifenheim 2000).

Ideally, the *Inubake* men are *huni dauya* and *Duabake* men are *huni mukaya*. Attending to both aspects of health guarantee the health of the village and of the survival of the group. Anybody who wishes and is willing to learn can become an herbalist, but not

everyone can become a shaman. One needs to have a call from the spirits. While there are still many herbalists, albeit with diminished knowledge compared to the great authorities, it is practically impossible to find a *huni mukaya*. The ones who had the potential to become shamans were taking the herbs that would stop this process of transformation, either of their own wish or pushed by their families. The reason was that they didn't want to take on the role of a shaman, as that person is then unable to lead an ordinary life. As Keifenheim explains (personal communication) "No family was happy when one of them became a shaman, because then he was lost as a hunter, but for a village to be a *mae kuin*, it had to have at least one. The hope to get information of remote facts, events, and so on, through *nixi pae*, was still very clear in 1978".

In 1979, Balta was threatened with an exodus. Some Huni Kuin who came from Brazil to Balta spread the rumor that everything was wonderful in Brazil, that the state gives huge sums of money as pensions, etc. Grompes tried to reassure the people in an impassioned speech that this cannot be true. It was then that the villagers took to ayahuasca to see and verify what it is really like there. This episode shows how Huni Kuin hoped to get information of remote facts and events through *nixi pae* visions, even in 1979. Normally, the *nixi pae* session would happen once every week or even once every two weeks. In that time, *nixi pae* sessions took place nearly every day to get a real picture of the boasted about village of Fronteira (Keifenheim personal communication).

The Huni Kuin say that the last shamans died in the epidemics of measles in 1951. However, Deshayes and Keifenheim report of a *mukaya* man living in Balta in 1979, so they must have existed in that time (Deshayes 98). Even today, when I would ask them anything about this knowledge, most everyone would quickly deny any knowledge on this matter. It seems the main reason for this imbalance is the contact with Mestizos which first caused catastrophic epidemics that cut the passing of the knowledge from generation to generation. And another reason might also be that after the missionaries came, they would condemn any kind of shamanism as satanic. The SIL missionaries would pressure Huni Kuin people by providing help only insofar as they agreed to stop drinking ayahuasca.

Txana

It would be convenient to polarize these two phenomena, and put herbalism in the category of curing with its focus on pharmacopoeia and its effectiveness, and put shamanism into healing category, associated with religious healing, and psychotherapy, and talk about it in the terms of it being some kind of a "highly persuasive cultural performance" (Csordas 2002, 2). But these two systems are interconnected, and we cannot draw a simple line between a more medicinal herbalism (*huni dauya*) and a more religious, or cultural, or spiritual (for lack of a better word) shamanism (*huni mukaya*). Especially so, because there is a third important person involved, the one who is leading the ayahuasca ceremonies. They are called *txana* (the one who memorizes every song). They are responsible for leading the ceremonies with the chants (*dewe*). The chanters are also called *nixi pae yuan nika (*yuan, the one who sees what happens with the chant and can explain the ayahuasca vision). In the Huni Kuin case it appears that the ceremonial leader, which a chanter obviously is, is not also necessarily a medicine man.

The Huni Kuin shamanism has changed a great deal. It is said that the healing chants of the *huni mukaya* (shamans) were addressing the spirits. Even though there are no *huni mukaya* shamans, there still are directors of ayahuasca ceremonies. The chants are supposed to guide the visions and the chant master decides which ones to sing according to the situation. In the beginning the chants would call for the spirit of ayahuasca to come and bring the visions, but if the visions proved to be too strong and frightening for the individuals, he would sing for the softening of the ayahuasca power.

As the years passed, the elder chanters are now almost gone in the Peruvian Purús region. They either died away or migrated to the Huni Kuin communities on the Brazilian side of the border. It is there that the practice of ayahuasca drinking came to represent the value of cultural resistance to the missionaries and to the colonial culture (Deshayes and Keifenheim 2003, 8,9). The Peruvian Huni Kuin disregard the new versions of the songs (accompanied by guitars or other instruments) sung over the border as "inventions."

Sometimes I could sense an air of contempt towards the new songs, or at least a looking down upon, from the chant masters on the Peruvian side, Bané from Canta Gallo being one of them. In a way, seemingly contradictorily, Bané in one person combines a conservative traditionalist who denounces new tradition, and is also a supporter of the evangelical church in his community. Could it be that the influence of the missionaries also suppressed and ostracized the remaining candidates for shamans from the society thereby causing an imbalance in the health of the society? Without the shamans the harmony in the ideal village, *mae kuin*, is broken.

Dami

Finally, *dami* or transformation, is one of the main concepts, as it explains through the creation myth the state of being in the primeval time. At that time the realities were not separated and everything that existed was able to transform, exchange forms, animals and humans. When an actor would transform (*damiai* is a verb form of the noun *dami*), it would bring with the transformation also the change of perception. Through these transformations, all beings would be able to communicate with each other. With the rupture of the primordial creation, the ability of the first beings to transform was lost.[94] Separate material and immaterial realities emerged, visible and invisible, space and time separate. Every living being ends up trapped in a body (*yuda*), animated by one or more spirits (*yuxin*), and the ability to communicate among each other is lost. However, the boundaries are not hermetically closed, and there is a possibility to pass between the realities: interference between the worlds is possible.

Inner images such as dream images and drug- or fever-induced visions are also referred to as *dami*. A high creative (transformative) potential is attributed to them (Keifenheim 2000). As Elsje Lagrou writes about *dami*, as a noun, it describes the

[94] A physicist in me sees here an analogous concept in physics called rupture of symmetry, or even from quantum mechanics, collapse of the wavefunction.

transformation of images before the eyes of a person under the influence of ayahuasca, but as a verb it speaks of the transformation the participant himself experiences. *Dami* also describes transformation process of the insects, molting (1998, 182). During ayahuasca sessions it is thus possible to temporarily experience the point of view and actions of the other beings (Ibid, 260).

Characteristics of ayahuasca sessions

At breakfast the next morning, Bané said in front of everyone that Luis cried during the session. It was a form of confession that the session went very deep, not to make fun of him. I realized he was crying because his wife died after giving the last birth. He was crying not because he was afraid of ayahuasca visions, but because it led him to the space he still needed to heal. I had a feeling that it hadn't been that deep for a long time here. When I then tried to ask Bané when the last time was that it has been like that, it seemed to me that he didn't grasp or didn't want to answer my question. I also feel how this traditional way of chant is a stronger version compared to the guitar songs; the energy of the chanting is more "warrior" like. However, remembering those Huni Kuin bands from Brazil, you know they are singing just as strongly. You realize tradition is developing, changing. Or, we could say that guitar songs are their version of our modern music. Guitar songs have become in a record short time part of tradition even though 50 years ago the guitar was practically nonexistent here. When they asked me how it was for me, and I told them that I don't want to drink it ever again, they were all laughing at me in this sincere tone of affection, as if I was now more part of them. They understood I went through a transformational experience, and they respected me for it.

This story describes conversations after our ayahuasca session in Canta Gallo, I would say my first successful session in the fieldwork. The previous session was a failure.

Searching for words

Figure 2: Recording interview with Bané in his house. Canta Gallo, July 2021 (author: Andrej Kocan)

The interviews that I have made in Purús with the elders, whom I considered were maestros or at least closely connected with ayahuasca were done mostly in Hantxa Kuin (Huni Kuin language) so as their narratives would not be limited with the language that they do not command. All the Huni Kuin, even all the elders, nowadays understand Spanish pretty well, but their speaking level is much lower. I would always pose a question in Spanish and then encourage my speakers to speak in their language. To be able to be at least roughly on the same page, I had an interpreter with me (usually my boatman), who tried to summarize what my interviewee was speaking about. I talked with several elders trying to learn more about how the ayahuasca chants are perceived and how, and if, they are healing, that is, in what way do they contribute to the healing effect of ayahuasca ceremonies. Only a few speakers turned out to be knowledgeable. The others were trying to wiggle their way

in, sometimes to get the financial compensation for their time that they spent with me. I would ask the same, or similar questions again and again to verify whether their versions overlap. It is still difficult to say with certainty what exactly was the message the speaker was trying to convey. Sometimes my interpreter's recounting of what was said would be very different from what my interlocutor actually said. And sometimes the translations that I worked on for a long time, didn't really make much sense because literal translation does not convey much. After several rounds of listening to the interviews, the story usually became clearer.

Through the translation process I would get further insights into what my interlocutors were saying by asking questions, what does a certain translation mean at all, because, as I already mentioned, sometimes the direct translations would make no sense. And during my conversations with the interpreter, Luis, we both finally realized what it was that was really being said. As the knowledge is diminishing, my interpreters would also be surprised at the things being said and would sometimes be guessing about the meaning, and sometimes they would discover something that they did not know about their own culture and tradition.

As I mentioned earlier, the interview, interpretation, and translation process has been iterative, and the transcription of these interviews constitutes the creation of a living document, because I continue to find meanings as I listen to the stories. This is why I am adding many comments in square brackets, filling in the meanings, adding important contextual information, questioning my interpretations, and noting spots for further research into meanings. Following are a few excerpts from these conversation sessions.

There were many people that I interviewed in the dry season of 2021. Here I will share a few cases, in chronological order:

Mateo: a Colombiana man in his 40s, also posing as a chanter and ayahuasca preparation maestro, with whom I chatted on my first trip up the river Curanja

Herman: the real chanter

Roy: with whom I had regular morning conversations in Esperanza

Jana Horáčková: an ethnobotanist from Czech Republic working at the UNIA

Mateo

When I tried to record Mateo, I came back totally disappointed. Mateo came drunk to the session. At first, I went along with it, and started to record interview with him, but it was all full of drunk ranting. And when we tried to record some songs, I realized he is the same as Canta Gallo's Bané, he was reading from his notes. But much worse this time, he kept making mistakes, stopping, unable to read his notes. After the first song, I turned off my camera and recorder and started packing the equipment. We got into a quarrel as he still expected me to pay him large amounts of money for his singing and double what we agreed for cooking ayahuasca. I gave him 70 soles for ayahuasca brew and 20 soles for his rant.

When his wife came to see what was happening, I told her I couldn't record anything because he is drunk and that this was useless. She saw the situation clearly and didn't say anything. I was a bit afraid that the villagers might turn against me, but I had to do this. I spent almost a week in Colombiana, trying to work with Mateo, who promised me he would cook ayahuasca and direct the session with chanting. In the end, we did cook the ayahuasca together, but he never showed up for the session. After this failed attempt to record the chants, I understood why. I am thinking how local people are trying to sell me the broken culture.

They are all expecting a tourist to bring in the money, but they have nothing to offer. In one week, they are hardly able to cook one pot of ayahuasca. Of course, Mateo resigned last night because he is unable to perform, he is not a real chanter, and he realized he would be exposed and that he had no performing potential. That is why he was drinking today, to muster up some courage. I told Paco what happened with Mateo, that he cannot sing and that he was drunk and how much I gave him in the end. He said it was okay and that he would speak to him. He stressed again that only Herman really knows how to chant.

Herman

Next, I present some excerpts from a conversation with Herman. With me was Luis, my boatman and interpreter. Luis, around the age of 35 knows ayahuasca very well. He is son of Santiago Belisario who is one of the elders and who was running the house of crafts for Huni Kuin[95]. The conversations with Herman happened on the porch of an abandoned house, with Herman cozily resting in his hammock, Figure 3. This was also where our ayahuasca session took place.

Figure 3: Herman before making an interview, in Nueva Vida, July 2021 (author: Andrej Kocan)

For a more vivid experience of how the interviews were conducted, I attach links to the video footage which has the captions both in Hantxa Kuin and in Spanish.

[95] Santiago is Belisario's son, and Belisario is Puricho's brother. Puricho is Grompes' and Alícia's father (Alícia is Paco's mother). Luis wanted to learn to prepare the *nixi pae* and to sing.

(ARCHIVE: Interview Herman pt 1.1): https://vimeo.com/967139688?share=copy

Me: Can *nixi pae* chants heal, or cure?

Herman: "Ayahuasca is to see the patient and see [who] become[s] an authority [such as a mayor, counselor, professor, promotor of health], or becomes a maestro. Ayahuasca makes you see as if you would fly with an airplane. We all drank ayahuasca to see. And to cure. And to learn the chants, to follow the rhythm of the chants, and to learn and follow the forms of curing procedures. When I was ill, I got healthy [by drinking ayahuasca]. It is the truth. My brother-in-law (*txain*) cured me, Antonio Napoleon. With it [ayahuasca] I believed I will be cured. He gave me ayahuasca to drink, a whole liter of the white one, and then of the real red one [the ayahuasca can come out white, which is weak, or red, which is considered the truly proper one]. And I saw that I am travelling to Sao Paulo, even though I didn't know anything [about it] [Eliane Camargo later in 2007 took him there for two months]. And I vomited. Something like pieces of bananas. Over and over again. In the end I had to shit. And then I vomited very bitter (*muka*). After that I didn't know how to come back [to reality]. *Txain* (Brother-in-law), come here', 'I can't!' He took my hand and put me on the bank. Your uncle told me let's go and eat. This is how he healed me. "You dumped all your harm (*txakabu*). You are not sick anymore; you are going to live" he told me. This is how you heal! Then he made me drink again. One pocket (a cup?). Tsiiing, and it [ayahuasca] grabbed me and I fell to the ground. Scared I grabbed the hammock. And I saw many things. Then he pulled out the bad things from me [performing gestures as when someone is pulling out some stuff from someone and blowing it away]. And I wasn't inebriated anymore, they pulled it out of me.

—I turn to Luis for explanation—

Luis: "What he is talking about, about *nixi pae*, it is a being [*es un hombre*],[96] that we drink in order to see the vision, to see the future. What is going to happen. *Nixi pae* allows you to

[96] Ayahuasca is also known as *huni meka* – to mean the resistance of man (huni meka is another name for ayahuasca chants as well), or *nawa huni,* the outer strength of man.

see. This is why we drink it and also believe in the visions. Through this it also cures you." (much untranslated Hantxa Kuin until the end)

When I started to research where is this man, Napoleon, who is able to heal, it turns out he moved to the Brazilian side of the Purús river. "António Napoleão came to Brazil with his brother and family to look for new horizons" (Els Lagrou, personal communication). They formed a new village where the missionaries have no entry. It is evident that the evangelic pressure in the Peruvian Purús is profound, and that the Huni Kuin who move downriver to the other side of the border are aware of the effects of this pressure. Another excerpt from my conversation with Herman:

(ARCHIVE: Interview Herman pt 1.2): https://vimeo.com/967253559?share=copy

Me: "But which illnesses does *nixi pae* cure, or which categories of illnesses are there and which of these are curable by *nixi pae*."

Here Luis first interjects to say that there are two kinds of the curing chants, ones that make you vomit [increase the power of ayahuasca], and the ones to lower its power. With this [purging] one can throw away (*botar*) the illnesses that our organs have. But for this one has to sing its chants, to cause vomiting. So that the illness that is inside is thrown away."

Me: "but who can see what is inside, or which song to chant? How does this work?"

Luis: "The *nixi pae* visions makes you see which illness is it that you have. Or which illness your family has."

I am still not satisfied, and still want to hear more of how this works.

—Herman continues with explanation—

"Ayahuasca vision lets you see what kind of illness you have, it could be from a leaf of a plant [poisonous plant] or an illness from a mestizo (*nawa*). Now how do you heal. I will go and drink. … Who has done something [bad] to me, or is it an illness from mestizos. You are going to have a diarrhea [not clear if from illness or from purging it]. Then you will see the

illness from a mestizo. If it is not an illness from a mestizo, if they did something bad to you [witchcraft], you will see it. To cure from this, you will vomit. Vomiting purges everything. And you won't die. Purging everything. And in the end the very bitter stuff (*muka*). All is ended then. Then you will live good for ever. To see all this, it is being drunk, to cure the others, and yourself. This is how it is with ayahuasca. You listened to it [to me]."

Me: "I have further questions, but first, Luis can you explain a little bit please."

Luis: "The vision lets you see your family. The maestro sees. His chant makes you vomit to purge all the illness. From this vomit [after vomiting?] it makes you sleep. Then he chants in another form so that you react, so that you wake up and concentrate again."

Me to Luis: "You have talked about *muka*, the bitterness. If I understand correctly there are two healers, herbalist (*vegetalista, huni dauya*), and a shaman (*huni mukaya*). Shaman has bitterness, and vegetalista [heals] with herbs, *dau*. So, if I want to become a shaman, how do I acquire the bitter, how does this function?"

Herman starts to talk in Spanish, but it is such a pronunciation that I cannot discern anything more from what he already said. Mostly, I feel, he just repeated the stuff he already said. So I turn to Luis, if he can clarify a bit.

Luis: "*Mukaya* is a man who has, a magic, we call it, he has the "other" power. *Dau* is a herb, with which we can cure, and, as Herman was saying, just a leaf of some plants can also kill you. [*Dau*] has two sides. It has a good and a bad [side]. We can cure and kill with the plant. It is another plant [the poisonous one]. It [*nixi pae*] makes you see what is going on. One heals with this *nixi pae*. One didn't need medicines, or doctors… This he explained to you in his story."

(ARCHIVE: Interview Herman pt 1.3): https://vimeo.com/967253698?share=copy

Me: "What types of chants are there"

Herman: “When you chant you have to chant about health that you healed? Thinking about where you are going. If you are eating the meat that is not advisable to eat.[97] They wouldn’t have taught me had I not listened to the chants and asked questions. When I drink ayahuasca, I chant for the people. That is how it is.” Luis intervenes: There are chants to vomit, this is like a cleaning [method]. Then there are chants for the diet (*dieta*), chants to call the power of *nixi pae*, and the chants for the power of *nixi pae* to subside, to lower (*bajar*) the intensity of the energy that is in your body.

Me: “This means you are like a director of the ceremony.” And I ask a bit naively: “And for today’s ceremony, which chants will you sing? All the types or only the ones for vomiting?”

Luis: “It depends, the maestro decides. When we drink, we wait and concentrate for a while before the energy of the *nixi pae* arrives. And we inform [the maestro] what we are seeing, ‘I am seeing this, maestro’. And with this [information], one chants. For example, like it happened in Colombiana [with Mateo’s ayahuasca], we could say ‘we don’t see any visions, maestro’, so then the maestro chants the songs so that the energy of *nixi pae* arrives, and when we are seeing visions, we say, ‘now we are seeing’, or, ‘I am already at the point [*en punto*] of *nixi pae*’, and then he changes to another chant.

Me: ”I have heard that a maestro receives his chants from the spirits, who is the author of the chants?

Herman (after listening to Luis who translated the question into Hantxa Kuin, replies in Spanish): “No, my father, my grandfather, he knows everything, my uncle, too, they all know, they have taught me to chant and to understand.

I tell them I shut off the camera, because it got too hot and notify them that we have a break. But I continue to record audio. I hear they are talking something about *nixi pae*, between themselves, and suddenly Luis asks me, “did you do the same with Mateo, as you are doing now, Herman wants to know, which chants did Mateo sing?”

Me: “Mateo chanted only one chant, and after that I cut the recording, because I saw that he drank some alcohol, and that he is not good [during that conversation, Mateo was

[97] Huni Kuin have categories of meat: safe, potentially dangerous, and the meat of the animals that is absolutely never eaten because of the inhabiting spirits or because the forest spirits are eating those animals, too.

becoming increasingly and vividly drunk]. He cannot sing, he has to read the lyrics, he cannot sing from memory."

Luis: "Herman has all of his chants in his head."

Me: "Yes, this is important, because, if this is not the case, he doesn't have a good rhythm, melody, the songs carry no energy, nothing."

Herman was laughing heartily, obviously proud, because he saw that I can distinguish his knowledge from the imposters. We ate watermelon for a while that we found on our way to the village on the banks of the river where they are planted by the locals, then I continued with the topic: "And it was the same with Bartemeo [Bané] from Canta Gallo. Do you know him? He also has the lyrics in his notebook. All his chants in the notebook, he doesn't know any of the chants on his own." Luis: "He is not a maestro. Maestro is here."

Me: "This is why I was a bit sad and weary. Because I cannot find a maestro. And I am paying for nothing. And it is difficult to come [here] nowadays.

Herman laughs again upon hearing that one sings with the lyrics [in a notebook].

Me: "His [Bartemeo's] father was a maestro. But not him."

Then Luis starts to talk about the myth about the origin of the hallucinogen *nixi pae*, and I say that Paco believes that Yaminahua brought *nixi pae* to the Huni Kuin, then Luis explains his beliefs of how it started. I should note here that Paco's assumption that ayahuasca can be traced back to contact with mestizos or Yaminahua is very questionable and behind this opinion might be an attempt to distance the Huni Kuin from ayahuasca use because it was declared devil's work by the missionaries. And now that Paco is a true believer he is already steering in that direction, maybe to imply that the Huni Kuin were merely "seduced" by the outsiders into using ayahuasca. However, from the myths about the origins of the ornamental art it is known that the mythical female anaconda[98] – – *Yube Dunuan Ainbu* is the owner of all the designs (*kené)*, who transmits her knowledge to the women (cf Keifenheim 2000). At the same time, she teaches the men by opening

[98] Huni Kuin do not distinguish between boa and anaconda and consider two distinct species to be the same type of snake. According to Camargo, the boa (a terrestrial snake) is connected to feminine knowledge, while the anaconda (a river snake) is connected to masculine knowledge (personal communication).

their eyes in ayahuasca visions[99] (ayahuasca brew is also called *dunuan isun*, anaconda's urine). This makes it possible to recognize a relationship between the men's vision in inner images and the material visualizations of the women in outer images *kené*. Based on these ancient myths, Paco's story could be rejected (Keifenheim personal communication).

(ARCHIVE: Interview Herman pt 1.4): https://vimeo.com/967869170?share=copy

Me: "you are a *vegetalista*, right, but nowadays there are no shamans here anymore, the ones with *muka*?"
Herman: "there are only curers now, with the herbs, the good ones. As I work with my daughter, she had a stomach pain, but now she doesn't have pain anymore. Powerful curers (*curador fuerte*), no, I don't know power."
Luis helps out: "As we were talking earlier, there are good and bad plants … and nowadays they don't function anymore, [shamans working with] the bad plants, they have been eliminated, now they only work with plants to cure [undiscernible]. And with the herbs you can cure the bites of snakes, spiders, ants, and all the insects, and it also helps with pain. And nowadays, shamans don't exist anymore. Previously they existed."
Me: "If I understand correctly, the shaman word means that he is the one doing bad things, and *vegetalista* is the one who is curing?"
Luis: "No, it just means that shaman works with the spirits. And *vegetalista* works with the plants." Me: "Ok, and nobody works with the spirits nowadays?"
Herman: "No, no, no, a long time ago, I don't know, nobody, my grandfather knew, long time ago, nowadays, there is no more. The bad spirits, they are gone."
Me: "And there are no good spirits?" Herman just laughs and nods, "yes, there are." And that was the end of this topic.

[99] *Yube* is the name of the man who learned about the hallucinogenic brew in the underground water village of the anacondas in the origin myth about *nixi pae*.

What is problematic in this conversation and what I tried to see clearly is their perception about who the shamans (*huni mukaya*), were and what was their role. Both of them, Herman and Luis, are painting them in a negative way. As if someone who was bad and is now a thing of the past. This one-sided representation is problematic and most probably the result of thorough evangelization. It is highly likely that only a very few of them were harmful (and had to be killed). Their main task was healing and communicating with the spirits who knew what kinds of illnesses existed and how to act. And their special task was to bring back the volatile eye spirit (*bedu yuxin*) back into the body and thus prevent death.

Me: "What is the cause of illness and death?"
Herman tries to answer first in Spanish, but the words don't come, so he continues in Hantxa Kuin: "Before they died with the illnesses from the mestizos [flu]. If it wasn't the illness they died of poisoning [from poisonous animals]. Nowadays, it is not like that. That hard sickness has stopped. Nowadays, people don't get so sick anymore. Nobody dies. That bad sickness that arrived has killed all people."
Luis helps with the translation: "Before, when our ancestors lived in the hills, and there were no illnesses that are happening now, diarrhea, vomiting, flu, and other illnesses. They only died of shamans. Yes, some of them, now, they die of diseases, like they did of Covid."

When asking about the cause of death, I would get different answers about how it was in the past. A common answer about the past was, that people died almost exclusively from *imana*, that is, from nostalgia for their dead relatives. But one answer was common about the present. It is very clear that they ascribe the pandemics to the contact with the White people and that they bring death with them. In the Huni Kuin imaginary and experience, White people carry cold within them and bring it into their own world in the form of disease. Significantly, chicken pox, smallpox, measles, and influenza, that is, all new diseases that have emerged in the course of contact history, are considered diseases of the cold and are called *nawa-n pae*, which literally means "under the influence of the Whites,

or foreigners." Someone who is *pae* is in a state of passivity caused by the penetration of an external agent. For example, it can be a poison, hallucinogenic substances, or alcohol, the smell emanating from the spirits of the dead, but also a contagion. The person affected by *pae* suffers violent shocks and needs treatment to overcome this state. In case of snake bite, for example, the Huni Kuin know the appropriate antidote; when taking a hallucinogen, the accompanying chants help to "recover" (*xuxa*); only in the case of cold diseases breaking in from the outside there is nothing of their own to remedy. The terrible measles epidemic of 1951 was such a traumatic event because all traditional healing methods failed.

