The Internationalization of Ayahuasca

Ralph Metzner, Ph.D., Psychologist and author of Sacred Vine of Spirits – Ayahuasca

The Internationalization of Ayahuasca provides reliable information that has never before appeared in print, ranging from the rain forests of the Amazon to the churches in Western Europe. ... Like it or not, ayahuasca has left the jungle and is here to stay! Read this book and you will understand the importance of its arrival on the global scene.

Dr. Stanley Krippner, Ph.D., Alan Watts Professor of Psychology, Saybrook University

The contributors provide a detailed consideration of the legal situation of ayahuasca ... as well as a multidisciplinary assessment of the health implications of its use. The Internationalization of Ayahuasca is a must-read for anyone attempting to understand the global implications of ayahuasca today.

Dr. Michael Winkelman, M.P.H., Ph.D., Author of Shamanism – A Biopsychosocial Paradigm of Consciousness and Healing
Contents

Preface .............................................................................................................................................. 5

Foreword: Ayahuasca and the Coming Transformation of the International Drug Control System
Charles Kaplan .................................................................................................................................. 15

Section 1: Ayahuasca in South America and the World

Tracing Hallucinations: Contributing to a Critical Ethnohistory of Ayahuasca Usage in the Peruvian Amazon
Bernd Brabec de Mori ......................................................................................................................... 23

Hoasca Ethnomedicine: Traditional Use of "Nine Vegetais" ("Nine Herbs") by the União do Vegetal
Beatriz Caiuby Labate, Denizar Missawa Camurçã, Sérgio Brissac and Jonathan Ott ......................... 49

The Historical Origins of Santo Daime: Academics, Adepts, and Ideology
Beatriz Caiuby Labate and Gustavo Pacheco ..................................................................................... 71

Ayahuasca Groups and Networks in the Netherlands: A Challenge to the Study of Contemporary Religion
Wouter J. Hanegraaff ......................................................................................................................... 85

Psychonautic uses of "Ayahuasca" and its Analogues: Panacea or Outré Entertainment?
Jonathan Ott ...................................................................................................................................... 105

Some Reflections on the Global Expansion of Ayahuasca
Luís Eduardo Luna .............................................................................................................................. 123

A Vine Network
Oscar Calavia Soléz .......................................................................................................................... 131
Tracing Hallucinations: Contributing to a Critical Ethnohistory of Ayahuasca Usage in the Peruvian Amazon

Bernd Brabec de Mori

One thing is certain: Both indigenous and mestizo shamans consider people like the Shipibo-Conibo, the Tukano, the Kamsa, and the Huitoto as the equivalents to universities such as Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, and the Sorbonne; they are the highest reference in matters of knowledge. In this sense, ayahuasca-based shamanism is an essentially indigenous phenomenon. It belongs to the indigenous people of Western Amazonia, who hold the keys to a way of knowing that they have practiced without interruption for at least five thousand years. In comparison, the universities of the Western world are less than nine hundred years old.


During the evolution of modern anthropology and ethnology in the 19th century, most researchers believed, in line with their era’s common sense, that whatever so-called Naturvölker or “primitive peoples” performed was conserved from the Stone Age and represented a pre-civilized way of living and understanding. Usually, these researchers did not assume any development beyond occidental or missionary influence (which was considered “civilization”). Thus, in 19th-century ethnology the importance of “old knowledge” in indigenous societies was defined circularly under the assumption that indigenous knowledge would be “old.” Although 20th-century authors from Malinowski to Narby (quoted above) provided a great development regarding the anthropologists’ points of view, research methods, theories, and understanding of what they were doing, some dogmata from the discipline’s beginnings are rooted so deeply in academic structures and fieldwork strategies that not every researcher could get rid of them.

Narby is not the only author writing about age-old ayahuasca traditions. In the ayahuasca-related literature one commonly finds statements like “ayahuasca is a sacred drink used for millennia by numerous indigenous groups” (Luna & White, 2000, on the book’s back). In some cases, one can distinguish between analytical and somehow — maybe unconsciously — idealized statements. For example, McKenna (1999) first analyzes: “about all that can be stated with certainty is that it [ayahuasca] was already spread among numerous indigenous tribes throughout the Amazon basin by the time ayahuasca came to the attention of Western ethnographers in the mid-nineteenth century” (p. 189). However, later in the same paper he states that “the lessons we have acquired from it [the association of ayahuasca with the human species], in the course of millennia of coevolution, may have profound implications for what it is to be human” (McKenna, 1999, p. 207). Unfortunately, there is still no evidence found to back up the assumption that ayahuasca has been used since pre-
Columbian times. The often quoted "archeological evidence" by Naranjo (1986) exclusively shows that people in the Ecuadorian rainforests produced small ceramic vessels since about 2400 B.C., but there is no valid indication of ayahuasca use (see also McKenna, 1999, p. 190; Bianchi, 2005, p. 319). In a newer paper, Naranjo (1995) himself totally skips this hypothesis. Ogalde, Arriaza and Soto (2009) provide evidence of harmine in ancient Chilean mummies' hair, which the authors themselves interpret as an evidence for the ingestion of *Banisteriopsis* by these people. Contrarily, they also tested positive in hair taken from living people who used harmine containing hair dyers – thus restricting their findings to an evidence of the use of harmine containing preparations by the people of the Azapa valley during the Tiwanaku horizon, which anyway constitutes an important finding. Finally, *Banisteriopsis* is not necessarily the only plant in South America containing harmine (as Ogalde et al. argue), as was shown by Lindgren (1995, p. 347-348).

With this article, I will not question the importance of ayahuasca use within indigenous and mestizo societies, or within spiritual contexts in Brazil and in the globalizing world. Acknowledging its qualities, I am going to challenge only the assumption of millennial knowledge in the case of ayahuasca use. I also have to make clear that I refer to the currently known formula of the ayahuasca brew, that is *Banisteriopsis* in combination with *Psychotria* or *Diplopterys* (with optional additives). Therefore, I will distinguish between "ayahuasca" (referring to the hallucinogenic brew) and "Banisteriopsis" (referring to the vine). I am not going to treat the use of *Banisteriopsis* vine without the mentioned combinations, nor the use of other psychoactive plants in fairly ancient times. My aim is to show that the current global spreading of ayahuasca use is not new to this substance, but rather a logical consequence of its prior spreading within the Amazon basin. Among most researchers (e.g. see Zuluaga, 2004, p. 132) there is a consensus that an "origin" of ayahuasca, however remote it may be, should be located in the western Amazonian lowlands around the Rio Napo, and it probably was discovered by western Tukanoan populations or their predecessors. From this region, it is thought, ayahuasca use has then spread among other peoples and regions. It is beyond the scope of this paper to treat all