Me: "What rules should one observe before and after taking the ayahuasca? For example, are there things I can't eat. Are there any rules?" Luis helps out, mentioning *dieta*.
Herman: "If one doesn't eat, what is he going to vomit? One goes eating, and drinking chicha, eat *plátano*, fish. When he is full, he drinks [ayahuasca]. When you are inebriated [*huascas* – this is a weird translation, as if they think that *huascar* is a verb that also means the same as *pae*, which in their language means inebriation], you vomit. And then the power [*paenamaki/huasca*] subsides. Do you understand?"
Luis jumps in: "You can eat normally, breakfast, lunch, dinner, a little, and when you drink ayahuasca, it is for washing your stomach, this is why you vomit, if you don't vomit, it [the illness, the bad] stays in your stomach. This is why Herman is telling you, you should vomit. If you feel there is something in your stomach, this is how you get it out. It is called *muka* (bitterness). This is how you clean your stomach. But when we, or when a young one drinks *nixi pae* for the first time, for three days after drinking, one should not eat grilled meat, fish that are still hot, and should not eat meat of a male animal, if you don't diet, this could weaken you. And the next day, maestro has to bring some leaves for preparation of a bath, and one should take a bath with this water, so that nothing [bad] happens. Sometimes a headache, or you can feel dizzy. This is why, in our custom, one has to diet when one drinks for the first time."
Me: "So I understand that drinking ayahuasca is foremost for purging."
Herman: "When you drink for the first time, you also have to drink a tea, made of plants."

Luis: ”But when you have drunk already a few times, there is no problem [no need to diet anymore]. But in all cases you have to purge, and clean your stomach.”

Me: “But now that there are no shamans, do the spirits still exist?” I tried a bit jokingly, to see what they say to this.

And Luis explains: Before the shamans could take on the power of the bird, or of the tiger, I believe that this does not exist anymore, now, we don’t see this. But of the medicinal plants, there still are the spirits. For example, my father, or Herman, I could tell them that I am suffering from some disease, and he could dream about what illness I have, the spirit of the plant can come to his dreams and tell him that. Which plant and how many leaves he should bring and make a tea or a bath, or whether I should drink it cold. I believe that there still are these spirits.”

Me: “but these spirits, can they be influenced with the chants?”

Herman: “Yes. I will explain. You are listening to my voice, I entered in you, you have something that I have, you will learn. When you will be walking, and thinking, [undiscernible...].

Luis explains: “Spirits, yes, they exist, because through the chant, the energy of *nixi pae* is being commanded. If you chant about this energy, it makes you go on a path of freedom? [*camino libre*], if not its song, it makes you too much…, so he needs to change to another song, this makes you straight, and at peace, and it makes you see visions.”

Me: “It seems to me that ayahuasca is being drunk less and less in the last few years. What will be lost if people stop drinking ayahuasca?”

Herman starts explaining that he already taught his son about the chants. But in other places, like on river Tarauacá [in Brazil], they only sing in other language [Portuguese] and they sing with the guitars. He again talks about how he can cure and heal. But it is impossible to learn, how the healing works, what is healing, and so on. It seems he understands that without the proper chants, sung in Hantxa Kuin, they will lose their language. I was aiming at a more spiritual loss, what will happen to the community. But it seems impossible to penetrate.

Roy

Roy is important because he was drinking ayahuasca with the Huni Kuin since the 1970s, with the generation that already died. They would always invite him to drink it with them. Only one of the chanters that he drank with was still living at the time of my interviews, in 2021. His name was maestro Viveo, whom I visited in Nueva Luz.

Roy came to Purús region in 1972 when he was 22 years old, and practically stayed there his whole life. He came as an adventurer, and at first he would trade with hides, e.g. jaguars, otters, and other animals. He lived for four years in Balta, where the center for the productions of hides was.

Later on he moved down river to the mouth of Curanja where he had his own farm, hacienda, for cattle raising, called Livia. They would be working on creating a new cattle race, an "Amazon strain," more resistant to tropical weather together with the ministry of agriculture. But the project could not succeed due to low local demand for meat and dairy products. He remembers how it was back then. He says most of his companions now are already dead. That there wasn't done much research on the aspect of chants. That not everybody knows them and that they are in "the other type of language", the old language.

First, he talks about the purpose of drinking ayahuasca and how it is combined with rapé. He points out that one of the main reasons to drink ayahuasca is to purge: "Here when they drink ayahuasca, in all the communities here, they prepare their rapé with the leaves of tobacco, with a special *ceniza* (ashes). With a plant named *caña de vieja*, they mixed those leaves, and they mill it. So, when they drink ayahuasca, in general, so, they drink, sing sing sing, and when the effect is diminishing, they stop for a while, turn the light on, because they are in darkness, the lamp, whatever they have, and get in the rapé. They get the powder and blow it like this. When you are under the influence of ayahuasca, you feel the effect of tobacco. It lifts you. They take one, two, four times. And they continue to drink [ayahuasca]. They prepare it in large pots. And they don't take little amounts like in other places. They drink big cups. They take a lot. So they can purge. They want to purge, eliminate

everything they have in their stomachs. The excess that they have in their stomach. By throwing up and defecating. They drink it mostly for that.

They purge, throw out everything they have. And so, they relax. They start at 9, or 8, and finish around midnight, maybe 1 or 2 in the morning. And then they return to their houses. This is the story of rapé. In other parts I have not seen them taking rapé."

Then he talks about the visions:

"What you see depends on your way of thinking. You see in line with who you are. If you are a person who has nice thoughts, positive thoughts, if you are a positive person, you see good things, but if you are a person who has quite a lot of negativities inside, you will see huge snakes (*víboras, culebras, serpientes*) trying to strangle you."

He interprets the scary visions as a starting point to awakening:

"This is how you start to awaken, with fear, some are frightened, so the other calm you down, saying things like 'don't worry,' put the hand on their head, and so. But many get scared, the ones who have this type of thinking, feelings… "

And about seeing the aura of the people and with it their personality:

"When you drink ayahuasca when it is not [completely] dark, you see people and you see their aura. Because your body radiates energy. Your body radiates energy! In ayahuasca [sessions] you see their aura in colors and in accordance with the colors that you see you come to get an idea of their personality."

He also told me a story about how he loved listening to classical music while taking ayahuasca at his house. He had a record player (a Nacional Panasonic) and many vinyls:

"There [at my house] I drank it [listening to] Tchaikovsky, Mozart, Vivaldi, Rachmaninov, 2nd concerto, the most beautiful for ayahuasca, Rachmaninov. Excellent. Four seasons of Vivaldi, Brandenburg concerts of Johan Sebastian Bach. So beautiful. It is a wonder to drink ayahuasca with this music. Rises to the surface.....your personality [lifts your spirit]."

This hybrid use is common not only for the mestizo ayahuasca user but also with the Cashinahua. One of them, José, the maestro for cooking ayahuasca in the village Miguel Grau, told me that he usually drinks it with his radio, listening to songs from the radio. And

of course, the customs vary with different groups. Roy's experience with the Asháninka appears also to be very casual and like a social practice of everyone:

"The first time I drank was in Juruá. in Giruate, around the year 69, 70. There I drank ayahuasca with the Asháninka. They had another custom. Before drinking ayahuasca they sat down and chewed coca, coca leaves. They had their pouches, with lime, and they were chewing from 6 in the evening to 7, or 8... when the one who prepared the ayahuasca called...he had a.... [an instrument] like a horn with a tail of an armadillo. This meant it was time to drink ayahuasca. There I drank for the very first time. At that time, I was 17, 18 years old."

His point about the change of ayahuasca use:

"But ayahuasca [use] has also transformed. From Brazil come Cashinahua people, and they use other type of [music], they almost don't chant anymore...The elders chant. He [Viveo] is one of the few left, one of the few still alive. Because all my friends I used to drink ayahuasca with already left, died... All of them. The only one who is still alive is this old man [Viveo], with whom I also drank. He is the only survivor of that generation, from that era, from the seventies..."

About the noncontacted tribes in the Purús region:

Roy: There are still many noncontacted tribes, here in Purús. In the parts higher up, around Alto Purús and also around Curanja. They, yes, still live nude, naked, *calatos* as it is said.

Me: Are they dangerous?

Roy: The noncontacted ones, like all primitive beings, when they feel attacked, they just attack. Or when they see people, they have never seen before. They become scared, they feel dread. They get scared because they have never seen it [the outsider]. But they don't attack you straight on, like a snake or cats. If they don't feel under attack they don't attack you, they simply run. But if you come with bad intentions, they defend themselves, they shoot arrows. They are not aggressive, they just defend themselves. They feel under attack, or they feel their territory is violated. So, they protect their territory. But their personality is not bad. They don't live only in one place. They are nomads. They go to the place where certain plants give fruits. For example, in August, there they are, eat that fruit. If there is a

tree that produces some fruit in December, or January, there they are. They are collectors. They are just nomads. And they live all together, in one big space made of leaves.

If we disregard his use of the word primitive for the noncontacted tribes, his description is simple but accurate. He also names one of the reasons why Cashinahua move further down river, closer to the "civilization." Santa Rei used to be the farthermost community on Curanja, but they moved down the river after that incident with the Mashco Piros attacking their own people.

Me: It seems that Cashinahua are afraid of the *calatos*. The people who live in Canta Gallo [close to Esperanza] they don't want to go upriver because they are afraid.

Roy: I worked in Curanja for many years. I worked with the wood. I went up the river all the way to the river Cetico, which is a tributary of Curanja. There was a part of a group that are called Mashco Piro. This is the name that was given to them, but it could be some other tribe. They came out at the Cetico, tributary of Curanja. About two hours up from Balta. They came out because one of them, called Epa, wanted to contact the civilization. He came out. There is always someone who thinks differently than the rest. But it appears that the others did not want that. His own group, the others didn't like it, that he, they, become civilized. They wanted to live in a voluntary isolation. Just like many other tribes that want to live in isolation. Why, because their organism has an immune system that is very sensitive. […] For them flu is a mortal disease. Because they never had this virus. It is a different virus that never reached them. And it killed almost all of them. In the community. This is one of the reasons why they don't want to be contacted. […] Now there are a couple of persons, monitors of the ministry of culture in Cetico. They are watching that nobody enters the area. Supposedly they [Mashco Piros] live in Cetico but further in the jungle. What happened? They killed that person who was looking for a contact [Epa]. They killed him and came out. All of them who got angry, and they started to push out all the others. They shoot arrows at them. So that they leave. They didn't want to be contacted. That is the reason."

There are many versions about what happened there and why, because it is not certain who killed him. The version of a biologist whom I met at SERNANP, Leslie, was that Epa was influenced by the missionaries and somehow tried to Christianize his fellow people.

They, on the other hand, recognized him as a threat, and probably killed him because of that. Leslie said that the worst thing is that the missionaries want to Christianize all of the natives, even the noncontacted ones[100], the ones who live in the reserve to which I have no permission to even enter.

But Roy never saw a single *calato* (noncontacted):

"Like I told you, I have worked for years with the wood. Up the river. From Cetico, one day further up. One day of voyage. But I have never seen one *calato*, never. I have seen a tiger,[101] but not a *calato*. We have been working at a valley called Chancho. We were there for about a month. Nothing ever happened there. Once they were observing us, but when they saw that we didn't come to attack or search for them, nothing happened."

He emphasized again his dislike for any reason for forced contact:

"But if they see we would be looking for them, as many people do... Because there are people who want to search for noncontacted ones and look at them, and they don't want to be looked at. Because they have the fear of catching a disease, which would infect everyone. Institute of linguistics also wanted to contact them. The Americans. But they didn't want to be contacted."[102]

Jana

Jana Horáčková, an ethnobotanist from Czech Republic, worked in Pucallpa at the UNIA (La Universidad Nacional Intercultural de la Amazonía), when I met her in 2021. In Colombiana in 2008, she worked with Alícia, the famous *curandera* and wife to Marcelino. Paco is her son. Herman Torres Alício is also son of Alícia (but not of Marcelino). Jana worked a lot with Herman.

[100] It shows the manifest destiny mentality of the missionaries, the belief of their exceptionality.

[101] He is referring to jaguar.

[102] North american missionaries from the organization South America Mission (SAM) created village Monterrey with the group Yine on the river Alto Purús in order to contact the Mashco Piro. (personal communication with Roy Hoyle and Chris Fagan, see also (Salisbury and Fagan 2003, 177)

In her first visits to Purús, when she was still collecting handicrafts, she would always also ask about the medicinal plants, and she slowly built their trust. This is how she got into contact in 2008 with the only famous herbalist in the whole area, who was visited also by people from Brazil: Señora Alícia from Colombiana. Unfortunately, she died in 2009. When Jana asked who inherited her knowledge, who was her apprentice, everybody told her that nobody; Paco, her son, a little bit, maybe, but none of her sons had learned the art of medicinal plants. She describes Alícia as *curandera*, a healer, not just an herbalist. The difference is that a *curandero* (she must be talking here about a *huni mukaya*) leads a different life than everybody else, one needs to do a diet, cannot hunt animals, because one sees them as relatives. This means one is not a good fit to find a woman to marry, who are all looking for great hunters. And because of these reasons, nobody—including Alícia's sons—wanted to learn.

(ARCHIVE: Interview Jana - changes): https://vimeo.com/967253807?share=copy

After Alícia's death, Jana worked with Alícia's husband Marcelino, returning to Curanja river almost every year until 2015. Paco was also interested in the topic and was making his own notes about the plants. Jana did her PhD on medicinal plants at the University of Life Sciences in Prague. During all the years at UNIA she built a botanical garden with more than 8000 species from 66 botanical families and collected information about their use from experts of different Indigenous peoples: Huni Kuin, Ashéninka, Shipibo, and mestizos. In her experience, on the Curanja river, Huni Kuin were still almost 100% dependent on their medicinal plants during the time she was visiting them. She says their knowledge is very complex (she had 590 medicinal plants in her botanical garden from Purús), and very beautiful. She believes that the knowledge she accessed still is not the full pharmacopoeia, and that there are also various combinations of these plants. She finds their method to be holistic, if we want to use the Western term, because they cure the root causes of diseases, stemming from the imbalances in human behavior, as when one is sad or choleric. They have the plants for this, too. They are searching for the imbalance before

the illness manifests. They can also cure if someone is bitten by a spider, a scorpion, insects, and snakes.

She would also ask all her informants about ayahuasca use, do they drink, or why don't they drink. And all of them would tell her, "yes, my father, my grandfather, they were always drinking ayahuasca, and they were also using kambo" (using excrements from a frog to induce purging that the Huni Kuin in Peru also stopped using). She emphasizes that the first time the kambo appears in the literature, it was in relation to Huni Kuin. "But then came the evangelicals from the SIL and they told us it is diabolical, that drinking ayahuasca is not allowed, that curing with the plants is also not allowed. So, we stopped drinking, and nowadays there is almost no one who remembers the *nixi pae* chants. And we are afraid to enter this world without the chants that guide us, because we might not return."

Searching for ayahuasca sessions

Using this method of conversational interviewing, I went travelling up and down the Curanja river, all the way to Colombiana twice in 2021 and once again in 2023, visiting other communities along the way, attempting to find ayahuasca sessions with chanters who could chant in the old way, from memory. The following passages from my fieldwork diary show my difficulties in finding these *txana* (the one who memorizes every song and directs the sessions). I came across a few who claimed to be chanters, but were unable to chant a single one from their memory. Usually it was their close relative, for example their father, who used to chant, and this is why they do possess some knowledge about directing. However, I will call the real chanters the ones who are still able to chant from their memory. To my knowledge the only real chanters were Herman, who passed away in March 2024 and Mateo, who passed away in 2023.

In Canta Gallo

Here, in Canta Gallo, Luis is adding sugar to the ayahuasca brew while he is cooking it. It is unusual to add sugar, I have never heard about this before. When I asked Luis about it, why he is doing it, he says that it tastes better. I mentioned that I have never seen this before and whether he could cook one without it, but he just said plainly, here, I cook like that. Later when I tried to organize an ayahuasca session in Esperanza, with the Huni Kuin elders who live there, they refused to drink ayahuasca that was mixed with sugar. The one I brought with me from Canta Gallo made by Luis. Of course, who wants to drink a fermented ayahuasca… This, however, complicated my plan to have a ceremony and drink ayahuasca there, since there was none in the town and we had to wait for someone to bring it down river from the communities. In the end, the ayahuasca never arrived, and the ceremonies were cancelled.

2nd Ceremony in Canta Gallo

The day we were going to have the real ceremony was the 18th day since I arrived to Purús and only now I started to feel completely safe here. And I also only now started perceiving the different reality that is here. And today a big blue butterfly has flown into our house and landed on my shirt for a short time, around the place of my heart. Everybody said it was a sign of good luck. I remembered of that short final sequence in Werner Herzog's documentary, dedicated to Klaus Kinski, when a butterfly lands on Kinski, somewhere in the Peruvian Amazon, and doesn't want to fly away, totally unafraid of him. The moment of intense happiness overcomes me, and I have tears in my eyes. It made me feel a deep trust as if the Universe is helping so that everything is evolving as it should. I told Bané that we will be drinking in the house of Aquilino, while he was away—Luis's decision—and he said "OK, but I come only if you will record." So, I started to prepare for it.

We gathered at Aquilino's house. I already prepared the microphones that were now hanging above Bane's head. He sits in a hammock. Everyone had a hammock except me again, because, as I already said, they are scarce. I was ok with that. Bané started with an opening talk[103]: "first of all, we are going to see what we are going to see, and Andrej, a friend (*haibu*), is with us." Then he warned us, that during the *mareación*[104] (*paenadan,* original meaning of *mareación* is sea sickness; it can mean to be drunk, but here it means to have visions induced by ayahuasca), we should listen to him and that we should accompany him (with the singing). That he has learned from his father and from other people how it is to be done – the chanting. That in the past there were many, and now he is the only one (he probably means his village) and that we depend on him. That we are going to drink to heal rapidly tonight (*para poder sanar rápido esta madrugada.* The verb *bepe,* translated here by my translator as "to heal" can mean "heal the eyes", which could mean that ayahuasca heals the eyes, so that they can "see"). That we have to let him know when we are *mareado*, or too drunk, when it will throw us to the ground with its power. He says that I am here listening to them so that I will be able to carry the message to my own country. That we can trust in him. He didn't want to come, but as his son, his grandson and all of us are here, he came. With this [chants] we can have clean visions (*ahora pueden visionar bien. Pewa*, clean). And again, he stresses we should be careful how much we drink and that he will be vigilant, taking care of us.

From here Luis took over and went straight into the practical matters: He said it is not a bad thing to drink and to be able to be healed rapidly. He said, I don't know how many times we will drink, maybe just once, but with the first drink we will see how strong it is, and how far it will take us (*hasta dónde nos va a llevar*). We would all drink the same quantity (one 2dcl glass). "I always take this amount without listening to chants and I am still drinking it nowadays" (as if replying to Bané that he does not, in fact, need him). "Here with us is our foreign friend (*nawa*), and he will be drinking with us, and we will be drinking with him. This is all I wanted to say at this time, let's drink." And here the first exclamation

[103] Transcribed from the recording *Ceremonia in Canta Gallo with Bane 2021.07.10*.
[104] He was speaking in Hantxa Kuin, this is already a translation. The same is with all the Spanish translations in this passage.

of *haux* appears, it is a way of calling ayahuasca before drinking, to come. The next one Manuel started to talk, son of Bané: first he greeted their *paxui*, which is a certain kind of shaman,[105] and then Bané as their chanter (*txana*, ritual chanter).[106] Then he mentioned all the participants with their name in their language (*en idioma*). He goes on that we have gathered to see ayahuasca, that we have to withstand (*aguantar*) and think good, and we should see our life and our work and also our brothers who live in other communities. He said that before he did not drink with them, but now he will "see" with them.

Everybody listened quietly. Luis poured himself a cup and started to talk to it: "Haux Haux Haux, my child, you were created to be drank, that is why I love you and I am going to drink you. Let me see my life, my family, and for what we live with all my family. Also, [show me] what we live with my brothers and make our living peaceful and without problems. Let me see the voyage in the world and let me see my work, and how I live with my sons. Don't take us too far, only here in the surroundings, bring me to the space of the river and cure me. Haux Haux."

And all of them repeat "haux." Then he started pouring for everyone except for Bané, as the chanter here usually does not drink or drinks just a little. The cup was going around in the circle. The last one was for me. When he was talking to ayahuasca for me, he was saying that after seeing this, many tourists will come to this community. And to make me see what will come out of my work with them in this community. And then I drank.

For me, it is impossible to describe all that was happening during the ceremony, it felt unreal, or, unbelievable. Although a hard work, for everyone involved. When we first drank the amount was about one cup. Manuel and Alberto almost immediately started vomiting, Manuel especially violently. After the second dose everybody vomited except me. Because I was the only one who didn't eat dinner. And this was probably the reason I was the only one "*mareado*" (inebriated) when we finished around 4 in the morning. Bané was singing practically all night. I have to admit he was incredible for enduring so long. I felt after

[105] A shaman who carried poison in his earrings or under his fingernail. This shaman could heal as well as kill. (source: unpublished Hantxa Kuin Dictionary by Eliane Camargo)

[106] This is usually the oldest man in the group or village. He is recognized for his knowledge of ritual chants, especially those in the category of *txidim* rites. (source: unpublished Hantxa Kuin Dictionary by Eliane Camargo)

all that he might really be a chanter, at least have stamina for the one. There were songs when everybody was repeating after him, or singing along, with a small delay. Those repetitive lyrics became like some kind of mantra, that we were holding on to through the rough waters. This was incredibly connecting us all. Because we all went through very difficult moments, as if Ayahuasca was taking us through our own heavy energy that had to be cleaned. The passage that had to be made. And it made us all weak and small. We needed collective support, sharing of our energy to get us all through. It really felt like we are all in the same boat and the "shaman-the-boatman," the psychopomp[107] (chanter in this case) with his chant is the guiding light, helping us cross to the other side.

In the very end, when we all felt the hard part was over, and when Bané was already very tired, the younger two, Jack and Elvin took the guitar and sang some songs, in the style of "new" ayahuasca songs coming from the Brazilian Huni Kuin. And after all that hard work was done, when you had to "hold on for your dear life," as my friend would say, you realize how these guitar songs really do help and do work. Their effect is so soothing and heart opening. It is something that helps you come back to this reality, like a child who is born again. And you are so grateful for these songs. As they told me later, both of them were practically singing for me, as I was the one who could not come back. They told me they sang a song for me to vomit. Even Luis, the cook, maestro of ayahuasca preparation (*nixi pae wanika*), who was probably the only one among us, who was taking it regularly, had a very hard time (well, Jack, his son, and the youngest here, 16, told me he also regularly takes it, mostly alone or with young friends, without the chanters and ritualistic setting). He was the only one who drank the whole second cup.

In the part below, I am including my own thoughts that were running in my head during the ceremony and I wrote them down as I woke up the next morning. These are part of my autoethnography which I consider important for the understanding of central matter

[107] From the Greek word, *psychopompós*, literally meaning 'the guide of the souls'. Psychopomps in many ancient religions are creatures such as spirits, angels, demons, or deities. One of the shaman's duties was to act as psychopomp, escorting the soul of the deceased on its difficult journey to the netherworld. The funny thing is, that it is the chanter who is the only one in the session not in a non-ordinary psychic state serving as a guide. And it is us who will report what we have seen in the underworld, or, in our case, the future, the distant place, the introspection, or the post-Freudian underworld of suppressed memories (Csordas 2002, 20).

of ayahuasca ceremonies and its healing properties. This is important as here I am not an observer; I went through it, I experienced what they mean by “seeing” under the ayahuasca effect and I consider this as healing:

In the middle of the night, when I thought that the hard part was over, and I felt like I am already coming down, I asked Ayahuasca not to spare me, to just show me what I need to see. Only then I really started to feel it will overcome me, and I will not be able to handle it. It was emotionally and physically tense. I ended up once again working through my arrogance. Self-assuredness. My own personal “ethnocentricity.” Taking you through this difficult place (phase) ayahuasca forces you to want to let go of it. As if your own personal self-centeredness is causing you to feel bad. As if, pledging to let go of it, to be more humble, more grateful, actually drops this weight from you and makes you feel better. You might think for example about your ex-girlfriend, or your parents, and where before you might be recycling thoughts about how much suffering they caused you, now you suddenly are able to see the other side, their point of view. Which makes you grasp that you ought to be thankful for the good things that they did to you. For the moments they shared with you and were willing to share with you. It feels as if you are slowly growing out of this isolation from all the others and start feeling more connected. Only through this growth, you are able to realize now, you are becoming a more mature person, a fuller being that is more oriented towards giving and not so much centered on receiving. You become in awe about the Nature. You start to feel respect for the people who have so selflessly accepted you and are helping you now. Even for Manuel, who as a local priest with practically the biggest belly in the village, somehow resembles the stereotype of a corrupt priest. You tend to see the good side in the people. You feel respect for him because he dared venture into this session, even though it was clear he will be having a hard lesson. I remember observing him take the second dose. He crossed himself – he knew he was going to get it. And still he drank. I felt he was fighting a sincere fight with his own self-centeredness. I was able to observe a bond between fathers and sons getting stronger: between Manuel and Elvin and Luis and Jack. The two sons helped their fathers go through the hard time.

During the visions I also saw the world from the perspective of frogs. They were (I was) looking at us humans, observing us, the whole madness, folly, and drama of humanity, completely detached from it. Only by seeing this and experiencing in first person you are able to understand what it means for them that ayahuasca is sacred and that it is part of their tradition. How it connects the whole community. It is easy for us in Europe to think how these people should work more or build better housings, grow food for themselves (and not be nomads) and earn money, failing to understand they have different priorities in their life. In this sense we, the proponents of "progress", are mere fundamentalists, the ones who run over the values of others.

The next day in the evening after the ceremony, I went to see Luis to pay for the ayahuasca we used at the ceremony. What surprised me is that Luis had another man at his house, doing some sort of a ritual. Elmer was reciting something that sounded like spells to me, using a big *mapacho* cigarette and blowing smoke over Luis's head and spitting out through the window. In his hand he was holding the book, more as a talisman, holding symbolic powers that were being transferred to him. When they finished, I asked him what the book he was using is, and he showed it to me: *La Santa Cruz de Caravaca,*[108] with a double cross on the front cover. According to popular legend, this double crucifix first appeared in the town of Caravaca, Spain in the 14th century when the Iberian Peninsula was controlled by Moors. The Christian Reconquista took various forms, from fighting to gradual infiltration by the missionaries. As the legend goes, a missionary who was captured in the area was brought to the Moore king himself who ordered him to perform a Communion so that he could decide whether he is of any use to the kingdom. The king gave him all he needed to perform the communion but the cross, because the Muslim kingdom did not allow Christian objects. Suddenly, a miracle happens, as two angels appeared, carrying the

[108] The double beams cross, also known as the Caravaca Cross, probably brought to Brazil by the early missionaries, was the first symbol of the Santo Daime doctrine. The Santo Daime is a syncretic Christian religion that was founded in 1920 in the Amazon state of Acre, by Mestre Raimundo Irineu Serra and uses ayahuasca during their ceremonies. The Santo Daime incorporates native American, Brazilian and 19th century European Spiritualism elements. http://santodaime.nextohm.com/Cross/Caravaca/ (accessed on 25th Jun 2024)

cross and placed it on the altar for the missionary to be able to perform the ritual. This moved the king so much that he converted to Christianity.

This story reminds me of how the Christianity was infiltrated into the Amazon area, so that this Indigenous young man is using the Cross of Caravaca as a talisman, mixing the Christianity with the "voodoo" practice of sucking out the bad energy from the patient and spitting it out. It didn't matter much that the spit didn't fly through the window out of his room but landed somewhere inside the room. Luis said he had a terrible headache after the ayahuasca ceremony, and that this procedure helps. Oftentimes I felt that the world I entered is perpetually weird, sometimes verging on absurd, and this slowly affects you, slowly starts to change you. It is part of the autoethnography to trace these changes on yourself and try to see in which direction they take you.

Ceremony in Nueva Vida

The visit to Nueva Vida happened after the visit in Colombiana. We reach Nueva Vida with a boat at 17.30. We are hosted in the house of local chief Rafael and his wife Aurelia. Rafael is a grandson of Herman, only 27 years old. On our way to the village, we had a happy encounter. We met a boat of villagers from Nueva Vida without fuel, so we towed them to the village. I feel it is a good sign to help someone as you come to visit them. So, everyone accepted us friendly.

I brought with me some ayahuasca that Mateo cooked, and I gave some of it to Rafael for his feedback and he immediately said it needs more *chakruna*, one of the two main ingredients. He says he will cook his own and that tonight we drink. His wife says that she only drank it twice in her life, but never really to a full effect. But let's see what kind of ayahuasca Rafael will prepare.

I ask him what in his opinion makes one community successful. This one is so small, I would say barely 30 or so people live here, just a couple of families. He said "acting like a community. Organization for the common wellbeing of the community." He said he has

been a chief for only a month now. That he has plans to elevate the culture to a higher level. From the cultivation of produce to his own learning of the traditional myths and chants. And he also said that when he sees that the community doesn't work, he will pick up the big pot and cook ayahuasca. He will call all the people to have a common vision of what is the best way, or the most important goal at the moment for the community. He understands *aya* has a connecting role and is useful for resolving everyday issues. And not for some shamanic activities or supernatural spiritual entities.

After talking with Rafael, he explained to me that he likes the Bible, because now, since he is a Christian, when the end of the world comes, he will be saved, whereas if he wasn't, he would be doomed. He said Markus, the missionary, is his friend and that he likes to listen to him. He also likes his guitar songs, because guitar is "*muy animosa,*" very spirited. In short, he believes what Bible says in the most literal way, as the evangelists do. That just before the apocalypse great diseases will come upon humanity, just like COVID, and what would he do then? If he is not a Christian, he will go to hell. When he asks me about my beliefs, I try to explain that in the West there are many people who do not like the church because of the many bad things it had done in the past and that this is basically just a story. I ask him, how is this Biblical story different from their myths about creation of the world. He says it is not the same, however, he can't explain what the difference is. He says, we maintain our culture, but the Bible is ok.

In the evening we had a ceremony, Rafael's ayahuasca barely cooled down. Again, we were on the porch of a small house, everybody in hammocks except me. There was also Herman's daughter with her two kids, around 12, and 10. They also got a tiny dose of ayahuasca and were witnessing the events. The session started with Herman saying haux, haux, haux, and said a few words of invocation. Then we all got our dose, and Herman was serving. I noticed that Rafael drank only very little, maybe he doesn't like it too much. Herman asked me to inform him when I feel the effects. And then we started to wait; people were occasionally chatting quietly, settling in cozy positions. But when Luis asked around who was feeling the effects already, he told me that Rafael already feels it, while none of us is at that point yet, so maybe he is more sensitive to it. Soon after that Herman chants

his first chant, in a slow, steady pace, with grounded and strong energy in his voice. And then he waits another 15 minutes. Then Rafael starts to purge. After that Herman starts to chant and doesn't make any long pauses for hours. During this whole time we were in absolute darkness.

The effects of ayahuasca were strong on me, it was again pushing me to the ground, but without any clear visions. Next day, Luis tells me that during the ceremony he saw that Ayahuasca was working strong on me, and that when I was all bent down on the floor, he saw a circle of light around me that was spreading to everyone in the group. He said that we are connected. He also explained what he meant by saying that during the ceremony one should concentrate very hard on what one wants to ask Ayahuasca spirit. Whether it be for his work, money, life. He meant one should keep his eyes closed and stay focused when the visions come so as not to lose them.

In Nueva Luz

We had to go back to Esperanza urgently in the middle of the first expedition with Luis, because his father called him on the radio saying he urgently needs the boat. After that I had to find a new boatman and prepare a new expedition which added considerable extra costs. We arrive in the afternoon to Nueva luz with Álvaro, my new boatman.

I tried to have a ceremony with Viveo in Nueva Luz. It feels sad that apparently no one in the village knows how to prepare ayahuasca except Viveo. And Viveo is due to his weak health unable to go and search for the vine and the leaves. It looks like there will be no ceremony here. Viveo does have his own garden with medicinal plants, but there is too little of chakruna or ayahuasca to cook it. I meet the granddaughter of Viveo, Mari, and she seems to command Spanish very well, and she is also very friendly with me.

We stay in the village for two nights. Viveo is very old and feeble, we do about an hour of interview with him and about an hour of him chanting. However, it is very difficult

to understand anything he says, even when he speaks in Spanish, I need his granddaughter to be able to communicate with him.

Viveo was eager to chant and we recorded several chants, but for me it is less usable because it is not during the ceremony and also, he is so weak, that his singing is not energetic anymore. But he wants to document the chants, I feel like he wants them for the posterity, and he gets annoyed when I try to ask him questions instead of recording more of his songs. Antonia Moises Torres, his wife, I ask her if she can sing, and she just laughs, shaking her head but then while cooking she almost silently tries to sing just for herself, as if to see if she still remembers them. I decide we go to Miguel Grau and see whether José has any chants up his sleeve.

In Miguel Grau

The first time we arrive to Miguel Grau with Luis on our way back to Esperanza, and immediately go visit José Jijida Nunatu, he is quite famous for the ayahuasca that he cooks. He is a son of Remigio and Roy tells me at some point that Remigio did know how to chant. Luis leads the talk and he confirms to me that his uncle can sing. After that I present my ideas and then ask him directly whether he can chant, I am becoming more careful because, so far, I have found only one real chanter. He just looks at me and doesn't say anything. Luis jumps in as if helping me not to sound too rude, saying that I had some bad experiences before him. Then José just nods and then confirms that everything is ok. We made a plan that I come back in a few days.

The second time I arrive to Miguel Grau with Álvaro. In the evening we were hanging out with José's son in their house while most people were to the church, but he was instead taking rapé as his way of relaxing and maybe connecting with the spirit world. He kept on snuffing it, I think around 8 times. He is preparing it himself, and when offered I took one shot. It was a very strong mix and of course I took only one shot and needed a few minutes to get back into a calm state. Álvaro of course wouldn't touch it—he is very religious. Jose's

son told me openly that his father does not know how to chant. During the ayahuasca ceremonies he is listening to radio Brazil, or Peru and then imitates those songs. And this is something I have no desire to document or enter such a ceremony. To me this seems as some kind of an entertainment, that we can say could have some positive outcomes due to intake of the medicine, but apparently there is nothing to learn for me here. It also shows that there are ways of consuming ayahuasca that do not respect the traditions, nor do they appear to be honoring the sacredness of the medicine. I am wondering whether Aquilino really is the only person left, besides Herman, to talk to now?

Álvaro, my boatman, naturally wants to go visit his home village, Canta Gallo, because there will be a big church ceremony today (I later find out it was the inauguration of the newly built church). Should I follow his "advice" to just move on from here and go to Canta Gallo? Even though I have no intention to participate in another churchy festival. When José comes in the house, I tell him we are going to move on and not stay for the ceremony, as we know that he is not chanting, and I am in search of the old chanters. He understands. He says he cooks it for himself and then sells the rest. It moved me that he said he considers me a friend and that I am welcome any time in his house. I get a feeling of a genuine welcoming by a Huni Kuin person and that he is one of the few who have absolutely no intention of earning money on me.

In Canta Gallo with Aquilino

Figure 4: Aquilino practicing before the ceremony on the porch of his house, Canta Gallo, August 2021. (author: Andrej Kocan)

At 5.15pm we land at Canta Gallo, even though I said to myself I am never setting foot here again. I am happy to find Aquilino in the village, finally we meet again. After a short talk – I explain to him my experience so far, and how I work and ask him does he think we could do something together in these few days that I stay here? We quickly agree that we will work together for the next three days. I tell him I will pay him as I paid my boatman, 50 soles per day. I will also feed his family because they literally have nothing. I am going to let Álvaro go and pay him instead. Then he is responsible for taking me back to Esperanza on the last day, of course with my fuel.

I finally realize what the church ceremony Álvaro wanted to attend is. It is the inauguration of the newly built church. I was surprised to see that only in about a month's time they were able to construct and open the church. Aquilino tells me a story how he will earn huge amounts of money in the autumn when some tourists come. The number he stated went something like this: a hundred and fifty thousand eighty thousand sol! I was

nodding, saying wow, that is a lot of money and thinking to myself he must be smoking strong weed. I go to Luis, Aquilino's father and buy some groceries in his shop: oil, sugar, rice, fish cans, coffee, *plátanos*, cookies. They have no *chacra* and are not harvesting anything because he and his wife just recently returned from Esperanza, and from Brazil. The community always supports the newcomers or people returning, somehow, until they start harvesting their own produce. Tonight is the inauguration.

The next night we have ayahuasca ceremony, just me, Aquilino and his wife. I prepared the microphones and started recording. We were in hammocks in front of his house, in the middle of the village. Without any ceremonial procedures, we drank a very small shot of ayahuasca each. It was not a Peruvian Huni Kuin very diluted brew, it was a very concentrated one, which he cooked himself. When the visions started arriving, he would start to chant, and sing with a guitar. He would mix old lyrics of the chants into a more melodic version of them and sometimes accompany them with a guitar. Sometimes he would sing invented songs that he would compose. And in between there would be long stretches of silence that allowed me to concentrate on the visions. Occasionally he would check my wellbeing with asking, Andrej, how are you doing, and I would mutter that all is well, that it is working profoundly.

Maybe an extremely intimate nature of this ceremony, only three persons, allowed me, and I believe them too, to enter a sacred space that gave the most profound experience. Maybe it was that the other people, not really treating the ayahuasca ceremonies as sacred, or bringing very low energy vibrations into the ritual space prevented us to lift. And it has always been just a hard work with a lot of purging. I always felt we were just cleaning out lots of low energy that was present in the space.

In this ceremony, ayahuasca showed me a space where I felt absolutely safe, something I haven't felt since I was a little kid and have already forgotten how it feels. This insight gave me a possibility to heal. To not be on guard all the time in everyday life. The ayahuasca, as I already said, only shows you what you need to know, when you are ready to know it. It is then upon each individual to bring this experience into their daily lives. Which can prove to be a very challenging work, with lots of setbacks, and long-term work.

It was the most amazing experience that put in perspective everything I did in Purús. The hardships of the fieldwork finally made sense and were crowned with this experience. And the purpose of the fieldwork, I felt, was achieved, to be transformed by it. I went back to Esperanza a different man.

Analysis of *nixi pae* dewe (ayahuasca chants)

According to Paco, there are basically three types of *nixi pae* (ayahuasca) *dewe* (chants) that roughly correspond to three phases: (1) for calling the *boa* which is the spirit of Ayahuasca—for the visions to come, (2) to control the pressure of the drink, to cure, and for having clear visions, for seeing and feeling, and (3) in case of being too inebriated (*emborrachado*), to calm the visions down and to leave the energy of Ayahuasca. And the director, or chanter has to know which one to choose according to what is happening during the session with the participants.

The singing starts as people start to feel dizzy (*borrachar*). Chants can talk about various topics—for example, chanting for people not to be afraid of being inebriated, or taken by the power of Ayahuasca. The first chants would be singing about the energy of Ayahuasca to come slowly and gently and not at once with full force that could scare the participants. Such a chant is deemed to have a healing effect on them. When one is overwhelmed with the effect of Ayahuasca, such a chant causes the effects to subside, bring the experience into a more bearable state and into useful direction, where one can concentrate on the content of the visions without fear and without thinking too much. In such a calm state one can observe the visions and be encouraged in one's heart to undertake this journey, which often discloses one's fears. The same chant can also talk about the people who ate male animals, to not have adverse effect to their feelings due to that during and after the ayahuasca ceremony.

Huni Kuin say that when one drinks ayahuasca, its property, the bitterness (*muka*) enters one's body. And when its energy comes, it makes your body weak. The chant then

talks about being strong and resisting the urge to rest in the middle of the way. Just like when carrying a large animal on one's shoulder, one can only rest at the top of the hill. In the same manner, the participants have to remain firm during the ayahuasca session to reach the top of the experience, the top of the hill, otherwise one can have troubles if resting too soon, for example falling asleep in the middle of the session. The energy of the participants must match the energy of ayahuasca so as not to be overwhelmed by it. Otherwise, there is a danger that one will never come back from the space of visions, return to common reality. The chant helps to bring back the feelings into the body, and that again creates the healing effect.

I will present three chants that I recorded myself during the interviews with Herman in 2021 in the village of Nueva Vida. The first chant is sung in the beginning of the ceremony, when one is not dizzy yet. When the amount drank doesn't make you dizzy or there is no effect, the power is being called to bring the visions to be able to see them.

DEWE: Nei Nei Nei	CHANT: Come Come Come
nei nei nei, nei nei nei, nei nei nei	Come come come, come come come, come come come,
hudi tae nawandi nei nei nei,	come from afar the power, come come come,
tua ibidanaitun nei nei nei,	the power is coming, come come come,
beaii beaii na tae namandi nei nei nei,	from under my feet, come come come,
xekeakebidanai nei nei nei,	all is turning around, come come come,
nei nei nei,	come come come,
habudukun yumeni nei nei nei,	the first created, come come come,
xanka daka bidanaii nei nei nei,	all the light on fire, come come come,
tua ibidanaitun nei nei nei	Come, power, come, come come come,
nei nei nei, nei nei nei,	come come come, come come come,
beaii en tae namandi,	come from under my feet,
xekeakebidanai nei nei nei,	everything is turning around,

habudukun yumeni nei nei nei, nei nei nei,	The first created, come come come, come come come,
tua ibidanaitun nei nei nei, nei nei nei,	all the light on fire, come come come, come come come,
pae xekeakeatun nei nei nei	power turning around, come come come,
xekeakebidanaii nei nei nei, nei nei nei,	everything is turning around, come come come, come come come,
pae ekedakabidanaii nei nei nei,	the power is coming come come come,
xanka daka bidanaii, nei nei nei,	flying whirlwind come come come,
nei nei nei, nei nei nei,	come come come, come come come,
bene tene namadi,	down there from below,
xekeakebidanai nei nei nei,	everything is getting closer, come come come,
tua ibidanaitun nei nei nei, nei nei nei,	here comes more power come come come, come come come,
nei nei nei, nei nei nei nei nei, nei nei nei,	come come come, come come come come come, come come come,
habu dukun yumeni nei nei nei,	the first creation come come come,
ekedaka bidanai nei nei nei,	Everything is getting closer come come come,
bene tei namatun nei nei nei, nei nei nei nei nei.	coming from below come come come.
Hatiski pae kenatidan.	This is all to call power.

Figure 5: *Nixi pae* dewe: *Nei, nei nei*. Chanter: Herman Torres Alício.

The second chant is to cut the power of ayahuasca…

DEWE: Nane dane dukain	CHANT: Blow blow [with machete, or, with a chant!]
nane dane nanen dane,	Blow blow, blow blow,
hi, a, nane dane, nanen dane, hi, a,	hi a, blow blow, blow blow, hi a [*hi a* is the voice of boa],
matxi keya mapetan nane dane,	arriving at the height of the hill, blow blow,
muka awa xaudi nane dane hi a,	[with] sachavaca bone bitter blow blow, hi a,
nane dane hi a,	blow blow, hi a,
nane dane nanen dane	blow blow, blow blow,
muka awa xaudi nane dane	[with] sachavaca bone bitter, blow blow,
matxi keya mapetan nane dane	arriving at the height of the hill, blow blow,
hi a nane dane hi a,	hi a, blow blow, hi a,
nane dane nanen dane hi a,	blow blow, blow blow, hi a,
muka mawa tenaman nane dane	under sachavaca [hiding] bitter blow blow,
muka txawa xaudi nane dane	sachavaca bone bitter, blow blow,
hi a, nane dane hi a,	hi a, blow blow, hi a,
muka mawa tenaman nane dane	under hill bitter, blow blow,
muka xau xaudi, nane dane hi a,	bitter bone bone, blow blow, hi a,
nane dane hi a,	blow blow, hi a,
nane dane, nanen dane hi a,	blow blow, blow blow, hi a,
muka mawa tenaman nane dane	bitter under hill, blow blow,
muka txawa xaudi nane dane hi a,	bone of [txawa?] bitter, blow blow, hi a,
nane dane hi a...	blow blow, hi a,
muka mawa tenaman nane dane hi a,	under hill bitter, blow blow, hi a,
muka xawe xaudi nane dane,	turtle bone bitter, blow blow,
nane dane hi a,	blow blow, hi a,
nane dane nanen dane hi a,	blow blow, blow blow, hi a.

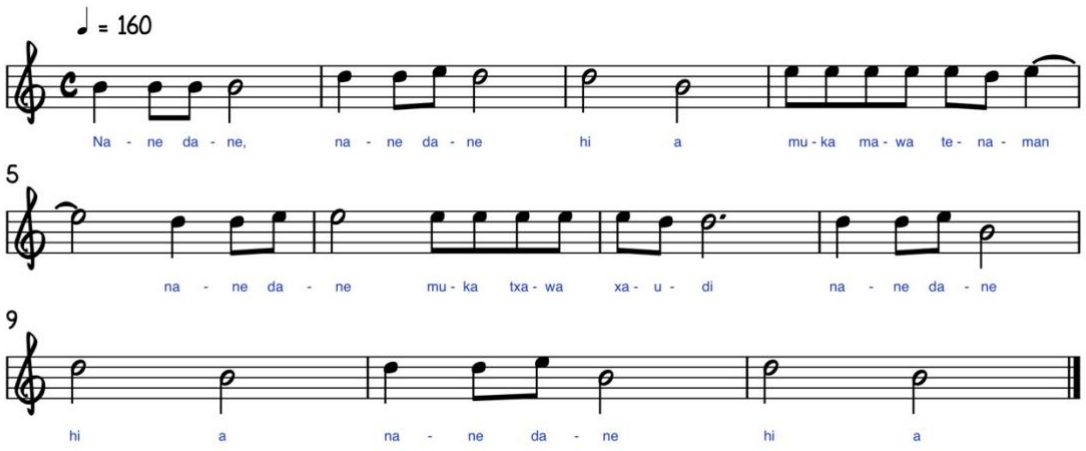

Figure 6: *Nixi pae* dewe: *Nane Dane*. Chanter: Herman Torres Alício.

The third chant is a curing chant, when one is sick with fever. Herman's comment after chanting:

When your body feels cold, this is when you drink. When you are ill. Feeling cold every evening. And your body is getting thinner. This is a remedy. If you don't get better with a [herbal] remedy, put into your body to cure the cold. This is when we say one needs to drink [ayahuasca]. And to make [the body] produce the sweat. That's what I've been singing about. Being cold and shaking the body. I go with that [chant], if this happens [to a person]. [When one] remains skinny and goes like this, you must take this into account and give [him] to take [ayahuasca]. You should stop taking the pills and start taking [ayahuasca]. This is the way to cure. Our ayahuasca is a remedy for healing. If I see you looking like that, I see that you need to drink. If you don't, you will remain sick. So many times, there is a problem. When they take you to a place of mestizo (*nawa*) [hospital] and they tell you that they can't cure you. If they tell you that, we are going to see with ayahuasca. By taking it, one sees the sickness. This is what this chant is for. You have listened. This is all, grandson.

DEWE: I ia I	CHANT: Ee ea ee [boa chant or boa voice]
I ia i, i ia i,	Ee ea ee, ee ea ee,
uke manan, uke manan teneman i ia i,	another height, below the other height [another hill] ee ea ee,
uke manan tenaman i ia i	below the other height ee ea ee,
i ia i,	ee ea ee,
xane huni banani i ia i,	[boa] has sown xane man [aya name?] ee ea ee
xane huni mextea i ia i,	the xane man has been cut [harvested]
hanu danka ipanun i ia i,	here always leaving the sound [making noise] ee ea ee,
i ia i,	ee ea ee,
uke manandan i ia i,	[we go] to the other height ee ea ee,
xawan huni banani i ia i,	male macaw [bird] has been planted ee ea ee,
xawan huni mextea i ia i,	male macaw has been cut ee ea ee,
hanu danka ipanun i ia i,	here we have always left the sound [making noise] ee ea ee,
pae danka ipanun i ia i,	the power leaving the sound [vision] ee ea ee,
i ia i, i ia i,	ee ea ee, ee ea ee
uke manandan i ia i,	to the other height ee ea ee,
baka huni banani i ia i,	fish man has been sown ee ea ee,
baka huni mextea i ia i,	fish man has been cut ee ea ee,
hanu danka ipanun i ia i,	here we have always left the sound [making noise] ee ea ee,
pae danka ipanun i ia i,	the power leaving the sound [vision] ee ea ee,
pae xaba tanimen i ia i,	power is clearing [withdrawing] ee ea ee,
i iai i, i ia i, i ia i...	ee ea ee, ee ea ee,
uke manandan i ia i,	to the other height ee ea ee,
uke manandan i ia i,	to the other height ee ea ee,
xane huni banani i ia i,	[boa] has sown xane man ee ea ee
xane huni mextea i ia i,	xane man has been cut ee ea ee,
hanu danka ipanun i ia i,	here we have always left the sound ee ea ee,
pae danka ipanun i ia i,	the power leaving the sound [vision] ee ea ee,

i ia i,	ee ea ee,
pae xaba tanimen i ia i, i ia i en...	power is clearing ee ea ee, ee ea ee en.
uke manandan i ia i,	To the other height ee ea ee,
dunuwanen isundan i ia i,	his boa [ayahuasca] urine ee ea ee,
dunuwanen isundan i ia i,	his boa urine ee ea ee,
dunuwanen isundan i ia i,	his boa urine ee ea ee,
ha mextea dunuwanen isundan i ia i,	when its boa urine has been cut off ee ea ee,
ha hadi ikin yuikin i ia i,	so he is singing and he says ee ea ee,
ha mexte xunamen i ia i,	this has been cut ee ea ee,
hanu danka ipanun i ia i,	here we have always left the sound ee ea ee,
pae danka ipanun i ia i,	the power leaving the sound ee ea ee,
xaba daka tanimen i ia i,	it is clearing ee ea ee,
i ia i, i ia i, i ia i,	ee ea ee, ee ea ee.
uke manandan i ia i,	To the other height ee ea ee,
xane huni banani i ia i,	xane man has been sown ee ea ee,
xane huni mextea i ia i,	xane man has been cut ee ea ee,
hanu danka ipanun i ia i,	here we have always left the sound ee ea ee,
pae danka ipanun i ia i,	the power leaving the sound ee ea ee,
pae xaba tanimen i ia i,	power is clearing ee ea ee,
i ia i, i ia i en.	ee ea ee, ee ea ee en.
hene tada buduki i ia i,	The point [on top] of the river pole ee ea ee,
awa xuke hewanen i ia i,	[the most] major of tucan sachavaca ee ea ee,
tsau ina kawanxun i ia i,	seated and is rising ee ea ee,
axia adi kawani i ia i,	it is moving ee ea ee,
hawen pae tupikin i ia i,	chanting and choosing its power ee ea ee,
pae tupixunamen i ia i,	has chosen its power ee ea ee,
hanu danka ipanun i ia i,	there he passed by leaving the sound ee ea ee,
pae danka ipanun i ia i,	and the power went by sounding ee ea ee,
i ia i, i ia i, i ia i,	ee ea ee, ee ea ee, ee ea ee. [boa, calls, taking its spirit and takes it].
awa xuke hewanen i ia i,	[the most] major of tucan sachavaca ee ea ee,

hene tada buduki i ia i,	the point [on top] of the river pole ee ea ee,
tsau ina kawanxun i ia i,	seated and is rising ee ea ee,
axia adi kawankin i ia i,	it is moving ee ea ee,
hawen pae tupia i ia i,	singing of its power ee ea ee,
pae tupixunamen i ia i,	has chosen its power ee ea ee,
hanu danka ipanun i ia i,	there he passed by leaving the sound ee ea ee,
pae danka ipanun i ia i,	and the power went by sounding ee ea ee,
danka ipa baini i ia i,	passes already leaving the sound ee ea ee,
i ia i, i ia i, i ia i.	ee ea ee, ee ea ee, ee ea ee.
nai basa hewanen i ia i,	[the most] major sky huasa [monkey] ee ea ee,
hene tada buduki i ia i,	[at the] tip of the river pole ee ea ee,
tsau inakawanxun i ia i,	seated and is rising ee ea ee,
hawen pae tupikin i ia i,	singing of its power ee ea ee,
pae tupi xunamen i ia i,	has chosen its power ee ea ee,
hanu danka ipanun i ia i,	there he passed by leaving the sound ee ea ee,
pae danka ipanun i ia i,	and the power went by sounding ee ea ee,
i ia i, i ia i.	ee ea ee, ee ea ee.
i ia i, i ia i,	ee ea ee, ee ea ee,
txain panu basani i ia i,	grandfather dug up the frog [cambo] ee ea ee,
basa depiatunxun i ia i,	from huasa [monkey] onwards ee ea ee,
mia paen depian i ia i,	power has left you at the edge ee ea ee,
hanu hanu dakanun i ia i,	there just hold on [from there you can't go forward] ee ea ee,
hanu xabatanimen i ia i,	there it is already clearing ee ea ee,
i ia i,	ee ea ee,
hawen matsi payati i ia i,	with that the cold is thrown away ee ea ee,
bekabei danimen i ia i,	is being made ee ea ee,
mia beka xuntana i ia i,	it is throwing you ee ea ee,
pae beka xuntana i ia i,	throwing the power ee ea ee,
hanu danka ipanun i ia i,	there it leaves the sound ee ea ee,
pae danka ipanun i ia i,	power leaving the sound ee ea ee,
i ia i, i ia i, i ia i.	ee ea ee, ee ea ee, ee ea ee.

txain panu basani i ia i,	grandfather dug up the frog ee ea ee,
hawen matsi payati i ia i,	with that the cold is thrown away ee ea ee,
beka bei danimen i ia i,	it is being made ee ea ee,
pae beka xuntana i ia i,	throwing the power ee ea ee,
hanu danka ipanun i ia i,	there it leaves the sound ee ea ee,
danka ipa baini i ia i,	passes leaving the sound ee ea ee,
i ia i, i ia i, i ia i.	ee ea ee, ee ea ee, ee ea ee.
na unu txain panu basani i ia i,	where grandfather has dug up the frog ee ea ee,
basa depiatunxun i ia i,	from huasa onwards ee ea ee,
mia paen depian i ia i,	power has left you at the edge ee ea ee
pae depin tanamen i ia i,	there at the edge the power has left you ee ea ee,
hanu xaba tanimen i ia i,	up to this point it is clearing ee ea ee,
pae xaba tanimen i ia i,	clearing the power ee ea ee,
xaba daka tanimen i ia i,	it is clearing ee ea ee,
i ia i, i ia i, i ia i, i ia i en.	ee ea ee, ee ea ee, ee ea ee, ee ea ee en.
hawen matsi payati i ia i,	with that the cold is thrown away ee ea ee,
beka bei danimen i ia i,	it is being made ee ea ee,
hanu danka ipanun i ia i,	there it leaves the sound ee ea ee,
pae danka ipanun i ia i,	power leaving the sound ee ea ee,
i ia i, i ia i, i ia i.	ee ea ee, ee ea ee, ee ea ee.
Haska watiki.	This is how it is done.

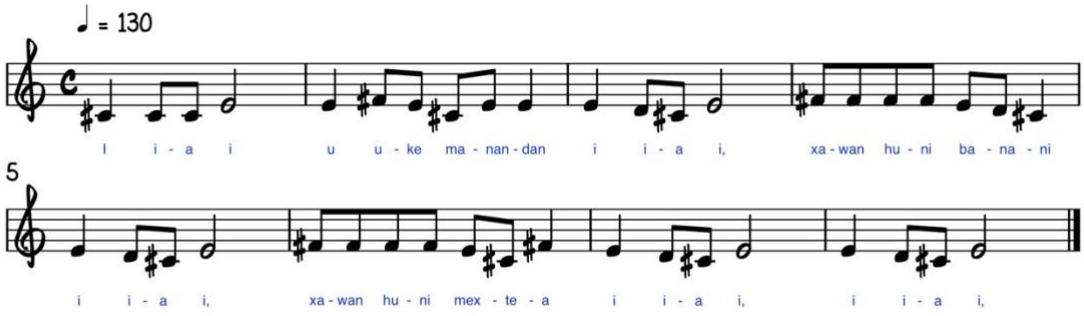

Figure 7: *Nixi pae* dewe: I ia i. Chanter: Herman Torres Alicio.

(ARCHIVE: Herman chants Ee ea ee): https://vimeo.com/968770052?share=copy

The language of the lyrics is filled with meanings. For example,

xane huni banani i ia i,	xane man has been sown ee ea ee,
xane huni mextea i ia i,	xane man has been cut ee ea ee,

There are four types of the vine used for the preparations of ayahuasca: *bakan huni*, *xawan huni*, *keya huni*, *xane huni.*[109] So, he is chanting about how the vine has been sown and cut, to be prepared for the ayahuasca drink. *Xane* is also a name for a little bird, Cotinga, that symbolizes visionary capabilities.

It is difficult to understand the form of the chants, or to discern when a certain chant starts and when it ends. Different chants can have the same melody and rhythm. For example, the melody of the chant *I ia I* stays the same, but the next chant could be about a scorpion and a spider insulting each other. The spider says that the scorpion has swollen arms, and the scorpion says the spider has elevated, lanky arms. They insult each other while they are drinking ayahuasca. It is a competition of power between them. The strength of their venom is the same and it also matches the strength of ayahuasca. The word for venomous (*paepa*) is also used for strong ayahuasca (*nixi paepa*). It is a completely different topic and therefore it may be another chant, but without understanding the lyrics, it is impossible to discern when the new chant has started.

One of my main goals when coming to Purús for the second time, was to determine which chants Herman sang during the ceremony. When in Colombiana, Herman, Santiago and I were sitting together for hours, listening to the recordings and Herman would say where the beginnings and endings of each chant were. We counted that he chanted 49 different chants and he repeated some of them. I believe this is the full repertory that Herman was holding in his memory. Below is the timetable of the chants being sung during

[109] *Xane huni* is translated as blue force (unpublished dictionary, Camargo).

the ayahuasca ceremony from Nueva Vida, in 2021. Occasional comments tell us what is going on. The time starts the moment Herman chants the first chant. The chanting lasted almost full four hours.

1:02:29	Haux!	Herman in Hantxa Kuin	
1:26:13	Chant 1	Paeni taei.	Starting to get drunk
1:46:16	Chant 2	Hawen paeki	It is its power (oh power)
1:51:44	Chant 3	Paean uxaken ixuntiki	The chant of the one who sleeps dizzy
1:55:24	Chant 4	Nuikin atiki	Chant for when you are suffering
1:58:05	Chant 5	Betsa betsapa uinkin atiki	Chant when you are envisioning in different visions
2:00:32	Chant 6	Nanen ixun atiki	The body painted with *huito* is taken
2:02:12	Chant 7	Bis ikaya atiki	The chant when there are cries
2:03:25	Chant 8	Nukun bake betan axun atiki	The chant when it is taken with your child
2:03:40	Chant 9	Pae xabaken atiki	Sung when your vision is clear
2:05:52	Chant 10	Maiti sawetan atiki	Sung while putting on the crown of feathers
2:07:19	Chant 11	Panu anixun xinankin atiki	Sung thinking about what the mother possum has killed
2:08:05	Chant 12	Ikinin ikin atiki	Sung when it's cold
2:08:55	Chant 13	Mai ukemedan mia puta atiki	Sung when it throws you on the ground
2:10:20	Chant 14	Bepe ikin atiki	Sung when the dizziness calms down
2:11:59	Andrej, how are you doing?		
2:12:54	Chant 15	Hawen bepe itiki	With that the dizziness goes away
2:14:27	Chant 16	Tunukuai uinkin atiki	Sung when you are seeing turbulent visions

2:15:38	Chant 17	Himi uinkin atiki	Sung when you are seeing blood
2:18:14	Chant 18	Ha ninkanun ixunti	Sung to it for it to listen
2:20:56	Chant 19	Pae ma buaya atiki	Sung when the dizziness goes away
2:21:20	Chant 20	Nava tsakanixun atiki	Sung when in the past you have killed someone from another ethnic group
2:25:44	Chant 21	Nuku paen datea atiki	Sung when the power of Ayahuasca frightens us
2:27:35	Andrej, how are you?		
2:30:53	Chant 22	Yuan tae waaki	First, permission is requested to sing
2:32:13	Chant 23	Paeni taekin atiki	Sung when the dizziness begins
2:36:49	Chant x = Chant 13a		
2:45:21	Chant 24	Nun ana xinanma atiki	Sung when we don't think anything anymore
2:46:39	Chant x = Chant 1a		
2:47:31	Chant 25	Nukun txai betan axun atiki	Sung when taken with your brother-in-law
	Drinking again?		
2:50:55	Chant 26	Pae buaya atiki	Sung when the dizziness goes away
2:53:43	Chant 27	Pae dasi wakin atiki	Sung to gather the power of the dizziness
2:56:00	Chant 28	Pae damia uinkin atiki	Sung when seeing the transformation of the power
3:06:07	Chant 29	Txi keti wai itiki	Sung when you are extinguishing the candle
3:06:43	Chant 30	Mia hantsusiwan atiki	Sung when your mouth dries out
3:11:28	Chant 31	Nixi pae ama taewaxun atiki	Sung when you are given Ayahuasca to take for the first time
3:23:41	Chant 32	Miki ana mania atiki	Sung when the dizziness starts to back up

3:24:14	Chant 33	Hawaida pua inun atiki	Sung so that the dizziness will go away quickly
3:24:44	Chant 34	Hawen nisunwen atiki	Sung with your dizziness
	Then he walks to someone and continues to sing for her/him. He blows...		
3:26:24	Chant 35	Paen haida bepe atiki	The one who is dizzy is healed
3:27:32	Chant 36	Bawaxun yuikin atiki	Sung while talking after cooking
3:31:54	Someone vomits. He continues to sing.		
3:32:17	Chant 37	Pae udenkin atiki	Sung to diminish the power
3:34:21	Chant x = Chant 11a		
3:35:52	Chant 38	Bakux bus ikaya axuntiki	Sung when the froth is forming
3:36:10	Andrej como va.. Mucho fuerza... he continues to sing		
3:36:56	Chant x = Chant 8a		
3:38:35	Chant 39	Pae niti akin atiki	Sung to make the power stay
3:43:51	Chant x = Chant 13b		
3:47:18	Chant 40	Xinaneken axuntiki	Sung when you have fainted
3:50:10	Chant 41	Kaya wakin axuntiki	The chant to cure dizziness
3:54:49	Chant 42	Pae nitxin xunkin atiki	Sung to scare away the power
3:59:49	Chant 43	Paean iwekin atiki	Sung when bringing the dizzy one
4:01:49	Chant x = Chant 42a		
4:02:24	Chant 44	Banani huni axun atiki	Sung taking what the Ayahuasca has planted
4:03:23	Chant 45	Yuanisma axuntiki	Sung to the one who does not know how to sing
4:05:12	Chant x = Chant 9a		
4:07:02	Andrei, como estas... Ha pasado...		
4:07:27	Chant 46	Unanyamasai axuntiki	Sung to the one who has dizziness
4:11:56	Chant x1 - repeated		
4:13:09	Chant x = Chant 26a		
4:14:09	Chant 47	Nixi pae akin tae waxun atiki	The chant for the first taking of Ayahuasca

4:16::17	Chant 48	Hantxa katsis ikin atiki	Sung when you want to talk a lot
4:19:47	Chant 49	Hawen bepe itiki	With this one you are healed
4:24:40	Chant x2 - repeated		
4:25:29	Chant x3 - repeated		
4:29:05	Chant x4 - repeated		
4:29:36	Chant x = Chant 36a		
4:32:29	Chant x5 - repeated		
4:35:35	Chant x6 - repeated		
4:39:12	Chant x7 - repeated		
4:41:40	Chant x8 - repeated		
4:42:14	Chant x9 - repeated		
4:43:37	Chant x10 - repeated		
4:44:31	Chant x11 - repeated		
4:46:09	Chant x12 - repeated		
4:48:07	Chant x13 - repeated		
4:49:45	Chant x14 - repeated		
4:51:44	Chant x15 - repeated		

Table 1: Timetable of the ceremony on 4th August 2021 with the titles of the chants. The numbers represent different chants, and the chants with the x in front designate the chant has already appeared before.

Nixi pae dewe before and today – chants vs. guitar songs

Figure 8: A group of Huni Kuin after performing a few of their guitar songs in Canta Gallo. July 2021. (author: Andrej Kocan)

An example of a guitar song performed by a Huni Kuin group from river Murú in Acre, Brazil, that I recorded in Pisac, a town in the Andean region of Peru. The Brazilian Huni Kuin regularly visit Pisac to serve ayahuasca to tourists:

(ARCHIVE: Huni Kuin song Barisiririkatu performed in Pisac):
https://vimeo.com/967142175?share=copy

Before, a Huni Kuin shaman (*huni mukaya*) was chosen by any particular sign from Nature, called upon by some special coincidence, or what Eliade would call "divine election" (Eliade 1964, 23). Kensinger reports that during the summer of 1966, none of the Huni Kuin were trying to become a shaman; rather two men were taking plant medicines to avoid becoming one (1995, 218). It is quite common that there is a resistance in the human being

to “divine election.” The most obvious reason is that they cannot become good hunters. And the other reason might be that they are simply refusing to become obscure figures in local community, unable to compete for resources in the society that is turning towards Christianization. The same is with the master-apprentice relationship. When the master is losing a place in his society, he will have a hard time convincing anybody why it is worth going along a certain path.

The whole world knows the Huni Kuin from Brazil, but in Brazil, due to the constant contact with the mestizos, they slowly stopped practicing their rituals and lost substantial parts of their way of living. After the first re-contact in the 1970s, when the Brazilian Huni Kuin visited their Peruvian brothers, they started pulling in the elders, the Huni Kuin from the Peruvian side, by painting life on the Brazilian side as better, to learn how to do handicrafts, knitting, the chants, the ceremonies, etc. And the state of Brazil supported this diffusion of knowledge from Peru to Brazil, probably unwittingly. In the border region of the state of Acre, adjacent to the province of Purús, Huni Kuin elders are given a retirement salary which is a lot higher than the one in Peru. So many older Huni Kuin, when they are of the age 75 or so, move to Brazil.[110] And they stay there to teach the knowledge they brought with them to the locals. In this way, these Peruvian Huni Kuin elders are valued in the Brazilian communities where the knowledge of the rituals is poor, while in the Peruvian communities, due to strong Evangelization, their knowledge would be disregarded.

Meanwhile, the influence of the missionaries is very strong in Brazil, as well. So, the local Indigenous pastors come back to evangelize their own people with guitars, charangos (small guitar) and other instruments. The missionaries also come with tape players with their evangelical songs prerecorded. And all the kids, enchanted by these music producing machines, learn to sing along with these songs from the age of 2 or 3 onwards. But guitars entered the ayahuasca rituals of the Brazilian Huni Kuin on the Jordão river when they were

[110] The first Cashinahua from Peru to move to Brazil was Pancho, in the 1970s, who founded Cana Recreio. He had problems in Balta so he migrated to Brazil. First he settled at Fronteira, a Cashinahua village and, as he had served in the army in Peru, he immediately wanted to be in charge of the village and clashed with the villagers, particularly with Domingos, the headman at the time. After that he founded Cana Recreio. (Camargo personal communication)

taken to Santo Daime sessions in the 1980s. This influence then started spreading to other Huni Kuin groups (Lagrou 2018, 25).

It is important to know that all these guitar songs, at least their melodies, have nothing to do with the tradition of the Huni Kuin. However, they have become so internalized in the culture that they could be called a "new tradition." These guitar songs now diffuse in the other direction—from Brazil back to Peruvian Huni Kuin in Purús. And they start to be mixed into the ayahuasca ceremonies in Peru by the young generation.

The traditional chants also have different energy than the new guitar songs. The feel is the one of warriors chanting, nothing like, for example, the soft angelic (falsetto) voices that one hears with Shipibo *icaros*. The place that has been settled and cultivated for about a hundred years gives another feeling to the chanting. As Jana Horáčková guessed, the warrior sentiment resembles the hard reality that the virgin forest presented to the Huni Kuin in the past, and tough challenges they needed to face. As Keifenheim reports,[111] in the past, the participants of ayahuasca sessions would ram a strong stick into the ground, which they would hold on to the whole time. Under no circumstances should they collapse, as it is very common in the ayahuasca sessions with the Westerners. I did not see this practice anymore during the sessions I attended. This style is also very different to the new Huni Kuin guitar songs arriving from Brazil, and even to the way that the younger shamans, like Aquilino, chant the a cappella chants. The voice is softer. This process of hybridization cannot be stopped. Not only in the form of the chants but also in the lyrics that might be forgotten; the new, invented lyrics, are more romantic and might soon start prevailing.

When loitering around Esperanza, I happened to come across the headman of the Asháninka community Pankirensi. He told me that they do not cook ayahuasca, that it arrived from Pucallpa, which I found very strange. Why didn't they source it there, from Cashinahuas, for example? He told me his sister was learning in Pucallpa with Shipibos to be a shaman, to be a *maestra*. And that she would return on 23rd of August. It looks like she is also an apprentice and in a few years' time she would also be selling her services as an ayahuasca *maestra*, probably as a traditional Asháninka knowledge. Chief also said they

[111] Personal communication.

wanted to build one house for the ceremonies. I am not sure whether they expect any tourists to come in, or if it was for themselves.

I observe almost mundane use by Huni Kuin youth, as for example Jack, 16, who is usually taking ayahuasca alone or with friends, completely outside any "traditional" way. It does look as if without proper guidance from the elders, the youth start experimenting with the traditional medicines in haphazard ways. How to interfere in this is a big question so as not to make more damage by engaging in similar moralizations as the church does.

Nowadays, almost all the Huni Kuin have on their smartphones at least a few chants, sung by their relatives, that they would show me, when I told them that I am looking for the *nixi pae* chants. When we made a short stop on our way to Colombiana in Curanjillo, they showed me on their phones some recordings of their uncles or close relatives who would be performing ayahuasca chants. Some of them have already died, some would be living in other places, like Santa Rosa, a town just across the Brazilian border. I noticed that in these recordings the chanters sang in a lot softer voice than our Bané, and to me, it was a lot more appealing. It actually sounded to me, as it should, like a real *maestro* would be singing, with a real flow, which Bané definitively lacked. No matter what style, or flow, a person, or a *maestro*, develops, this is more important, than doing it the "correct" way without the flow. The proper flow, and in the case of designs *kené*, the ability to weave beautifully woven hammocks, are a sign of embodied and materialized expression of their highly developed *xinan* and used to establish their personal prestige.

And the young Huni Kuin, especially the ones studying outside Purús region, bring back influences from the wide world. The oldest son of Paco, Amir, is studying to be a teacher in Atalaya. Paco showed me a video on his phone of his son rapping. I asked one of his daughters what he was singing about. She said he was expressing thanks to his father for giving him hope. But Paco keeps listening to those evangelical missionary songs all the time. He listens to his phone playing these songs from early morning onwards, while working outside, resting after lunch, almost anywhere, anytime. This is a radical and fast change in the soundscape of the Huni Kuin.

Rethinking the new ayahuasca guitar songs, are they an act of cultural resilience, or are they corrupting the tradition? By tradition, in the context of the Huni Kuin, we mean "oral tradition not influenced by 'Western' musical patterns, socially circulated among a rather confined community, vitality that allows renovation within the tradition, and so on" (Giuriati 2010, 18). Or in the words of Blacking, are we dealing with a radical musical change, or a variation and innovation within a flexible system (1977, 1)? After a careful evaluation, the ayahuasca guitar songs seem indeed influenced by Western musical patterns.

I would hear opinions from different anthropologists working with the Huni Kuin that the new ayahuasca guitar songs are a corruption of their tradition, even expressing resentment towards attending such ayahuasca sessions where these guitar songs would be played. At various times during my stay in Purús I would hear the "traditionalist" Huni Kuin elders, or "purists,"[112] to call the guitar songs inventions, also expressing resentment towards them, and seeing this development as some sort of a moral decay. They would say our tradition is *puro canto* (only chants, meaning without instrumental accompaniment). However, as I see it, it was them, the self-proclaimed "traditionalists" who started going to church and abandoned the ayahuasca use, leaving the younger generations without the chanting knowledge and experience. This is not something they decided to do when they have already grown up; the generation of elders that I was talking to now was the generation of kids in the 1990s who stopped asking their elders the questions about their tradition, as Keifenheim observed. She reports talking to an elder lamenting that the kids don't ask questions anymore. They are the ones who already lack the full command of what they themselves call the traditional lore. And kids nowadays are lamenting to me that they miss their *abuelos* (grandparents) with the necessary knowledge about how to direct the ayahuasca sessions and how to chant.

The young generations are now left with the limited repertoire of the chant lore that their fathers disused and marginalized on the one side, and on the other, with the more "emotionally effective" musical tools, such as guitars, synthesizers, that were brought into their society first by the missionaries. It is natural that they are "syncretists." My main

[112] See John Blacking discussion on syncretists and purists (1977).

question remains: who are we, anthropologists, ethnomusicologists, outsiders, to tell them what they should do with their tradition and lore? Or, why are ayahuasca chants even supposed to be preserved without change? They have all the right to reinterpret, re-mix, syncretize their musical repertoire, as they see fit, or in other words, use the technological developments. “The addition of new styles and items [instruments] through social contact *cannot* be regarded as cases of musical acculturation” (Ibid, 2), or musical change. On the other hand, it has to be acknowledged that in Brazil, the so-called traditional ayahuasca chants and songs are surviving and thriving (see the project *Huni Meka, Cantos do Nixi Pae*, done with the Cashinahua from river Jordão in 2007).[113] But, because this revival provides economic development for the local communities, it is possible that only the more simplified version of the ayahuasca system survives, the parts that are interesting for the tourists, embellished and romanticized for a bigger impact on them. This is the reason for the change of the repertoire during the neoshamanic ayahuasca sessions from the chants to guitar songs. The rest of the tradition could still be marginalized.

However, social change can disrupt the tradition in such a profound way that the changes in the musical system demonstrate more than an accumulation of new sounds. With the adoption of Christianity, the chants and rituals observed with ayahuasca use became a taboo, and a section of the population completely replaced the traditional chant system with the new music system—the church songs and dances. With the advent of the local pastors who became authorities in the local communities, associating oneself with the new musical system became a way of reaching extra resources and prestige in the society. And on the other hand, associating oneself with ayahuasca use and chants was accompanied by decrease in political status. The “purists” seem to have no trouble with Christianity threatening their tradition, a curiously ambivalent attitude to continuity and change in music, considering their resentment of ayahuasca guitar songs.

My previous observations show that I have come across widely differing uses of ayahuasca. From the traditionalist setting, to listening to songs on the radio, or classical

[113] http://portal.iphan.gov.br/uploads/publicacao/livro_huni_meka.pdf (accessed on 25th Jun 2024) The songs that they recorded are uploaded also to YouTube: https://youtu.be/qjjxBHDRGAc?si=rXPZHBrldCTTIKNa (accessed on 25th Jun 2024)

music, drinking it with friends outside any ritualistic setting, drinking it in daytime or nighttime, etc. This just shows that people were always flexible in their use of social and cultural systems (Blacking 1977, 8). I would say that the Huni Kuin are appropriating the evangelizing tools for their own needs. For them, the problem is not that the ayahuasca chants are being replaced by ayahuasca guitar songs. The problem is that the evangelical songs and dances are replacing and marginalizing the whole of the old cultural activities connected with ayahuasca use and with the use of medicinal plants in general. This change, from ayahuasca chants to missionary songs can be rightfully claimed to be a truly musical change. It is those Evangelical songs that have the potential to change their performing culture and with it the Indigenous uniqueness of the Huni Kuin.

Sociopolitical institutions

The situation in the Amazon regarding the Indians is most often described as one of genocide and ethnocide. About one third of all the tribal groups in Brazil between 1900 and 1957 were exterminated while the remaining groups were greatly reduced (Ribeiro 1967, 92). The main cause for this situation were violent clashes with the settlers who were in the business of extracting resources such as wood, rubber, nuts, diamonds, or gold. The other were epidemics caused by the contact. Whenever it was possible the Indians were enslaved for their labor. In the times of the rubber boom, their physical survival was not regarded as important; whenever the supply of workforce would dwindle, they would just do more raids in the jungle. Ribeiro argues that the extractive frontier in the Amazon could be said to have been less destructive to Indigenous culture because, unlike the pastoral and agricultural frontiers, it laid no permanent claim to Indian lands (Hvalkof and Aaby 1981, 13). Ribeiro's study refers roughly to the period between 1900 and 1960. However, since then the situation drastically changed, and the expansion has intensified due to industrial world's growing need for raw materials. Large, well-organized, often multinational firms drilling for oil, opening mines, felling timber, or building hydroelectric dams, moved in. The states,

rather than carrying out genuine land reforms, opted for internal colonization, by compelling the poor peasants to migrate to "uninhabited" Indian zones. This has necessitated introducing and "extending various social and ideological institutions which will control or serve the national society's own members, while 'civilizing' the Indians" (Ibid). The expansion has become less genocidal, but the ultimate consequences, Hvalkof and Aaby argued, must still be considered ethnocidal.

The ethnocide concept gained traction in South America in the early 70s, especially after the now almost forgotten Declaration of Barbados (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs - IWGIA[114] 1971), and it refers to "the destruction of traditional cultures, that is, the denial of their possibilities for survival as viable ethnic units having integrated structures and historical traditions" (Moore 1979). Although, physically, the people survive, their culture has been replaced. Indigenous culture and identity are being transformed and broken down by various cultural and political pressures. The charge of ethnocide was aimed also at the missionary activities; however, it must be acknowledged that the missionaries are not the fundamental cause of Indigenous peoples' problems. The real source of the problems that Indigenous people have is the socio-economic structure that brings about the expansion—foreign investments, resettlement schemes, and national development projects are all important factors.

However, the missionaries have often served state interests in controlling and remolding the Indigenous people. One such example is the installment of the SIL missionaries in 1953 in the territory of the Awajun people in the north of Peru with the task of transforming the notoriously hostile Indigenous people ("*esos indios"*) into "meek citizens" and "docile laborers" (Romio 2021). However, there is also a point of view that the missionaries engaged in many activities that helped the Indigenous people survive and cope with the challenges. For example, evangelical missions had launched vaccination campaigns since the 1960s. The immunization against viral killers, especially measles, contributed to population increase of many Indigenous groups; a new system of indigenous bilingual

[114] IWGIA is a global human rights organisation dedicated to promoting and defending Indigenous Peoples' rights founded in 1968 in Denmark by anthropologists alarmed about the ongoing genocide of Indigenous Peoples taking place in the Amazon.

schools was being established by the evangelical Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), "that greatly lifted the organizational capacity of the indigenous population, regardless of the ideological motive and proselytizing effort of the mission" (cf. Hvalkof 2006, 210 quoting Veber 1991, 1998).

In an article titled *The Relationship of the Catholic and Evangelical Churches with Indigenous Organizations in the Peruvian Amazon: The Experience of the Achuar People*[115] Oscar Espinosa (2018) traces the involvements of Catholic and Evangelical churches in Peru. Focusing mostly on the 2nd half of the 20th century he argues their role was more than just one of ethnocide or cultural imposition. This claim goes against many anthropologists who thought very much the opposite, as for example Richard Chase Smith, who titled his article *The Summer Institute of Linguistics: Ethnocide Disguised as a Blessing* (1981) (as we will see in the next chapter SIL was the largest missionary project which took on hundreds of "bibleless tribes" in Latin America). Or Steven Feld, who wrote about missionaries on the other side of the world, Papua New Guinea, that they "hardly bothered to learn any of the local cosmology," but instead "immediately expressed suspicion and hostility about local practices and rituals" and that "Evangelical Christianity, thus initiated a local regime of fear, much remembered years afterward for the guilt, chaos, and confusion it instilled" (2012, xvi). Or, Brabec de Mori, "The subversive strategy of missionaries is fairly obvious when they forbade forms of music other than their "hymns", which were very often translated into the vernacular language and sung collectively in the church" (Brabec de Mori 2022, 277).

Espinosa (2018) argues that the imprint of the churches (at least in the Achuar example) expressed itself in a more complex and varied ways, and he highlights instead how the missionaries spurred the formation of new institutions within the local communities which affected Indigenous peoples' relationship with the state in such a way that they were then able to become political actors and form what we now term the Indigenous movement within the Peruvian context. Similar narrative is also woven in SIL evangelist's Richard Montag's book on Peruvian Cashinahua people: The new headmen became younger men

[115] The original title is in Spanish: *La relación de la Iglesia católica y las Iglesias evangélicas con las organizaciones indígenas en la Amazonía peruana: la experiencia del pueblo achuar*.

who visited bilingual schools, as what mattered now was not the knowledge of ceremonies but "possession of personal documents and the ability to deal successfully with the authorities in Puerto Esperanza to obtain official recognition and a land title for their community" (Montag 2002, 151). But even Montag admits that the recognition that the communities need large tracts of land for their sustainable living, and the land titles that were given to each community in the Purús region by the authorities in Lima, were in large part due to "the efforts of the Asociación Interétnica de Desarrollo de la Selva Peruana (AIDESEP),[116] with financing from the Danish government and much work by several European anthropologists" (Ibid, 152).

The first Indigenous organizations in the Amazon were created from the mid-1960s onwards in a context of intensified state expansion and internal colonization that became more pronounced between the 1940s and 1960s. During that time the process of formal recognition and legal registration was initiated by the states which was necessary for the Indigenous people to comply with to be able to defend their lands and cultures. Espinosa argues that these organizations had a similar structure and intent to that of trade unions or other social and peasant organizations. As the interaction with the state intensified, they realized that they needed to secure land tenure rights that enabled their Indigenous communities to govern themselves based on their own knowledge. The primary motive for their creation was to negotiate with the state and secondarily, with other social sectors: companies, churches, settlers, etc. Their main demands were first and foremost the right to their own lands or territories, the right to be able to live and express themselves in their own culture and language, access to basic education and health services, appropriate to their own cultural and geographic needs, among other demands (Ibid, 61). As Espinosa argues their actions were oriented towards negotiating with the state, rather than positioning themselves as a leadership body for their own peoples.

In the Peruvian case, the State's indigenist institutions were weak, and there was a lack of adequate policies for the Indigenous people. The state's inadequate managing of the

[116] AIDESEP is the national indigenous organization, in English, the Inter-ethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Rainforest. Among other work, they helped titling the communities and encouraged the organization of the communities into local federations.

Indigenous issues can be seen in the state's creation of the National System of Support for Social Mobilization (Sistema Nacional de Apoyo a la Movilización Social - SINAMOS), which viewed the Indigenous people as just another agrarian community who would need to organize and register as Agrarian Federations within the National Agrarian Confederation (CNA). As with the case in the Peruvian Andes, the Indigenous leaders rejected such classification and demanded the formation of organizations based on ethnic criteria. During these movements the "traditional leadership," in which the only authority within the community was the "chief" or "*curaca,*" started to be challenged. Differently from the Huni Kuin headman, in the Andes, the *curaca*'s role was not to aid the sovereign self-government within the community, but rather that of negotiator and mediator with foreign agents such as missionaries, extractivist bosses or state officials. With the introduction of new figures promoted by the state itself, such as community chiefs, lieutenant governors or municipal agents, or bilingual teachers, the authority of the traditional chief to negotiate was beginning to be undermined. Together with the systemic discrimination and marginalization that these Amazonian people suffered throughout the history, it was natural for the Indigenous peoples to view the state as an adversary, or even as a kind of a boss (patrón). This relationship was further re-entrenched in this organizational process on the part of the state.

Traditionally, in the Cashinahua communities, the leader would be the one who was the best hunter and also the most generous one. Hunting skills and ethics were crucial for the selection. With more interaction with the state, new skills gained importance such as the knowledge of the modern Peruvian society, better command of the Spanish language, literacy, knowledge of the state legal apparatus, and the urban experience, which allowed them to better negotiate with the state as well as with other external actors. These overshadowed the traditional skills. Now the interesting part comes when we realize that most of these new leaders were trained by Catholic or Evangelical missionaries. It is true that without this formation, it would be harder for the Indigenous people to negotiate adequately with foreign actors, especially without allied individuals and/or institutions supporting them.

Espinosa argues that the criticism claiming that the real managers of the Indigenous organizations were not in fact Indigenous peoples themselves, but these allies, who were in position to impose themselves through these new leaders that they themselves have formed, is invalid. The reason being that these interpretations are distorted and discriminatory because "they assume that Indigenous people are passive beings without initiative, dependent on others, clumsy or incapable of fending for themselves." (Ibid, 272, my translation) From what I have experienced, I could see that the whole extended families of such a new teacher, for example, become the supporters and agitators for the church within their own community. The salary that comes with the teaching job only gives them more power. And they start using this power in the internal life of the community as well. It is exactly because they are active beings that their strong proselytizing activity becomes successful in evangelizing their whole communities. It is through the initiative of the whole family (or a clan) that they are able to get a better position in the struggle for the resources and in the internal power struggles and steer the communities in the direction that they are convinced is good for them and the community. And their opinion is strongly influenced by the church.

I remember well when I went to visit the house of my first hosts in Canta Gallo at the very end of my fieldwork. This was after I left them and returned to Canta Gallo only to work with Aquilino. I just wanted to make a polite greeting and express my thanks, to clear any resentment that they might hold. I found only Bané and his grandson, Kenedy, the teacher, there. And their reception was a bit cold. They realized I am not under their influence anymore and that I am working with Aquilino, who refuses to go to church for any of their ceremonies. Bané would say that it is God who is controlling everything in the world, including here in the village, and is the supreme authority. And this was repeated by his grandson, the young teacher, as a sort of a warning that I should not forget this. God is on their side; their biggest ally and they are about to prevail. They understood very well that the more church goers they have, the bigger their influence and power. To me it was all quite sinister, and I was glad to be out of their house quickly and that they did not offer me anything that would keep me there longer. With this visit and the ensuing conversation, I

knew that the menacing grimace I had seen on Bané's face when I was under the light influence of a daytime ayahuasca that I had taken once to, as Luis said, "see more clearly the daily things," was the true one. Or Roy would put it, with ayahuasca you come to see the aura of the person. It was clear that they were no longer my allies and perceived me as a potential disruptor to their influence.

If before the man-hunter was the main and the only provider of the most valued good, the meat (Deshayes and Keifenheim 2003, 77), this has irreversibly changed with the introduction of the new institutions. As Luis my boatman says in my movie, now everything works through and with money. One does not need to be a good hunter to achieve prestige in a society. One can be a teacher or a pastor. The seasonal workers do not achieve any prestige. Translators, and as of recently, lawyers, do. If there were tourism, even a shaman would be able to achieve a high prestige with his way of earning money. In this regard, tourism would not function as a cause for decline of traditional shamanism, rather, young men could choose this way to earn and provide for their families. If in the 60s the youth who were predisposed to be shamans were choosing to take plant medicines that stops their developing into a shaman, because they lose the ability to become good hunters and with this lose status as a good husband, this would not be so anymore. The main question is whether the system and knowledge of becoming a shaman (*huni mukaya*) still exists.

Church in Latin America

The role of the Roman Catholic Church was crucial in the formation of modern Latin American nations. Only a year after the "discovery of America" by Christopher Columbus in 1492, the church and the state were officially joined to carry out the spiritual and military conquest of the New World for the Roman Pontiff and the Spanish king and queen. It is to be emphasized here that what they really brought to these lands was the state religion,[117]

[117] The state religion perceives direct connection with the spiritual realm as dangerous, even when restricted to an elite few, as it will sooner or later come into conflict with the orthodox dogma that is fundamental to the ideological structure of the state religions (Harner 1973, 7).

as opposed a personal faith and ethics, which meant a hierarchical religious structure closely associated with the state. This Church-State type of authoritarian absolutism dominated all facets of life for almost 500 years. There were a few Protestant colonies established in Venezuela and Brazil already during the 16th century; however, this did not change the fact that this was a Roman Catholic continent with a very small protestant minority which was often persecuted. The protestant churches in this situation had to defend their right even to exist in Latin America as non-Roman Catholic Christians, and supposedly defended religious freedom. They were, of course, in reality there to spread the Christian faith as understood from a non-Roman Catholic perspective (Larsen and Treier 2007, 260).

With the beginning of the second half of the 20th century, the situation changed. For some, the proliferation of Protestantism in Latin America is proof of the complete US cultural conquest of the region and a by-product of US foreign policy. It is broadly accepted that North American missions played a parenting role for Latin American Protestantism. With the revolutionary movements such as civil rights movements in the US, the independence movements in Africa and movements for social justice in Latin America, things have changed considerably. Theology had to answer the challenges of the era. Latin America in the 1960s was in an explosive situation. The growth of poverty was exacerbated by fast-growing urbanization and industrialization. Internal corruption and international exploitation were rampant. Everyone (the establishment) was afraid that the Cuban revolution that toppled the right-wing government in 1959, could happen in any of the Latin American states at any time. Labor and student movements, encouraged by the triumph of the Cuban revolution, considered that the time was ripe to overthrow US imperialism. Many young people, including university students, joined guerrilla groups in several countries[118]. Both Catholic and Evangelical[119] theologians had to ask themselves what their role was in a

[118] In Guatemala, after the coup orchestrated by the CIA in 1954 against Árbenz government, Marxist guerrillas fight the right-wing government in the 1960s. Also in Dominican Republic, after the president of the leftist government, Juan Bosch, is deposed in 1963 coup, two years later revolt erupts and the United States, fearful of a communist revolution, sent troops to end it.

[119] “Evangélicos” is a common term in Latin America for Protestants, hence "evangelical" is often used as an umbrella term.

region generally regarded as Christian but deeply affected by increasing poverty and social unrest. This led to the first wave of highly politicized missionary activity from the United States. Spearheaded by a nondenominational parachurch organization called Latin American Mission, it lasted from 1959 to about 1970. It advocated moderate political reform while warning of the dangers of communism. After the Sandinistas toppled the dictatorship of the Somoza family in Nicaragua in 1979, which was sponsored by the US since 1936, the fear of the communism struck again and spawned the second wave of anticommunist missionary activity in Latin America (Stoll and Garrard 1993, 200).

After the second half of the 20th century, the number of Roman Catholics was rapidly falling and the number of Evangelicals has been growing proportionately. The Catholic Church tried to respond to the needs of the Latin American poor with "liberation theology." The vision was a bold one, the still hegemonic established church leading a defense of community against the combined forces of military dictatorship and world capitalism (Stoll and Garrard 1993, 5). However, instead of successfully reaching the poor, it instead opened itself to the reprisals of the state. It seems that the Evangelical church was more successful, in face of appalling oppression and poverty, to seize this "opportunity" and address and respond to these social issues before, or better than, the Catholic church did.

Pentecostalism

Pentecostalists are a section of the Evangelical churches, who until recently, have been considered outcasts in the North American pedigree. What distinguishes them from other non-Pentecostal Evangelical strains is that they claim to receive special gifts from the Holy Spirit, like speaking in tongues, faith healing, and prophecy. There have been several waves of Evangelical missionary activity in Latin America. The first two waves happened at the end of 19th and beginning of 20th century, with immigrant churches from Europe (such as the German Lutherans of Brazil), and mainline Evangelical denominations from the US. The third wave was comprised of fundamentalist "faith missions." None of these three

waves succeeded in converting large numbers of people. Only the fourth wave, comprised of Pentecostalists was really successful, and to such an extent, that two thirds up to three-quarters of all the protestants in Latin America are Pentecostals (Stoll and Garrard 1993, 3). It was suggested that in this light, Evangelicals should be considered a subset of Pentecostals and not the other way around. Rising Pentecostal church membership has been going on not only in South America, but is a global phenomenon, not just in the developing world; Pentecostal churches have found appeal everywhere, especially "among those made marginal by the history of colonial expansion and by continuing ebb and flow of capital penetration" (Dombrowski 2002, 181).

In Christian Pentecostalism, trancing accompanied by music is a core feature of religious practice (Becker 2004, 1) which might explain their explosive growth worldwide. Such Christian trancing belies the popular association of trancing with peoples from underdeveloped or developing nation-states only (Ibid). This is especially problematic for the Indigenous communities where the locals, by transferring to this religion and abandoning their traditional practices, are losing their whole cosmology, and thus their "social organization, kin relationships, subsistence practices," rather than only that "particular domain that we call 'religion'" (Telban 2013, 82). The activities of Pentecostal and other fundamentalist churches, are rising all over the world and may be one of the greatest factors of change, seen as a threat by many, to Indigenous cultures all over the world.

The reason why I mention Pentecostalism as one of the primary forces in the field is my experience when I attended one of the church ceremonies in the village of Canta Gallo. I would usually avoid, or at least bypass, church services so as not to legitimize their activities. However, when I witnessed what was happening in there, during what is called the *Reconciliación* of the worship service, the *culto*, it shocked me. I realized that my hosts, my "friends," who were professing to me their support for their own traditional indigenous ceremonial and spiritual practices, are actively participating in proselytizing evangelicalism, and are the main local support for the church in the community. I had to reassess everything I thought about these missionary activities and how profoundly they change the culture. To

me, it was easier to see, or to realize, that the evangelical activity of this family is leading to their upward mobility, but more difficult to see whether the presence of an evangelical church in the community will be able to help it as a whole, or how. For example, they would build a church in July 2021, but it seemed that building a clean water well was not a priority there. They did not have even one well with reliable clean water in Canta Gallo. The following is a description of the church ceremony that I accidentally attended at the community of Canta Gallo.

Church ceremony in Canta Gallo

Just before going back to the town of Esperanza, leaving Canta Gallo, on Sunday morning I was a witness to the church ceremony, or *culto* as they call it here. I would call it (self-)Christianization of the local people. Brabec calls this neo-colonization of mind, or self-colonizing (2022). A "normal" church service turned out in the end into some form of exorcism of the sins. With a hymnic music played in the background by the young local pastor on the synthesizer, two pastors who came together from Esperanza were leading the ceremony. One of them was the church leader, Walter Bela, the other Indigenous-looking one was his assistant, José Teixeira, the one with the most charisma. He was mostly very reserved and modest until the charismatic part came, and he got obviously inspired and started blessing the people, calling halleluiahs and reciting some biblical verses or improvising. It was a very hypnotic moment for the locals who were completely immersed into the performance, and bowing their heads they received their sacraments, blessings and forgiveness for their sins. It was surprising to see among them Luis, who was completely immersed, holding his own copy of Bible in Hantxa Kuin in his hands, and also the headman of the village. The effects of "such soul penetrating colonial imagery" (Taussig 1987, 381) and music on Huni Kuin can be seen in my movie.

Some locals do believe that everything written in the Bible is literal truth. I remember when I was still staying at Roque family in Canta Gallo, when I brought home

from Luis a book about medicinal plants, written by Brazilian Huni Kuin, and which is a precious document of local knowledge, Bané started bragging he has many more books on their local knowledge, and even more important ones. The next morning, he brought me a thick book, very proud, his whole body saying, "look, here it is written everything." I realized he was holding his own copy of the Bible translated into Hantxa Kuin. I told him that I am not interested in that, that this is not the traditional knowledge, that we have a lot of this in Europe. But I felt he didn't quite understand me. He was like, "look, Matthew, here, he is sowing the seeds…" I was disappointed to see that he did not distinguish this book from the ones about their local knowledge and myths. It really seemed like they either did not distinguish their local myths from the ones in the Bible or are simply convinced that what is written in the Bible is "truer" than their unwritten myths. That the stories they are receiving from the missionaries carry greater weight just because they are written down. I wondered if it was only Bané who was so naïve, together with his son Manuel. To me this showed that the Huni Kuin are easily adopting the new religion that offers salvation after death which shows a fragility of their cosmovision in regard to influx of new religious ideas.

In fact, some elders here are perceiving themselves as very connected with the old natural (Huni Kuin) way-of-living. Bané, when talking about their lifestyle, likes to repeat that it is simply "*pura natura.*" And to this even the people around him were laughing. I saw that they mostly dabbled with and preferred Western pharmaceuticals (*nawan dau*) for any ailment. They ate rice they bought, sugar, powdered milk, soya oil, granulated coffee, fish cans, potatoes, onions, tomatoes, ginger, garlic and *farinha* (yucca shredded and baked into grains; in the communities further away from Esperanza, along Curanja, they still make their own *farinha* whenever they can), cookies, pasta, spices (glutamate). When they would run out of everything, only then they would go fishing. When they were buying food, they would rather buy chips and cookies than *cartuchos* (cartridges for shotgun, that are sold in the grocery stores as well) that would help them hunt the game.

Later, in Colombiana, while drinking coffee with the women of Paco's family, I showed them my photos on my computer and when we get to that *reconciliación* ritual led by the church pastor from Esperanza in Canta Gallo, I asked them if something like this was

also happening there. They said yes, it did, and that Markus and Jairo were leading this activity. So, I finally had the full picture of Markus' activity and about Jairo becoming his assistant.

Summer Institute of Linguistics

When Roy, in one of our morning discussions, started to talk about the *Instituto Lingüístico de Verano* (Summer Institute of Linguistics - SIL), I didn't know the scope of their operation. I later found out they were missionaries who were posing as linguists, so they could operate in many countries south of the US border. In the Purús region alone they had three airplane runways in the local communities: Balta, San Marcos (village of Sharanahua on Alto Purús) and San Bernardo (village of Culina downriver from Puerto Esperanza). They were fully autonomous in their operations. SIL collaborated with other Protestant missionary agencies, such as the South America Mission (SAM) and the Misión Suiza en el Perú (MSP) (Capredon and Grillot 2022); the latter was also very present in Purús region. They were all around to influence the native people.

Because of its size the evangelical missionary organization SIL is a special case. It was founded in the United States in 1934[120] by William Cameron Townsend (1896-1982) and played an important role also in Purús. SIL was known in the US as The Wycliffe Bible Translators Inc. (WBT); it was an openly religious organization created to satisfy the US fundamentalist promoters. While WBT was responsible for raising funds in the US, the mirror organization, SIL, seemingly a non-religious organization, was carrying out the actual missionary work (Hvalkof and Aaby 1981, 9). In reality, the two formed a single organization,

[120] In 1935 the Christian organization called The Fellowship Foundation was formed in Washington Seattle to address the so called "crisis"—the rise of labor unions. The unions were deemed by its founder, Vereide, the agents of the enemy (of the leaders of industry who consider their wealth must be protected by force), in other words, they are doing a Satanic work. The purpose of the organization was to produce Christian leadership. (The Family, E3, Netflix 2019). Similar motivation was behind the SIL: "For the SIL missionaries, Satan is not just an abstract concept [… h]e is, instead, a very real social incarnation whose clearest manifestation is Communism." (Hvalkof and Aaby 1981, 11)

with identical lists of members and leaders (Stoll 1982). After the Second World War, SIL/WBT expanded in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. It was the world's largest Protestant missionary society in terms of members sent abroad.

In 2020 SIL reported it had 1,350 language projects in 104 countries and 4,300 employees from 89 countries.[121] Officially SIL's main function was to teach local people literacy and they appealed to anthropology and linguistics as part of their activities. But, according to Hvalkof and Aaby and other authors of the book *Is God an American* (1981), their real agenda was to translate the Bible into their own languages and therefore to proselytize them. As Hvalkof writes in a response to the criticism of their book, he stresses that what is important is: "The WBT/SIL's veil over its own intentions has been an attempt to deceive the public as well as Catholic interests. When this results in accusations that SIL is a branch of the CIA and US imperialism, it only serves to gloss over those forces which are truly responsible for the Indians' plight" (Hvalkof and Stipe 1984, 124). The main issue for me as a researcher is not so much the imperialist agenda, but the consequences of their work on the local level—the imposed change of cosmology, or, as Elsje Lagrou said: "A silent conquest of the whole Amazon, an uninterrupted harassment of colonizer missionaries of all creeds."[122]

The goal of the SIL was to make dictionaries of all the Amazonic languages and translate Bible into all of them. The SIL strategy was to translate the Bible into Indigenous languages with the help of carefully chosen informants. The missionaries would operate in the communities and after a while take a few chosen ones to their base in Yarinacocha, a smaller town near Pucallpa for intensive training. Their centers were crucial to their way of operating; there were language laboratories, hospitals, libraries, air base, schools for missionaries' children, modern American-style houses, gardens.[123] They would take the whole families together with little kids and work for years with them. The missionaries would instill the new faith and when they would return to the communities, they would be

[121] https://www.linkedin.com/company/sil-international (accessed on 25th Jun 2024)
[122] https://youtu.be/5TH6Rnxct7Q?si=xuKYR8KXz0x5ueq0 (accessed on 25th Jun 2024)
[123] On the ground of the former SIL center in Yarinacocha is now situated the UNIA university.

the ones to work as the teachers in the bilingual schools that the missions had set up, and as pastors.

Another new authority would be the health promoter, a local man, preferably the village headman who would work under their guidance and manage the medicine store house that they would also set up in the community. These new authorities were the only ones who had salaries, so it was easy for them to be the most generous ones. They could travel down the river to town and bring things to gift, things that were always missing: salt, sugar, soap. This way they could become village chiefs. And this is how the hierarchy in the community completely changed. Christians became leaders and helped make leaders Christian.

As Keifenheim and Deshayes write in the 1980s about the presence of the SIL missionaries and the community of Balta: "The predominance of white medicine, as well as the existence of a school in Balta, are two elements capable of modifying, over time, the traditional life of the Huni Kuin" (2003, 26 my translation). The missionaries would also keep the radio connection with the communities and bring in supplies with an airplane every three weeks or so. But this necessitated the building of a landing strip. This is the reason why they did not approve of Huni Kuin changing the location of their villages every few years. This is why the missionaries emphasized the benefits of becoming sedentary, namely having the school and health services and through the influence of the headman convinced the people to stay. The Huni Kuin community of Balta as the center of the SIL mission became the biggest community on the river Curanja. The other center was the community of Conta on the Purús river, which was gravitating towards the mestizo center Puerto Esperanza.

The SIL project in Purús was terminated in 1999. As of now there are at least four different Pentecostal churches operating in Esperanza: Movimiento Misionero Mundial, Iglesia Pentecostal Dios es Amor Misión Evangélica Cristiana, Assambleia de Deus, Asociación de Seguidores (Roy Hoyle personal communication). Catholics are present with Misión Santa Rosa. As Roy told me, Richard Montag Christianized all of them and most of the congregants are Huni Kuin.

Markus the German missionary

During my stay in Colombiana in 2023 I often visited Markus and we had long discussions at his house. I also did an interview with him after he saw my movie and his comments proved to be very valuable. I have to say that he is different from the charismatic type of a pastor. He is a very modest man who tries to lead with his example: working in the fields, living his Christian faith. He is a kind, helping, honest, hardworking man. His Bible centrism is influencing the ayahuasca practice in the village because he does repeat the usual disparaging fundamentalist Christian belief that it is a Devil's weed. It is here that his conservative Christian stance meets the charismatic one. I voiced my opinion about that. When I asked him which church he belongs to, he replied he is a free Christian. That such Christians would not even like to be named, or have a name to go by, they just want to live by Christian morals: doing to others what you also would like others do to you. This resembles early Christianity when they were only interested in overcoming human nature and directed themselves towards the divine. I observed that my energy training—a practice of overcoming our usual vices, habits, resembles his path that he calls "becoming a true Christian." And if we both agreed that charismatic preaching is highly problematic and negative, he disagreed when I told him that locals do not distinguish a true Christian from a manipulative charismatic one and that he might become a useful idiot for the charismatics. He will teach them the Christian faith and morals, but the political power will belong to them. But he said he is aware of this predicament and is not worried about it, because even in the Western world there is only a few of real Christians and the other are, as here, just full of empty words.

During my stay in Colombiana, Markus helped me when Sofía, Paco's wife, would start skipping the meals, and simply refuse to prepare anything. This could be either because she started worrying that I would not pay them for my stay there, or because of any other reasons, or simply because she did not feel like it. Markus called it, "extreme laziness of Huni Kuin." He would also have a bad opinion of the Huni Kuin who are connected

to the cultural sphere, saying that they are not to be trusted. After being there long enough I could understand that opinion, however, this is also a typical stance of every Christian conservative in Europe, lashing at the cultural sphere and people involved with it.

At his house, I would always get the best-tasting meals. He was raising his own pigs, sheep, chicken, had a lemon tree, pineapples, cashew tree, he even had his own coffee. He would go hunting and fishing on his own or with Jairo, about whom he says is his true friend. He was slowly working on making that place a haven for him and at the same time, teaching the locals about Christian morals. He would wake up every morning around 4 am, drink his morning coffee and read the Bible.

He said that Paco was probably the only true Christian in the village, and he told me the story of how this happened. Paco used to consume a lot of alcohol until about the age of 40, when his family almost drowned when their boat capsized. It happened when Paco and his family were going back to Colombiana during a rainy season when the slowly meandering Curanja becomes a dangerous river. After his wife and daughter had a miraculous escape from almost a certain death, he had an epiphany, started following Markus' lead, and stopped drinking.

When I challenged Markus about his opinion of Huni Kuin being extremely lazy, he tells me of his experience, how in the beginning after moving to Colombiana, they came begging for everything and he had pity on them. But he noticed he started to become thinner. At this point he realized he needs to start selling the things he himself produced or face starvation. His heart was heavy, but he saw no other way out. He recalled political campaigning in Esperanza: the candidate that offers more, i.e., gives away more presents, wins. Nobody cared about the political program; it was all about receiving gifts and reciprocating with their vote to the most generous candidate. He also observed that when the Huni Kuin bargain among themselves, they bargain hard. When it comes to bargaining with an outsider (*nawa*) like him, they are all united against him. That there is no disciplining of the kids. Although they are being told what to do, if they don't follow, nothing happens. And when they grow up, they are full of themselves. His example of disrespect towards a woman is when a woman wants a house cleaner and wants to keep it clean by demanding

walking barefoot inside the house, her husband will walk over the clean floor with his dirty boots. From his perspective, the women hold the real authority and men, only superficially. The women only rarely respect them. He was also critical of SIL members. He made a distinction between a Christian and someone simply being baptized. They [Huni Kuin] are all baptized but a true Christian will never forcibly evangelize people. He saw SIL members as not true Christians. For Markus, one could only present the message. What they [SIL] built there is only a façade. It is easy to build a church, make photos in front of it to send it back to the headquarters so that the funds keep flowing. He resented the fact that they were making them Christians by bribing them with offers: "You will receive this and that, are you sure you would not become Christian?" The typical practice is handing out pharmaceuticals only after the service to the attendees. This is also a more general critique of North American missionaries, "According to whom the mission of the church was defined exclusively in terms of 'saving souls' and planting churches" (Larsen and Treier 2007, 268).

But he did also mention good sides about the work SIL carried out. According to his opinion, now you can at least trust a few individuals—they taught them to read and write their own language. That if there were no missionaries the mestizos would have gladly kept them in ignorance. But their main mistake was to take the individuals out of the communities to make them Christians, but when they came back, they weren't more modest, they came back as kings, full of pride and vanity, and the missionaries did not see it coming. The Huni Kuin who got elevated by formation with the SIL missionaries used the knowledge for power and abuse of that power. However, this was probably by design—the purpose of forming new Christian elites.

He said that it was true that the schools in the communities were bad and that a teacher could be generous, thereby increasing his influence. He could hand out some groceries to the families, organize an event and this makes everybody happy, because the parents didn't know how little their kids learned in the school. Besides criticizing the SIL for taking the natives out of the communities on their own [SIL's] expenses, he also criticized bringing in Western goods. He was proud to say that he only brought in his chainsaw when he saw others already having it. Until that moment, he would build his house and all the

amenities only with the tools he would see the locals already using. As much as he criticized the Americanized version of missions, he shared the same outlook with them: the people who live in the Bibleless world are lost and desperately need God's word.[124]

Markus believed that a real Christian spreads the message and lives in alignment with God, fitting the definition of evangelical perfectly. Markus was, by definition, an evangelical. According to *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology* (Larsen and Treier 2007, 1), "an evangelical is an orthodox protestant, has a preeminent place for the Bible in her or his Christian life as the divinely inspired, final authority in matters of faith and practice; […who also believes that it is] the duty of all believers to participate in the task of proclaiming the gospel to all people." Markus believed that one might present the message, the gospel, but cannot create "knowledge in the soul" and that, in his pursuit to convert people, one should not be manipulative. And if they do that, god's name is tarnished.

To anyone who says that the natives would be better off left to themselves, because they were happy in the jungle before the contact with the White man, Markus would tell them they should go naked into the forest. He was sure none of them would last even an hour. Every Huni Kuin says that without the mosquito nets life is a suffering. Before they were available, half of the night one half of people slept while the other half would chase away the mosquitoes so that they could sleep. Nobody wanted this anymore. And yes, before the White man there were diseases, maybe not diabetes, but diarrhea for sure, and God knows what else.[125] And his main argument, that women there were not safe with anyone. That he had been asked by a man, who was going for a longer trip, to look over his daughters, because he could not trust them to anyone, including any men of his family. That for any woman's request, even if only for yucca, the answer would be, of course I can give you, if you go with me to chacra. He saw women there as broken down. Abused. His dark

[124] The language used follows manifest destiny ideas that missionaries are divinely ordained to convert people https://wycliffeassociates.org (accessed on 25th Jun 2024)

[125] The claim that there were no diseases before contact is not just a myth, the claim has been repeated by the one man of the noncontacted group Mashco Piro, named Epa, who decided on his own to look for the contact. Interview with him can be found in the movie made by Fernando Valdivia: *Purús: Grompes, Curumí y Una Niña*, 2023.

vision of abused women may have come from his churchy imaginary that (savage) men are the ones forcing women into marriages and abuse them at any opportunity possible. This vision is in contrast with the memory of Kensinger, who wrote about how Grompes was practically forced by his three wives to marry another one, giving another perspective on how things may have worked in the society. When Grompes at first refused to marry her, he said his wives "refused to give me any food. They wouldn't talk to me. They wouldn't have sex with me. They acted as if I didn't exist. So I married her" (Kensinger 2003, 102). In this regard Markus is right to say that women have the real power over men even though this does not support his claim that they are broken.

He might need this dark image of their society (women being broken by abusive men)[126] so as to justify his missionary work—he has to convince himself that he is doing the good work, against a potential criticism that what he is doing is actually ethnocide. There of course are many signs from which he can see the social usefulness to his profession. When I commented that them being overweight might be a defense against men, to not be desired by them, he says, maybe, but mostly because they are incredibly lazy. This remark again shows he viewed their behavior as basically faulty, needing to be corrected into a mentality of a hard-working protestant. In his attempt to change them he exhibits strong ethnocentrism, and although he says he loves them, he still tries to change them; as if he is lacking "true respect for Indian culture" ("The Declaration of Barbados: For the Liberation of the Indians" 1973, 268).

[126] As Barbara Keifenheim reported to me: Women in that society are very strong, partly because of the matrilocality. As long as the most precious intra-societal exchange object was meat, the daughters brought young hunters into the home. They had to please the father-in-law by helping with the planting etc., the mother-in-law with bringing in the meat. This usually lasted until the birth of the 3rd child. Only then was a house of the young couple built and the fruits of their labor went to their own family. But the son-in-law was responsible for his mother-in-law for the rest of his life, never for his own mother. That's why women wanted to give birth to girls. Even if her husband left her in the meantime, in case of doubt, her first daughter would bring the first hunter into the house at the age of 12 or 13. And when a couple separated, it was customary for the women to keep the girls and the men to keep the boys. (personal communication)

Church ceremony in Colombiana

I was able to attend the church ceremony on Sunday that is normally led by Markus and Jairo. This time the main spot was reserved for the visiting pastor. The first part was led by Jairo and then later on by the Brazilian Huni Kuin pastor. It was clearly a charismatic type of preaching, to the point of being unpleasant to watch for me. But I kept filming and at some point, I left as this theater just became too long and I heard them mentioning my name as their friend (of the church). As I said earlier, Markus had to let into "his" church also this charismatic preacher, even though he told me he didn't like his way of preaching. We both agreed it was a kind of a theater.

Rights of the Indigenous people in Peru

Since the beginning of the colonial times, Indigenous people have lost their sovereignty and later became "minorities." During that time, the idea of "natural inferiority of Indians," presented by some European philosophers and theologians was a base on which the new political and legal order was legitimized. Racial and class segregation divided the society into two "republics," or two realities, Spanish society versus Indigenous one. The founding of independent republic of Peru (1822), was based on the idea of a single Peruvian Nation for all *peruanos*, with liberal principles of democracy and equal citizenship and individual rights. Indigenous people became citizens of the new state on paper, however, *de facto*, they were not recognized as having rights, despite the fact that they constituted 62% of the population (Kania 2016). Republican constitutions, until recently, expressed assimilationist idea of constructing a single, culturally homogenous nation under Creole and mestizo leadership and cultural domination. During the 19th century, Indigenous peoples

from the Amazon region were treated as semi-humans and referred to as “savage tribes,” “un-civilized natives,” “barbarians,” and “reduced Indians.”[127]

At the beginning of the 20th century, the policy of indigenism (*indigenismo*) appeared, the overriding objective of which was to modernize the country and integrate the Indigenous peoples into Creole-mestizo society. The new constitution of 1920 introduced extensive civil and social protection rights based on the Mexican constitution of 1917. It officially recognized the existence of Indian communities and guaranteed state protection over Indigenous peoples by giving them special rights to cultural development in accordance with their needs (Kania 2016, 14). The penal code, introduced in 1924, which remained in place until 1990, divided the population of Peru into four categories: civilized peoples (Creoles and mestizos); aboriginal peoples (*indígenas*); semi-civilized aboriginal peoples (*semi civilizados*); and wild peoples (*salvajes*). The last category was reserved for the Indigenous people of the Amazon who were deemed incapable of self-determination in both legal and economic terms, and their territories were seen as an area for invasion and colonization in the name of “progress of the Nation."

Law on Native Communities and Agricultural Promotion of the Forest Regions and the Amazonian Selva (1974) recognized the territorial rights of ethnic groups, but they were forced to settle in reduced areas, delimited and titled for particular communities. In 1979, on the basis of the new law on the Native Communities, the Indigenous people of the Amazonian region were organized legally into what were called “native communities” (*comunidades nativas*). These laws constitute positive decisions and regulations, however these laws led to fragmentation of Indigenous territories, and sometimes to division of the people inhabiting them. They also introduced new categories of land designated for agriculture and forest exploitation, which were used by the government in political decisions against Indigenous peoples (Ibid, 15). When I met the anthropologist Thomas Moore in Pucallpa in 2023, he openly admits that the government people, including SERNANP and the Ministry of Culture (the ministry most inclined to help the Indigenous

[127] Reductions (*reducciones*) were settlements created by colonizers into which they relocated, often forcibly, the Indigenous populations for the purpose of evangelization and assimilation.

people), are only interested in land titling for small areas of communities and oppose the idea of "Indigenous traditional territories." ICCA, an NGO consortium,[128] is proposing the formal recognition of traditional indigenous territories, which has nothing to do with land titling. It is the governance that is the issue: who makes the decisions and on what basis and who has the right to do so. And when it is indigenous territories, SERNANP will not include indigenous people. There is a big difference between administration and management and between making decisions about what is to be done in the area.[129]

The decade of 1990 brought significant changes with the belief that the state's internal policies should take into account the interests of all ethnic groups, and with their active participation. In 1994, the Congress of Peru ratified Convention No. 169 of the International Labour Organization on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries (ILO Convention No. 169). It was the most important legal document to date regarding Indigenous peoples, and recognized the need to appreciate the aspirations of Indigenous peoples to exercise control over their own institutions, lifestyle, and economic development, and to protect their right to preserve and develop their own identity, language, and religion in their respective countries. With the new constitution of 1993, the Nation of Peru was declared "multicultural" and in 1995, many provisions of the ILO Convention No. 169 were included in it.

However, in reality, so many examples indicate that the idea of a multicultural state, political participation and economic inclusion of Indigenous peoples remains little more than a political promise. To mention a few: Alberto Fujimori's neoliberal government facilitated the sale of Indigenous lands and launched a program in 1996 which forcibly sterilized more than 260,000 Quechua women.[130] Baguazo, the huge protest that occurred in the Amazon in 2009, when Indigenous people protested for months to overturn

[128] https://www.iccaconsortium.org (accessed on 25th Jun 2024)
[129] Thomas Moore personal communication.
[130] Over the course of five years from 1996 to 2001, under the disguise of the Programa de Salud Reproductiva y Planificación Familiar (Program of Reproductive Health and Family Planning (PSRPF)), the state intentionally launched a genocidal policy that aimed to destroy, in whole or in part, a specific population within Peru. According to the Defensoría del Pueblo (Human Rights Ombudsman's Office), through the PSRPF, health officials performed 272,028 sterilizations on a majority of poor, rural, Indigenous Quechua-speaking women. (Carranza Ko 2020).

controversial decrees that halved their territories and approved concessions in the zone. AIDESEP organized the protest and based their demands on ILO Convention 169, as the decrees were enacted without consultation (Merino 2020). Another example is illegal goldmining in the Amazon region, which is arguably Peru's main illicit economy, with estimates that nearly 16 tons of gold are mined yearly, mostly from the Madre de Dios region.[131]

In Purús region, until the 1990s, the village headmen were old local men, respected in their communities. Usually, the transmission of heading a village went to the first son of a headman. But in the 90s the municipality and people from Pucallpa organized a meeting in which they ordered that there should be no more old headmen who cannot speak Spanish. What happened was that headmen went to Esperanza to this meeting as headmen and went back as nobodies. And people in Esperanza decided who was going to be the next headman—for example, a son-in-law of the headman, or even someone outside the family, which is against the normal course of things. This completely changed the balance of power in the communities.[132]

We are still witness to a devastation and invasion of territories belonging to Indigenous peoples on systematic, structural and mass scale. Many of the rules of legal pluralism of the new Constitution remain to be implemented on the lower levels of the regional administration.

[131] https://news.mongabay.com/2023/12/perus-crackdown-on-illegal-gold-mining-a-success-but-only-briefly-study-shows/ (accessed on 25th Jun 2024)

[132] Eliane Camargo personal communication.

Practices for sustainability of music vs Projects for helping the Indigenous people

> By promising more staples rather than protecting autonomy, they will intensify disabling dependence (Illich 1975, 217).

Figure 9: The weekly school curriculum pasted on the front door in the house in the community of Nueva Vida, Purús, 2021. (author: Andrej Kocan)

Juan Negrín, who worked with the Huichol people in Mexico for more than 30 years wrote, “Any model to improve the material situation of the Indigenous people requires not only raising their awareness, but also raising our awareness of the human, cultural and political context, as well as of the habitat that preexisted the sudden contact with civilization and its global development projects” (my translation, Negrin 1985, 12). Considering this statement we need what we now call the ecological approach to see whether a certain initiative helps or not a certain society. Titon (2018) talks about musical ecosystems, or more broadly, sound ecology, and ecocritical approaches to music which foreground the relationships of humans with the environment. Each world of music can therefore be regarded as an ecological system, with the forces that combine to make up the

music-culture in a dynamic equilibrium. The principles of conservation biology to restore and maintain the health of an ecosystem may also be used to manage the health of and develop resilience in organizations and institutions within music cultures. It is important to look closely to figure out which factors influence musical vibrancy, or vitality, their relationships and how they, when combined, influence the sustainability of the musical activities. It is important to note that during the 20th century, within ecology science, the paradigm has shifted from seeing nature as nature-in-balance to seeing it as disturbance-and-change paradigm. Ecologically inclined ethnomusicologists, or applied ethnomusicologists might be criticized for their work of trying to preserve the traditional musics, especially of the Indigenous societies, as outmoded idealism. However, this criticism should take into account that contemporary ecologically inclined ethnomusicology does advocate for adaptive management in the face of disturbance-and-change (Titon 2020). The issue of Indigenous people retaining their autonomy, or self-determination, is very important and it relates to the sustainability of their music practices. "Autonomy is a permanent struggle; it is not self-conceived, but requires relating to another political subject" (Böhm et al. 2010, quoted in Merino 2020, 516).

Music sustainability

"Many initiatives that aim to foster the sustainability of a given music genre focus on improving its transmission to younger generations" (Grant 2016, 19). Organizations may provide master musicians with wage, instruments, teaching space, and basic healthcare, and for students, public school stipends. The well-conceived programs attempt to replicate or support the apprenticeship system that existed between older and younger generations. If, on the other hand, a schooling system supports changing values and attitudes to tradition, it is precipitating the disappearance of at least some of the previous genres. The transmission to younger generations, in practice, is done by committed individuals and their efforts toward music sustainability. There are various risks in introducing music genres into

the institutional environment, such as "risk of standardization of repertoire, stasis or ossification, decontextualization, and the various changes in attitude, values, constructs, and practices that may arise from assessment processes and procedures" (Ibid, 22). In short, nothing replaces the intergenerational link and environment conducive to upholding the spiritual values of the population in question.

As to my knowledge, there are no initiatives aiming to support music sustainability, or encourage its revitalization, in the Peruvian Purús region. There is one ongoing project (in 2024) led by Giancarlo Rolando, funded by the British Museum's Endangered Material Knowledge Programme, to document material culture associated to three types of rituals: *katxanawa*, *nixpu pimaa*, and *txidim*. The documentation of associated musics, myths, social dynamics as a side effect of this project, and a potential revitalization of the rituals as a consequence of this project might be the positive outcomes of it.

The advent of the post-colonial world has brought with it the attempts to decolonize the academia and ethnomusicology within it, and led to the development of heritage policies, specifically the concept of intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) and conservation of it by the international community under UNESCO's standard-setting activities. On the micro level of individual fieldwork as well as on the macro level of heritage politics, each intervention brings with it the dangers of commodification and objectification of the practices we study and trying to safeguard. While it is one thing to intellectually entertain a thought, or theorize about decolonizing, it is altogether a different thing interrupting our colonial ways of being. It is indeed difficult to decolonize ethnomusicology and the academia which is itself part of the power/knowledge structure; as Seeger notes, "Our field is shaped in part by the institutional structures in which it has been established" (2006, 219). To gain academic legitimacy, ethnomusicology often marginalized and self-censored research products like recordings, public outreach, and political involvement, as these did not easily fit the criteria used in other humanities and social sciences.

The closest (ethno)musicologists get to political decision making and the processes where power and responsibility are exercised is actually through the UNESCO, whose effort it is to empower local communities. However, UNESCO's instruments are very limited—

through conventions, recommendations, and declarations it "attempts to mobilize international opinion and shape state practice in its areas of competence by means of moral and rhetorical pressure" (Hafstein 2018, 11).[133] For example, although expressing a clear desire for encouraging participatory approaches towards ICH safeguarding and management, it is not made clear in the text of the International Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) how bearer communities will be in a position to influence government policy (Blake 2016, 71). The power there stays firmly within hands of its members—nation states.

As Catherine Grant argues (2016, 22), "one critical factor in music sustainability efforts is the involvement of musicians and communities themselves" and "of all approaches to strengthening music sustainability, local festivals serve as perhaps the most powerful example" (Ibid, 23). On the Brazilian side, in Acre, there is a festival of ayahuasca ceremonies attracting music groups and shamans, *curanderos*, *vegetalistas*, from a wide area, as well as tourists, spiritual seekers and shaman apprentices from all over the world. And Brazilian Huni Kuin from the river Jordão, from Aldeia Boa Vista, are the hosts, joined under the NGO Instituto Huni Kuin Yube Inu, helped by their non-indigenous partners. The Westerners sometimes also invite shamans from communities far away. For example, a Huichol shaman was invited to participate in the festival and his expenses were paid for by the Westerners who are among the organizers of spiritual retreats. It is very common, nowadays, that the Brazilian Huni Kuin shamans are paid to travel all over the world, to lead ayahuasca ceremonies for Westerners in their home countries and the high prices for the sessions pay for their expenses and some money for them to take home. It is common that the organizers prepare the whole tour for the shamans, visiting a few countries in one trip to Europe, for example. There is of course nothing like that involving the Peruvian Huni Kuin.[134]

[133] To more fully consider just how winding, flawed and even counterproductive this path may be, consult Hafstein's book *Making Intangible Heritage*. (2018)

[134] At the Salsa conference 2023, Rolando presented how SERNANP – Peru state organization, organized (promoted) the competition of Cashinahua traditional festivity dances from various communities which in my opinion contributes to the festivalization and theatralization of the rites, and culture in general. See *Western Conservation and the Cashinahua Proliferation of Life* presented at SALSA conference 2023.

For Indigenous peoples, such festivals represent strategic spaces to recognize, celebrate, and renew their cultural traditions. There is a negative side to the festivals as well, the "festivalization of world music" and subsequent homogenization or standardization. This is a side effect of the local ayahuasca festival as well, as the performers observe each other and try to find a formula that most captivates the foreigners. This is why nowadays the groups sound more and more similar. Another example are the painted designs, the *kené*; observing the designs of the Brazilian Huni Kuin, I can see that they have become modernized, "freed" of the constraints of traditional rules, in which each *xutabu* has only a limited set of designs that makes the person wearing it recognizable by the others, so they know which part of the moiety one belongs to. The context is lost, and body painting becomes art. One can also argue that the tourism promotes "commodification, vulgarization, and theatricalization" of the ayahuasca rituals and of the music itself. On the other hand, cultural tourism—in this case spiritual tourism—as part of economic development initiatives, is a possible link between enterprise and music sustainability (Ibid, 32).

As is the case with Brazilian Huni Kuin, shamanic enterprises seem to be an integral and fundamental characteristic not only of their music revival, but also for their successful fight for empowerment and self-governing and land claims. In this view, the benefits of spiritual tourism (sometimes derogatorily called drug tourism) may outweigh the negative effects of commodification. It is true that there is a fine line between the protection and the exploitation of cultural heritage. The programs needed in this specific case should be oriented towards guiding the Indigenous communities in developing and managing tourism that is sustainable for both themselves and their cultural heritage. So far, the musicians are free to practice their art without the restrictions imposed by regulations, taxes, or other dues.

Education

There are projects put forth by the state and/or nongovernmental organizations that are intended to help the Indigenous communities, one of the most important ones being schooling of children in bilingual schools. It was the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) that introduced bilingual education in Peru's Indigenous communities during the mid-1950s and trained Peru's first generations of primary school bilingual teachers. The SIL's monopoly over Indigenous education in Peru ended during the mid-1970s, when a few national institutions, and other organizations, introduced intercultural bilingual education programs in some areas in the Amazon and Andean regions (Trapnell 2003). However, SIL tried to maintain its influence in Amazonian Indigenous schools. Many Indigenous leaders and community members expressed two basic concerns: (1) "Forty years of schooling under sponsorship of the SIL had not responded to Indigenous peoples' expectations of preparing their children to enter national society on better standing." (2) "They were also conscious of the loss of Indigenous knowledge and of social and cultural values. They believed that this was a direct result of the time young people devoted to schooling, and they recognized that their children were ashamed of their Indigenous heritage" (Ibid, 168).

Education is playing an important role for music sustainability. This statement usually means that in the schools there should be implemented programs and teachers that support the local music practices. However, in case of ayahuasca sacred songs, this very school system filled with teachers who were taught by missionaries may be a threat to the local cultural practices, not only to the ones connected with ayahuasca, but in general. Because many Indigenous songs and dances are connected with rituals which are being abandoned due to changes. If the teachers are also instilling in children that their belief systems are based on diabolical superstitions and practices, as it was the case with the teachers trained by SIL, then it will inevitably help eviscerate the practice of those rituals. It would be necessary to evaluate what is going on in the classrooms in the local bilingual schools and see whether there is some level of colonial discourse in the school system

present (spread of Christianity, nationalism, etc.) and see if there is any way to improve "decolonizing practices for classroom experience, interaction, and learning that reflect Indigenous values and orientations within their teaching practices" (Louie et al. 2017).

In her movie *Seit Kape dem Krokodil... Geschichte auf Indianisch* (1979), Barbara Keifenheim emphasizes a quote from the schoolbook for Huni Kuin children:

> "The history tells of the past of the inhabitants of a place.
> History can be proven, for example with old documents or
> ruins left behind by the people of the past. The legend
> recounts events that cannot be proven.
> This is the difference between history and legend."
> (Peruvian schoolbook)

In a way this text is trying to establish, or inculcate, that science is the guiding light of modernity, and that a modern man is led by science, not myth, and that myths are to be replaced by history, which is based on science, and with this, closer to the truth. In this way, the state along with the church is trying to replace the traditional myths of Indigenous societies, uproot the durable mode of knowledge transmission. The state replaces myth with history, and Christianity replaces local myths with the Christian myths. As Eliade (1957, 33) observes, "Concurrently with official pedagogy, and long after this has ceased to exert its authority, modern man is subjected to the influence of a potent if diffuse mythology that offers him a number of patterns for imitation. Heroes, real and imaginary, play an important part in the formation of European adolescents: the characters in tales of adventure, heroes of war, screen favorites, etc. This mythology is continually enriched with the growing years."

Rafael (chief of *Reserva Comunal*) told me that the level of knowledge that teachers in the communities wield is still appallingly low. Markus told me the same; he said their schools are so bad, that the pupils can't even do basic subtraction after 5 years of secondary school. Math skills are crucial to establish competitive relations within any economic interaction. They both comment, that it is badly misguided when Alberto (my informant, brought up by the missionaries, who in 2021 worked mostly for the church, and worked as

a teacher as of 2023), or any Huni Kuin teacher, boasts that now FECONAPU[135] demands that all the teachers in the Huni Kuin villages must be Huni Kuin themselves and presents this as a win situation for the Huni Kuin people. The teachers only care to secure their jobs and don't care about the benefits for the kids. For the Huni Kuin (parents and their children), the only thing that should matter is that their teachers are good and able to teach the kids well.

One day, when I was working with Luis in Canta Gallo, his son, Jack (then 16), and by then, my friend, came from school and showed me what they did at school; he said, look at this, what we are doing at school. For example, he had to simply name three herbs. His point was that they are learning trivial things. All these are signs that it is more important that the new institution, imposed by the state, exists, but the quality of teachings is not evaluated. The presence of Indigenous teachers alone is not beneficial if they are poorly trained and on top of that continue a colonial/civilizing practice/discourse and/or encourage their students to look with suspicion on their own native cultural practices. It is very likely that the "*religiosa*" subject on the curriculum in Figure 9, continues with inspiring anti-cultural feelings in pupils and encouraging them to look with great suspicion on their own native cultural practices. An initiative to link shamanism, *curanderismo*, *vegetalismo* and education could be the right way forward so as not to stigmatize the traditional knowledge, however, as of now, there is just one Peruvian anthropologist considering experimental implementation of such a project.[136]

I filmed the last interview with Rafael Pino and José Grocio Gil Navarro, the previous head of *Reserva comunal* in Purús (SERNANP), a biologist, who also joined the screening of my movie at the end of my fieldwork in 2023. After seeing it, Rafael expressed concern about my research motives: to document their *nixi pae* chants and make them available to the younger generations. His reservation was that now that they are thoroughly evangelized, coming again in contact with their own lore might confuse them. I was quite surprised by this stance. José felt the need to comment, as well: the big problem before the

[135] Federation of Native Communities of the Province of Purús: *Federación de Comunidades Nativas de la Provincia de Purús* - FECONAPU

[136] Giancarlo Rolando personal communication.

evangelization was a belief in witchcraft (*brujería, daño*). It is still present. Even though there is a hospital there [in Esperanza], they still believe in it, in shamans, even though they do not exist anymore, even though the Evangelicals came. So even though there is a health center, which is very cheap, they would pay more money for a shaman, because they believe more in a sorcerer (*brujo*).

He gave an example, the pharmaceuticals cost 50 soles, but two or three sessions with a sorcerer cost 400 soles. And they still paid for it. Rafael added that there was an example of a family from a Sharanahua community who five years ago went to visit a *curandero*, to cure the ailments of a woman, all the way to Huánuco (a trip first to Pucallpa with a plane and then 8 hours on a road to Huánuco). To fund this journey, they had to kill their cow(s) and sell a lot of meat they hunted from the forest or fished from the river. They would have to gather all their resources. So, they have here the medicine men [in Purús], they practice ayahuasca, and still they went to Huánuco. They wondered how to explain this behavior. Or how to prevent this irrational behavior. Rafael sees that the SIL missionaries were not able to change so much. That half of the heart (of Indigenous people there) remained with ayahuasca, and half of the heart accepted Evangelism. Rafael thinks that SIL did not change their hearts and minds, did not remove the shamanism and belief in the power of their medicinal plants.

José gives another example. In 2008, other Evangelists came to Curanja [to the Huni Kuin]. AIDESEP wanted to expel them, but FECONAPU opposed. Why? The argument was, "the Evangelicals are the only ones who visit us. The state never arrives. In one year, there was only one visit from the Ministry of Education." The issue is that they, Huni Kuin, depend on the Evangelicals. They [Huni Kuin] claimed, we learned from them. Their first teachers, the first promoter of health (Grompes Puricho), were trained by SIL, and they are not going to forget this. José continued, if there were an initiative to safeguard the culture, it would have to be a bilingual intercultural, decision, in collaboration with the Huni Kuin, and the Ministry of Education to reevaluate the culture, customs, shamanism, and plant medicines. All sides would have to be included. For example, José knew some things about medicinal plants, through reading. "I am not a shaman, but the locals are asking me 'what is this or

that plant good for?' This [knowledge] has been lost." I commented that from what I had seen, they do not believe in their own medicinal plants anymore and only seek the pills and ampules.

José replied, this is the topic of education but should concern you as well: They prefer the mestizo teachers. In part, this is good. The education should be bilingual and intercultural. When a teacher speaks only their language the pupils receive only their part of the culture. One parent commented that they would prefer a mestizo teacher so that he can prepare the pupils for the life [in the national society], for the future, to go to Pucallpa to study.

Rafael finally commented on my work: From what you say, documenting *nixi pae* chants is the heart of your work, but, if already several decades of Evangelism have passed, which changed the customs, and you make them remember something that their grandparents were doing. If you revive this, it could also have a negative impact, as well as a positive one. Because now they have acquired the "Evangelist" mindset, and now suddenly they are faced again with the past, with the ayahuasca chants, it could generate a conflict within some individuals. Because whenever I travel to alto Purús and alto Curanja, almost all of them, speak, and express themselves, in some way they mention God, for example, like thanks God, may God protect us, God is my shepherd. If you hand out this material, your recordings of *nixi pae* chants, I think you could generate a conflict. You should be careful, or have a strategy, how to disseminate this information that they have forgotten. It should be step by step, not a heavy blow. This is how I feel from my experience. I know that Evangelism has penetrated their minds well. If I put myself in the shoes of children who were born in the last 10, 15, or 20 years, who grew up with this thought, I don't know what they will think, or receive this information. Will they reevaluate their grandparents? And another thing, every year, each and every year, here in Purús, the new Evangelicals arrive, new pastors, from Brazil, from Peru, from USA. And all of them come with the same idea, to constitute continuity. If they [Huni Kuin] receive this blow from your work, it is going to cause a conflict. After my comments that the kids, the young men were telling me that they are drinking ayahuasca but that they miss the knowledge of their grandparents, he walks

back his statements: All I am saying is how to diffuse this knowledge, because they are not going to let go of the Evangelical mindset from one day to another. Evangelical mindset is firmly in the people.

But, when speaking about the positive side of religiousness, we see how quickly the people I interviewed were to identify the positive outcomes of religion on the Indigenous people. Rafael and his colleague José pointed out to me when arguing how it is good that they are Christianized—at least they are not drinking alcohol. It helps them stay sober. They were defending the missionaries and criticizing me for trying to document their traditional chants, saying that it will confuse them. We could also ask ourselves, on the other hand, what was the cause for them to become alcoholics in the first place. Yes, it was the mestizo traders who would introduce the alcohol to the natives in order to manipulate them and earn more money on them. But, the fast changes and loss of their cosmology, and continuity with their local practices might leave them more vulnerable to this temptation and be the cause for some people to start drinking. Cosmology is inextricably connected with spirituality, a word encountered with increasing frequency in the literature on treatment of addiction; for example, empirical studies have looked at a possible role of spirituality as protective against alcohol and drug misuse (Cook 2004).

Agricultural projects

Figure 10: Map of native communities in the Purús region. Photo taken at SERNANP center, Puerto Esperanza.

Another example of a development strategy is the project of teaching the Huni Kuin cultivating land to grow more produce. Projects to make native people sedentary may be questionable from the land claims point of view. In the 1970s the idea of native communities (*Comunidades nativas*) was raised and implemented in The Native Communities Law in 1974. The law recognized rights of ownership of communal lands. Through this law, many native communities in Purús were designated long plots of land, which had little contact with the river where they lived. For an example of land titling practice, see Figure 10. The communities close to Puerto Esperanza have very elongated shape; although the territory is fairly large, it is of little use for the Huni Kuin people, as their lifestyle is nowadays to be based on the riverbanks. Originally, the communities would construct their villages and leave them after about ten years or so, to make a new one. They would look for another terrain where they planted their bananas and yuca. When those

crops were starting to bear fruits, in about nine months, they would move the whole community to the new place. They had to move every ten years or so, because the soil in their gardens around their village became exhausted.

Now that they only have the small plot of land, they cannot relocate. So, they become sedentary. This is of course not the result of the influence of the missionaries, but of the state. Lately, the state tries to help the natives to overcome the issues of them not being able to relocate. The state sponsors the project that teaches the natives cultivating various crops. The team of trainers comes into the village, hands out the seeds, the tools and organizes workshops. After a few months they come and see the results. The ones who have cultivated the crops successfully get the new batch of seeds and even a financial support. However, they report a significant part of the natives refuses to cultivate the plants, toss away the tools, and continue to ask for the financial support. One way of seeing it is the Markus way—they are extremely lazy. But it can also be explained as a form of resistance to making them sedentary. Why should they stop being semi-nomadic if this was their way of life?

The Peruvian idea of community is derived from the peasant societies of the Andes, where Indigenous communities were established during the colonial period in order to control labor and regulate land tenure (Hvalkof 2006, 211). With the demarcation of the land for the native communities (*comunidades nativas*) the Indigenous people in Peru now have a piece of guaranteed territory. However, by not demarcating the broader areas as Indigenous land, or reserves, they in fact lost that whole territory, once considered theirs, and were left with these communities, that became permanent settlements.

Before, even during the rubber boom time, the land in the Purús area, at least on the Peruvian side, was always considered to be of the Indigenous people, by mestizos and even by the rubber bosses. And even nowadays, when the local Huni Kuin people travel across the border to Brazil, and the soldiers ask for the documents, one Huni Kuin leader would reply:

> ""Essa é a minha terra, não a sua, e não preciso de pedir permisso pra viajar nela!" ("This is my land, not your land, and I do not need to ask for permission to travel in it"). He continued, saying that the soldiers accepted his argument." (Gow 2006, 290)

If we look again at the case of Alaska natives, for them "subsistence means hunting, fishing, and gathering. More than that, it means a way of life that—far from being marginal––fulfills spiritual as well as economic needs" (Dombrowski 2002, 213). For this reason, subsistence rights and traditional-use practices are key elements for native identity. Special rights to subsistence use on large swaths of land, now belonging to the state of Peru (or Brazil), are crucial for their long-term cultural survival. When they completely accept the sedentary way of life, they forget about the rights to the larger territory that they used to inhabit. Pastoralization, and evangelization go hand in hand in erasing their traditional identity. (Ibid, 91) In this vein, their reluctance to follow through with the state's farming programs that teach them how to cultivate vegetables on the small plots of land designated to each community is understandable. It is against their culture, and it is foreign to their identity. It could be viewed as a way of resisting larger-than-local forces. Viewing it as laziness that needs to be bettered by instilling in them the Christian pastoral spirit is problematic.

When I asked Luis how many kids he has, he answered five *varones* (males), as if only men count. Only when I ask how about daughters, he says he has three.[137] It seems that some locals here [in the Huni Kuin communities] have up to eight kids. Kensinger also reported that unlike before 1968, when women rarely had more than 4 children, in 1993, on his return, he saw many women had 6 or more children (Kensinger 1995, 271). Within one or two generations one could expect troubles if the population explosion happens. In Canta Gallo they told me that there have been no wild boars in the surrounding woods in

[137] Quoting a father speaking only of his sons should not be interpreted necessarily as disdain for girls. In terms of gender, the wishes of fathers and mothers differed. As Barbara Keifneheim explained, "Women mainly wanted girls, who later brought hunters into the house because of the matrilocality. I was present at the birth of a male baby and witnessed how the mother, angry for having given birth to the third or fourth boy, neither looked at the baby nor handed him the breast. Men preferred boys, who were lost to their own family as hunters, but strengthened the alliance with the families-in-law. When a couple split up, the mother took her daughters with her and the father took his sons." (personal communication)

the last seven years, because they decimated them. When one day I went fishing with a big group of people from Canta Gallo, about five boats, I realized even fishing in this area is a hard work. We did catch some fish, but I would hardly say it was abundant catch. Many small fish and a very few larger ones, less than a foot long. The Purús river is not full of fish anymore in this area. We stopped at few other places on the way back, and in the end, I would say the catch was enough for all the members who went fishing plus some more family members for one day, or maybe two of modest meals. Modest meal is a strong reason for dissatisfaction within a family. They have to work hard to feed families if fishing is not more fruitful. It seems that population growth is already causing problems[138] and they might run into bigger problems soon if they don't organize in some way.

Because of the scarcity of game and fish, the Huni Kuin realized they do need to start planting vegetables and fruits in their own gardens. When I was talking to a local Huni Kuin from the neighboring village Cashueira, Efrain, he said that this community, Canta Gallo, is the most disorganized village of them all. Because they are closer to the town, they can buy everything. More distant villages are better at producing fruits and vegetables as it is harder for them to travel to Esperanza and buy them.

The main question for the near future: When the community exceeds a certain size and the factional fights become serious enough, the usual resolution was that one of the factions or clans would leave the community to establish a new one. Where are they going to go now when all the land on the Purús and Curanja rivers is already allocated for the existing communities, or villages? If they would be able to demonstrate *de facto* possession of lands and resources through their way of life, subsistence, they would have a claim in lawsuits fought in court. The surrounding land is now *de facto* a state land that they don't have any special access to. As Dombrowski argues, for the Alaskan natives who heavily rely on subsistence, it is far more than just an identity, "it is not something that you can choose to leave or choose to take up. Anything that limited or put an end to subsistence work meant not simply the loss of an identity, but far more immediately, the loss of family, home,

[138] When Kensinger arrived in 1955, he estimated that there were less than 100 Peruvian Huni Kuin, four years after the epidemic that killed four-fifths of the adult population (Kensinger 1995, 270). Nowadays my estimate is around 1500 Peruvian Huni Kuin.

and just about their entire lives" (2002, 91). In this manner nudging the Indigenous people in the Purús region towards a sedentary life can be a way to erase the memory of this way of life. And erasing their claim to the lands that they were using in the past. And, yes, in a similar manner, the ones who are still heavily relying on subsistence are now the marginal ones in the communities and becoming a minority. And it is now impossible to say whether they became marginal because they turned to subsistence, or is it that they turned to subsistence, because they became marginal. And they are now those who have the least say "in how subsistence – as a political issue and central aspect of native identity – is manipulated, assessed, or even asserted" (Ibid, 92).

CONCLUSIONS

> If research doesn't change you as a person,
> then you haven't done it right. (Wilson 2008, 135)

My assumptions and expectations were that ayahuasca with the Peruvian Huni Kuin is used mainly for shamanic healing as is the case with many Amazonian Indigenous groups. Even though in many traditional Amazonian societies shamanism is also used for shamanic warfare, the Peruvian Huni Kuin claim that this practice is long gone and I haven't found any shamanism as well. After my fieldwork and all the ceremonies with the Huni Kuin, it was clear that everybody who wishes can participate in the sessions, including women and children. As my informant Herman explained to me, ayahuasca makes one "see." The visions are used to gather information on distant relatives, for divination, and most importantly, for all the participants to explore the other realms of reality.

The prominent figure in the ayahuasca sessions is therefore not a shaman as a healer, it is a chanter (*txana*), and he is supposed to direct the session for all the participants to journey into the other realm and ensure by means of chanting that this journey be successful and the experience not overwhelming. In the Huni Kuin cosmology, the realm of the spirits is part of the cosmos, all living beings have *yuxin*, an animating force, or a spirit. During ayahuasca intake, there is a real danger that one's eye spirit (*bedu yuxin*, the eye spirit is one of the several spirits that inhabit the body) that goes on a journey, might not return from especially strong session. According to Keifenheim the best approximation to *bedu yuxin* could be awareness (personal communication). Or the visions might be too disturbing. The role of ayahuasca chants is to steer the visions. There are three main functions of the chants: to call the force to induce the visions in the beginning, help the

participants to control the visions not to become overwhelming and in the last stage, to help them come back to the ordinary reality safely.

The procedures during the ceremony are not fixed. The sessions would normally start after 8 PM and last about 4 to 6 hours. What happens during the ceremony depends on the state of the participants, and the chanter (*txana*) decides what to do by listening to their feedback, or by feeling when they disconnected from his chants. After drinking, ayahuasca participants inform the chanter what they are seeing and how they are feeling, and with this information, the chanter knows which type of chants to chant or who needs a special attention. The ceremony does not end until all the participants are back to the ordinary reality. Striking is the lack of ritualization. The sessions were very informal, no special dresses, no ritual paraphernalia, incense, no altar. Participants would usually bring with them only the hammocks to make themselves comfortable. This is different to the way ceremonies were done in the 1980s; as Keifenheim reports, each participant would sit on the ground, ram a strong stick into the ground and hold onto it to hold himself upright and not collapse (to withstand the force of ayahuasca, *aguantar*). The session would start with a few introductory words by the chanter, and everyone would address the spirit of Ayahuasca to give them good visions, not too strong, and to show them what each one is asking for.

The ritual intake of ayahuasca represents a journey that often brings about change in meaning, or significance, of what it is to be human, the way of being in this world, and participants often get answers to questions on transcendental topics about their lives, such as why they are here, and where they are going. The *nixi pae* visions also make a person, usually an herbalist or on experienced user, see which illness is it that one has. Or which illness a whole family has. Once the diagnosis is made, it is then usually the task of an herbalist (*huni dauya*) to cure the patient with the herbal medicines.

What my informants would also claim is that through the process of experiencing ayahuasca one also becomes cured. In the Huni Kuin society, purging is seen to have strong curative powers. One of the main reasons to drink ayahuasca is to induce purging, which has a very practical curing effect. It is very common that the stomach and intestines become

infected with parasites and thorough purging is naturally helping in getting rid of those. There are chants to cause vomiting (increase the strength of the effects of ayahuasca) so that the illness that is inside is expelled. This is a very general desired effect, and, in some cases, it can already cause the curing of an actual somatic disease. Herman also claimed that the illness could be induced by sorcery, the visions would make one (usually an herbalist or on experienced user) see this cause as well, and in this case vomiting also helps; "vomiting purges everything." This is why they don't observe any diet before consuming ayahuasca, in Herman's words, "If one doesn't eat, what is he going to vomit?" The only time when special measures are taken is when one is taking ayahuasca for the first time.

However, I argue that one of the main functions of the ayahuasca sessions is the healing effect understood as a path towards wholeness by engaging *xinan,* a Huni Kuin concept which encompasses intelligence and knowledge—not in a sense of practical experience, which would be *unan*, but rather more an ethical and moral upgrade to everyday knowledge (Keifenheim 2000). As Keifenheim proposed, *xinan* can be understood as integrative consciousness and healing is essentially aimed at strengthening the patient's *xinan.* Ayahuasca experience can initiate in participants a process of an embodied personal transformation (*dami*). The other side of reality is revealed through visual, auditory, and bodily sensations. Through these experiences the concept of *xinan* is mediated and provided. The change of perception is not only due to the synesthetic effect of ayahuasca: it makes you "feel" the world differently in such a profound way that it almost feels like a rebirth. The visions, the journey, strengthen the *xinan* of an individual. Roy, my mestizo informant, also compares the ayahuasca experience to awakening. He said that the scary visions are a starting point to awakening. When one is in a state of mind that causes fear and feelings of dread, one can overcome it with ayahuasca. He would also say that if one were a person with a lot of negative traits, he would see huge snakes (*víboras, culebras, serpientes*) trying to strangle him. The spirit of ayahuasca has a role of a moral corrector, a teacher. A regular use slowly transforms one through the visions; by becoming more positive, one would start to see good things.

Before my fieldwork, I would understand from the literature that the most appropriate function of music during Indigenous ayahuasca sessions is healing. From my understanding, when Huni Kuin talk about their chants as healing it might rather mean protection. Within the Huni Kuin, the chants are a lifeline that offers possible paths that the participants can use to find a way back to the ordinary reality (Dobkin De Rios and Katz 1975; Dobkin De Rios 2006; Townsley 1993). It is in this sense, as a form of protection, that the Huni Kuin perceive their ayahuasca chants as healing. Music is vital in the ritual, but it is difficult, if not impossible, to demonstrate specific affective musical stimuli to hold the key to the music having a therapeutic effect. I would argue that it is the affective power of the performance and the voice of the chanter that holds the key to efficiency of the chants, not the lyrics, or even a specific musical structure. I would rephrase Robles' statement to say "Music has the power of healing [when] it resonates in the other [due to affective performance]; then it has the power of cohesion because it allows us to resonate with others." (2015, 176). Here I agree with researchers such as Blacking, and others who hold the position that "No music has power in itself" (Blacking 1985). Keifenheim (1999) also reported that her interviewees agreed that the effect of the chants did not come from the texts.

It is also very common for all participants to spontaneously join in the chant with the chanter. In this way, the whole group creates a sound field, or sound space (Robles 2015) that feels especially protective as it connects the participants while they are engaging in collective embodied practice. And by participating in the chanting, the participants are "practicing relationality" and enliven intergenerational knowledge transfer. These experiences work as cohesive agent in the Huni Kuin society. In that way, one of the central functions of ayahuasca practice of the Peruvian Huni Kuin is social cohesion within the community (Luz 2004, 65). Therefore, I argue that ayahuasca is not only healing on an individual level but on the societal level, as well. Music is used as a tool, in a form of a guide in this spiritual travel that dissolves ego and dissolves the boundaries between body and mind, self and others, the world, or the Universe. Healing with the Huni Kuin should also be

understood as achieving wellbeing, "as ecological, spiritual, ethical, social and political wellness rather than being limited to physiological health" (Van Styvendale et al. 2021, 2).

From what I could perceive in the literature and from my fieldwork, there are two main changes occurring regarding ayahuasca use among Peruvian Huni Kuin. The first one is the decline of ayahuasca use in general. From the literature we know that the Huni Kuin would have ayahuasca sessions on a weekly basis, sometimes even on a daily basis, during critical decision-making processes, such as verifying the veracity of external news. The other change is the decline of a cappella chants (*puro canto*) in favor of guitar songs. The new songs are more melodic, and many times performed in groups, accompanied also with other instruments, djembe, or maracas. But the guitar is present in almost all the combinations of the instruments, this is why they call them *con guitarra*, or the guitar songs, with the guitars tuned in the Western fashion, because they were introduced by the missionaries. In the communities of Brazilian Huni Kuin, where ayahuasca tourism is booming, the so-called commodification[139] of the ritual is driving ayahuasca use, shamanism (albeit re-interpreted), and performance of healing songs and their adaptations. These guitar songs are diffusing now to the Peruvian Huni Kuin, and the youth are accepting this musical influence of their brothers from Acre, Brazil.

The Peruvian group of Huni Kuin escaped the horrors of the rubber boom about a hundred years ago, settled on the upper river Purús in Peru, and returned to their traditional way of life and avoided any contacts with non-indigenous society until the late 1940s. Because they remained in self-isolation, they are perceived as more conservative than their Brazilian brothers who remained in contact with the non-indigenous society. The Brazilian Huni Kuin, due to the constant contact, slowly stopped practicing their rituals and lost substantial parts of their way of living. After the first re-contact in the 1970s, when the Brazilian Huni Kuin visited their Peruvian brothers, they started pulling in the Huni Kuin elders from the Peruvian side. Higher retirement salary given to the Indigenous people by the Brazilian state is the main reason for the migrations. Another reason for the migration

[139] Commodification of the rituals and shamanism is a big problem but is not the first "genre" that had to deal with it. Jazz, for example, had to deal with commodification and artification from its beginnings (Keil and Feld 1994, 296).

of Peruvian Huni Kuin elders is that they are valued in the Brazilian communities for their knowledge of the rituals, while in the Peruvian communities, due to strong pressure from Evangelists, their knowledge would be disregarded, and their role marginalized.

I believe that with the Peruvian Huni Kuin, we are now dealing with the last generation of the chanters who were able to memorize and chant large repertories by heart. The only two such chanters that I was able to find and record in 2021, Herman and Viveo, have passed away. The remaining few elder chanters are probably the last generation who are doing it without the use of any instruments. And my observation during my visits to the Purús region is that the elders have stopped using ayahuasca, and that the youth have been left without the maestro chanters as their teachers. The transmission of the knowledge of the chanting is, therefore, broken due to diminishing ayahuasca practice. It does seem that without a proper guidance from the elders, the youth start experimenting with the traditional medicines in haphazard ways. The influx of digital technology, such as smartphones, and tablets is also playing an important role in this process. The younger generations are looking to social media in search for the guitar songs from the Brazilian Huni Kuin. The Brazilian version of "traditional" ayahuasca rituals that the Western world has come to know as Huni Kuin tradition has most likely (d)evolved into a staged and performed neoshamanic version through the demand created by the very visitors seeking the authentic ayahuasca experience with the Huni Kuin.

Regarding the question of culture dynamics, the question is, are we dealing with a radical musical change, or a variation and innovation within a flexible system (Blacking 1977, 1)? Although the ayahuasca guitar songs are indeed influenced by Western musical patterns, after a careful evaluation, it seems this does not constitute a truly musical change. There is a difference between the music used in ayahuasca ritual sessions of the Huni Kuin in Peru and in Brazil. There is also a difference in ritual form in how these ayahuasca sessions are directed. However, it seems that the role of the music stays the same. Both the chants and guitar songs are a powerful means to steer individuals under the influence of the entheogenic brew to return safely into the ordinary reality. The function of the music stays

the same, that is, making the whole experience of the ritual transformational and healing, and thus, according to Blacking (1977), this does not constitute a truly musical change.

The commodification of the ritual through tourism is not the largest problem these native people are facing. On the Peruvian side, their tradition is in danger of becoming extinct under the pressures of Evangelization. The introduction of religion by the missionaries brought about radical and fast changes. And in recent years, Evangelism, and especially Pentecostalism, shapes their world and imagination in a destructive way as the local missionaries are successful in engaging the local population to evangelize themselves.

Due to high isolation of the Purús region, there is no tourism that would drive the ayahuasca use. The means of income are scarce; one of the only ways for a Huni Kuin to earn a substantial amount of money was to become a preacher or a teacher. And the ones who were teaching the young natives to become first bilingual teachers were the missionaries, effectively co-opting them in spreading the new religion. This intense contact with the missionaries in the last 50 to 70 years has profoundly changed their worldview, habits, cosmovision, and cultural and social life. Because of this interaction their traditional practice of drinking ayahuasca with accompanying chants is disappearing faster than I anticipated. If the elders don't know the *puro canto* chants, what other option do the younger generations have to continue the tradition at all but playing the "invented" songs with guitars that are diffusing into their homes from their Brazilian brothers, now with the help of tablets and smartphones.

Even though many researchers who I talked with said that they hated the guitar songs, I do believe they are here to stay and can be very effective if they are done well. And they do carry, for the lack of a better word, healing energy with them. Furthermore, one could look at this situation as if the Brazilian Huni Kuin re-appropriated the evangelizing tools of the missionaries, the musical instruments, together with the melodic musical structure, and re-arranged their traditional chants into an effective musical genre that, together with the power of Ayahuasca, helps "evangelize" the Western population into ayahuasca shamanism.

Many Peruvian Huni Kuin elders also look down on the guitar songs—they call them inventions (*inventadas*), and complain that these are not a true tradition, saying the only real tradition are the a cappella chants (*puro canto*). However, they seem to be more preoccupied with going to church and are involved in supporting the expanse of Christian religion in their native communities, now mostly of conservative Evangelical type, "*evangélicos.*" One of the reasons to support the church is often due to the fact that being actively involved with a church may help one family in their struggle for resources and influence. They are following the urgings of the missionaries to drop the practice of ayahuasca drinking because it is a devil's weed. Their lament that the younger generation are not willing to learn the traditional way, and their critique of the guitar songs being inventions, is in my view misplaced and hollow. Sometimes elders who are direct ancestors of a well renowned herbalist (curandero) or a chanter – e.g., father or mother, have turned to become local preachers of the conservative evangelical denomination.

The Indigenous Cashinahua would in the past re-create their sense of community, weekend after weekend with ayahuasca drinking ceremonies, which enabled them to connect as a community on a deeply spiritual level. With the disruption of church songs, and missionaries this ceremony is in decline and with it the cohesiveness of the native communities and the community-based identity. What I have found deeply affected me and I needed to write about it.

My observation, that the use of ayahuasca has a cohesive function to their social and communal life and a therapeutic function for individuals, has important consequences. The decline of ayahuasca intake might help spread stratification and individualization and affect the balance between two moieties that was, at the time of Keifenheim's research, still perceived as an important factor of a healthy native community (*mae kuin*). It needs further research to verify if the balance between the moieties is still maintained with the Huni Kuin. We are well aware that in other cases, like with the Shipibo, the rise of shamans who are catering to Westerners is rapidly increasing stratification (Brabec de Mori 2014). In some cases, the jealousy that arises between shamans and the rest of the community ends in violent disputes.

The way for the young generation to learn the chants and the curing procedures was through ayahuasca sessions. The notion that the chants are received from the spirits was not supported, as Herman explained that his grandfather and uncle taught him everything, how to chant and to understand. In all the conversations, my interlocutors would imply that there were some other procedures (healing and sorcery) beyond just chanting connected with healing, however, it seems that this knowledge is becoming remote and has come into disuse already since the 1960s. The roles of the chanter (*txana*), herbalist (*huni dauya*) and the shaman (*huni mukaya*) would sometimes overlap. A *txana* could also be a shaman, and a healer. Any shamanic capabilities were strongly denied, and they rejected any possibility of there still being shamans (*huni mukaya*). This negative perspective of a *huni mukaya* figure, that they are sorcerers causing witchcraft is strongly influenced by the missionaries. When I was talking with missionary Markus, he would repeat the claims about the sorcery that results in death still happening nowadays. I believe that this is only a hearsay, and that Markus is repeating the legends to instill fear about shamanism as a negative force. Because all the researchers, since Kensinger onward, mentioned that Huni Kuin claim that there are no more shamans among them, that it is a thing of the past. The question of shamanism became a moral question, an image of a shaman came to mean a bad person with bad intentions. It seems that the figure of an herbalist is not negative and they are proud of their knowledge of pharmacopoeia, although not many young are learning it.

The myths about the origins of the Huni Kuin ornamental art tell that it is the female boa snake, or anaconda, who is the owner of all the designs (*kené)*, and who transmitted her knowledge to the women. She also taught the men by opening their eyes in drug visions. These myths indicate that ayahuasca use among the Huni Kuin must be very old and it is not a recent adoption from neighboring groups as my informant Paco suggested. These myths also indicate that there is a relationship between the inner images during the visions (*dami*) and the material visualizations of the women in outer images (*kené*). Paco's interpretation of the origin of use of ayahuasca might show this undercutting of their own tradition. It is an attempt to distance oneself from the use of ayahuasca because it already has a negative connotation in the mindset. And it shows that what Kensinger observed in

the 1990s, that the "changes that have occurred since 1968 seem to be more cosmetic than structural," does not hold anymore. Slowly but surely, the negative "messages" about ayahuasca that the missionaries have been spreading started to infiltrate the minds of Huni Kuin who started to doubt that their way-of-being is profoundly connected with shamanism (*huni mukaya*). When true Evangelical believers are at the same time headmen of the native communities, as is the case with Paco, their perceptions about their own traditional culture carry more weight.

It is important to understand that the figure of a shaman (*huni mukaya*) once used to be an institution, an authority mirroring the authority of the headman. Ideally, each village (*mae*) would have the headman from *Inubake* moiety, who would also be a *huni dauya,* a herbalist. The shaman (*huni mukaya)* would be from *Duabake* moiety. Attending to both the herbal and shamanic aspects of health guaranteed the health of the village and the survival of the group. While there are still many herbalists, albeit with diminished knowledge compared to the great authorities, the fact that it is practically impossible to find a *huni mukaya* and that an image of him is already so negative among the Huni Kuin shows a deeper rupture. The alliance between *Inu-* and *Duabake* was a fundamental base of the native community (*mae*) until at least into 1980s, as Keifenheim and Deshayes reported (1994). When the community was in balance it was called *mae kuin*. It could be argued that with the decline and marginalization of the role of *huni mukaya* together with the declining use of ayahuasca, the balance between the moieties, and with it the health of the whole community, is broken.

"Recent work has been informed by the recognition of the resiliency of shamanism in the modern context, while also considering the potentially transformative effect on shamanism by a wide array of media such as video technology and news media as well as the spread of literacy and the New Age interest in shamanic praxis. An emerging area of research seeks to understand how shamanism has been responding creatively to these new possibilities" (Adlam, Holyoak 2005, p534). Under the concept resilience we should distinguish between Western definitions which tend to invoke a narrative about an individual and "their capacity to spring back from adversity", and Indigenous conceptions,

where the focus is on the collective and the cultural. In this sense Alena Rosen uses the term "cultural resilience," to "describe the character of Indigenous communities engaged in preservation and rehabilitation of cultural heritage" (Van Styvendale et al. 2021, 10). I would argue that the activities of the missionaries undermined the very cultural resilience of the Huni Kuin native communities. When the use of ayahuasca declines, the strength of the values declines, and this makes a vacuum ready to be filled with new values. When the experience of the sacred fades, we all regress to our narrow daily consciousness and fall an easy prey to church planters.

A system of Indigenous bilingual schools was established by the evangelical Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) in Peru already in the 1950s.[140] SIL was the largest missionary project which took on hundreds of "bibleless tribes" in Latin America. As a general rule, the missionaries were suspicious and hostile towards local practices and rituals. Of several strains of Evangelicals that came to Purús, the SIL were the first and most influential in the case of Huni Kuin. Their Huni Kuin base was in Balta, where they constructed the airstrip and encouraged the Huni Kuin to stop moving every few years and stay sedentary. They installed the health post and the very first school which started operating in 1979. These changes convinced most Huni Kuin to stay and the size of Balta inflated to over 800 inhabitants. No matter how we look at the work of the missionaries, their subversive strategies were fairly obvious: handing out the pharmaceuticals to the participants of the worship services, forbidding forms of music other than their "hymns," which were very often translated into the vernacular language and sung collectively in the church. They would carefully select individuals who would be trained to become teachers, preachers, and health promoters. The forming of the new elites by the missionaries is the most disruptive change in the recent Peruvian Huni Kuin society.

Schools are at the heart of Indigenous life. Because they occupy the time when the kids would be learning their way-of-life with their parents, it replaces the "indigenous education." It is important in the future to observe and analyze practices in schools. Does the school interfere in the process of acquiring agency called "*kuin*", or, our way of living,

[140] https://peru.sil.org/about/history (accessed on 25th Jun 2024)

and the production of sociality. When kids pass their time on school benches, they do not learn all activities based on experience knowledge, such as hunting or chanting. Formerly already little kids went in the forest with their brothers, cousins, etc. This created the danger that they would become Sunday hunters instead of experienced hunters, so to speak. The confrontation with new knowledge content required a great deal of effort and greatly reduced the interest in the knowledge of older people. As Keifenheim reports (personal communication), already in the 1990s many old people told her that the youngsters don't pose questions anymore. They stated without bitterness that their knowledge would be lost with their death. This has to do with the educational attitude of the Huni Kuin: They do not impose knowledge on children as in our societies, but knowledge is passed on when it is asked for. It is this cultural trait that makes this culture especially fragile in face of imposed changes. The generation of today's grownups are the ones who already lack the full command of what they themselves call the traditional lore. And kids nowadays lamented to me that they miss their *abuelos* (grandparents) with the necessary knowledge about how to direct the ayahuasca sessions and how to chant.

Espinosa (2018) highlights how the missionaries spurred the formation of new institutions within the local communities which enabled the Indigenous people to become political actors (with the church as their ally) and form what we now term the Indigenous movement within the Peruvian context. However, even Richard Montag, the SIL missionary in Balta admits that "the efforts of the Asociación Interétnica de Desarrollo de la Selva Peruana (AIDESEP),[141] with financing from the Danish government and much work by several European anthropologists" was crucial for the Huni Kuin to negotiate large tracts of land for their native communities. There are other allies who do not proselytize the native population in return for the help that they offer.

And about the missionaries, this paragraph from a Yawanawa young leader Biraci Brasil Nichiwaka, sums up what was really going on during the time of the missionaries, this

[141] AIDESEP is the national indigenous organization: Inter-ethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Rainforest. Among other work, they helped titling the communities and encouraged the organization of the communities into local federations.

is why I am quoting it in full first in the original and in the English translation (from an annex in a document written by Nietta Lindenberg Monte, 1986 [translation my own])[142]:

> Vou falar aqui, as razões de os Yawanawa do rio Gregório expulsarem os missionários das Novas Tribos de dentro de nossa área indígena. Isso aconteceu depois de avaliações feitas pela comunidade. Chegamos à conclusão que os 15 anos que esses missionários passaram na nossa área nunca mostraram interesse em ajudar concretamente a nossa comunidade. Passaram todo esse tempo enrolando os índios, boicotando a nossa organização política e impedindo o desenvolvimento da economia indígena. E, sobretudo, desrespeitando a cultura indígena, desconsiderando as rezas e rituais de nossa comunidade, impondo a religião deles, dizendo que é a melhor, a única que salva e que vai garantir o paraíso e um lar de paz eterna e de harmonia no céu. Esses missionários norte-americanos viviam dizendo que a nossa religião, o cipó (daime) e o nosso mariri e festas tradicionais eram coisas do diabo. Por causa das pregações religiosas deles, esses missionários converteram algumas lideranças para impor a religião deles para o resto da comunidade. Criando, de certa forma, uma divisão interna entre os índios de nossa comunidade.

> I'm going to talk here about the reasons why the Yawanawa of the Gregório River expelled the missionaries of the New Tribes from our indigenous area. This happened after assessments made by the community. We came to the conclusion that during the 15 years that these missionaries spent in our area, they never showed any interest in helping our community in any concrete way. They spent all that time deceiving the Indians, boycotting our political organization and preventing the development of the indigenous economy. And, above all, disrespecting indigenous culture, disregarding the prayers and rituals of our community, imposing their religion, saying that it is the best, the only one that saves and that will guarantee paradise and a home of eternal peace and harmony in heaven. These North American missionaries were always saying that our religion, the vine (ayahuasca/daime) and our mariri and traditional festivals were all things of the devil. Because of their religious preaching, these missionaries converted some leaders in order to impose their religion on the rest of the community. In a way, this created an internal division among the Indians in our community.

[142] https://acervo.socioambiental.org/acervo/documentos/educacao-indigena-no-acre-uma-experiencia-de-autoria (accessed on 25th Jun 2024)

It is of course difficult to say how things would have changed *differently* if some of the new elements in the society were missing in the whole picture—what I was able to witness was just a fragment in time. As does any society, this one also constantly creates and re-creates itself. It is of course very difficult for me to discern which or if the events I have witnessed are going to critically affect the culture in the future. Or to discern the real causes for and future outcomes of many of the changes that I am seeing now.

The lesson to learn from a small-scale society is that its whole society can lose important elements already within only one or two generations. If two generations are lost, it might possibly have irreparable consequences on its own. What we also can learn is that it is extremely disruptive to let even one generation in a relatively isolated society to be governed by forces that impose their power to change it in an externally determined way, as SIL and other missionaries have done in the Indigenous communities all over the world.

The lack of justice and imposition of other values on the Indigenous are the biggest enemies of a healthy development of small-scale societies. As ethnomusicologists it is our duty to report and advocate for moments to prevent this lack of justice happening in these contact zones. Researching about the activities of the missionaries, and other outside actors, to analyze their mission to evangelize and otherwise pacify, modify, civilize, the local Indigenous population, is important. It is also important to understand that if we want to safeguard the traditions of the world, so that they may keep evolving and emerging, it is necessary to maintain the healthy social ecosystem in the contact zones such as in the case of Huni Kuin in Purús region. And in the meantime, the second-best thing for an ethnomusicologist to do is to document their music traditions and let these archives be made available to them in a way that they are able to constructively and creatively use this traditional knowledge. Supporting the programs that motivate and incentivize the local population to interact with such an archive, comment on it, remix it, reinterpret it, and so on, is in the core of ethnomusicology. Whereas the cases of festivalization that I mentioned potentially lead to its degradation and oblivion of the culture.

It seems that in the Purús region, the Huni Kuin are still only starting their struggle for emancipation, self-determination and recovery of their identity. As I was able to observe,

leaders of the communities and influential clans are still imposing the new religion on the rest of their population, creating internal divisions and using the self-evangelization of their own communities as a strategy for survival and gaining prestige.

Today, ayahuasca tourism is widespread in the western Amazon, and ayahuasca healing ceremonies are conducted globally. In these modern shamanic practices, the use of ayahuasca significantly diverges from traditional Indigenous methods, departing from its original role in the western Amazon. The purpose of my presenting syncretic Brazilian ayahuasca religions is twofold: First, it is through syncretism that elements of charismatic cults and religious ritualization enters. And second, incorporating and remixing elements from other spiritual traditions is not a taboo in Brazil which is famous for a multitude of "nonorthodox religious movements" (Langdon and Rose 2014, 83). By analogy, neoshamanic ritual practices and cosmological visions which differ significantly from those of Indigenous cultures need not be criticized solely for finding inspiration in the Indigenous spiritual practices and remixing them. Nor on the fact that these practices are also directed primarily to restoration of a holistic self and personal transformation of an individual and not focusing as much on the collective group. This just reflects the individualistic worldview of Western postmodern societies.

However, it seems that the more ayahuasca practice is syncretized, the more ritualized it becomes. It seems there is a tendency among the New Age practitioners to believe that the more they ritualize their activities, and engage in these rituals, the more enlightened they become. This is crucially problematic from my perspective, the notion that such a simplified stance—"the more ritual the better"—actually does help one to self-discover, transform, and bring about results such as changing one's patterns of behavior or even healing one's illnesses. From my experience it does not.

On the other side, it is also easy to call Westerners embarking on mystical, esoteric, New Age tourism trips as spiritually empty, who look outside their own home for fulfillment. But one could also think that what they are craving for is the immediate, non-commercialized spiritual experience, and above all, something that they were not able to find in "their" home religions, that have become in effect state religions, serving centers of

power, or being corrupt, or being too empty, ritualistic, not giving them any valuable experience. Isn't it quite normal to expect of the human being, who can be called a spiritual being, to look for a direct experience of divine? Neoshamanic practices are often directed to the participants' individual interests and goals and to the restoration of personal equilibrium or balance (Langdon and Rose 2014). We could argue that the restoration of personal equilibrium or balance, self-transformation, are very similar goals to those of the ayahuasca practice with the Huni Kuin.[143] However, there is a distinct lack of concern for the health of community with neoshamanic or New Age practices. Because of all this it is necessary to see and acknowledge both sides of the New Age movements, and its connection with the Indigenous movement towards an ecological viewpoint.

Regarding my movie, *Nixi pae Chants of the Peruvian Huni Kuin*, I would like to summarize with a flashback.

(FLASHBACK) I was always happy to hear feedback from anybody, that the movie is engaging and some even said that it gives them a visceral feeling of uneasiness while watching the reconciliation part, that it made them feel something profoundly wrong is happening. But for me the biggest reward came during the screening of my movie at the SALSA conference in Colombia in 2023. A significant part of the audience was Indigenous youth. The best part of the SALSA conference was that the organization makes sure that not only the researchers "outsiders" show up, but also invites and helps fund the Indigenous elders, researchers, and artists to be present. After the screening and presentation was over, the Indigenous youth started to share their experiences. About how it is in their villages and native communities with the missionaries, how they want to manipulate using fear, forbid local customs, etc. I was genuinely surprised to see that everyone got so engaged, but it made me feel that I did it right. It showed also that this topic is important and urgent. I got a final confirmation that the message did get across and that the

[143] If we looked only at the Shipibo case, where in the alleged "traditional" use it would be only the healer (shaman) who would drink the brew but not the patient (Brabec de Mori 2014, 207), one could argue that this is in opposition to the neoshamanic practices.

Indigenous youth felt compelled to talk about it. The film influenced them to articulate their thoughts and questions about it more freely and showed them that what they already knew is actually legitimately concerning: How will they heal if they cannot use their own traditions to heal their own people? How will the tradition continue if constantly placed in a subordinate position to the Bible, both directly and indirectly, by the elders who would have, at one point, been charged with ensuring its survival?

Traditional songs, dances, chants, are being replaced in an accelerated manner by organized religion imposed on the Indigenous people by the missionaries. The missionaries have accelerated internal differentiation and installed the new elite which promotes the new cultural behavior. Everyone in the village now depends on some cash income and dependence solely upon subsistence is not viable anymore. Especially in the communities close to Esperanza, the game is scarce, and even the best hunters cannot provide steady food for their families. To be the best hunter and with this the headman of the community is now less possible, if not impossible. Wage earners are in the best position to wield influence in their communities.

The missionaries take advantage of native peoples' political and economic vulnerability for proselytizing. Introducing foreign songs and dances, and encouraging to avoid the traditional practices, plant medicines, healing methods, in the absence of state until recently, they have been the main agents of change in Huni Kuin communities. The first wave of sedentarization encouraged by the SIL missionaries in the 1970s with the construction of an airstrip in Balta, continued with the politics of designating plots of land for each native community, and with the declaring of the National Park of Purús in the 2000s. The Huni Kuin are now delimited between the noncontacted tribe of Mashco Piro on the borders of *Reserva Comunal* on one side, and the mestizo territory on the other. It is to be acknowledged that the National Park prevented the logging industry to enter Purús area and that the noncontacted tribes also need their place. However, it seems that the evangelization and the politics of the state go hand in hand toward identical ends:

marginalization of the traditional ways of being of the Huni Kuin and other Indigenous people in Purús.

I had originally approached this topic from a phenomenological and autoethnographic perspective. I tried to do research with Indigenous people, and to some extent I have succeeded, the disputes included. It is through disputes that I saw things that otherwise I could not. I focused my research on health, not on ill-health; it is where I chose to focus my energy. I do feel that ayahuasca ceremonies pull people togethe. However, they are not panacea and they do pose a threat to naïve populations of New Agers. Ritualization is like a vortex that sucks you in, and the driving force is your own overwhelming anxiety that you cannot control. The fast answers and endless retreats, which seem to be therapeutic, might not lead to the long-term healing the participant was seeking. I was lucky that my group therapy taught me the dangers of ritualization and the benefits of daily practice. And when one is desperate to find help, solution to a real illness, one that is threatening enough to kill you, the allure of rituals can be too strong to resist. It is a daily practice that is the path toward healing and wholeness. The occasional transformative experiences with the entheogens are helpers in this process.

It is only when I started writing down that I realized that my path towards growth has been going on continuously since my cancer diagnosis, which I see as a defining moment in my life that opened me to this path towards raising awareness of why I do things the way I do, to my unconscious patterns.

It took me a heck of a long time to write this all down. Another way of expressing myself is through working with sound and visuals. The writing forced me to articulate my thoughts about the process using language; more precisely, what I was going through, what I was experiencing, and to reexamine my life. The fieldwork confronted me with many of my pernicious biases, assumptions, patterns of behavior. I am a different person than who I was when I started this PhD research. Change has not been in a form of a revelation but a slow growth towards awareness, as Huni Kuin would say, of building *xinan*. I hope this transformation is long-lasting.

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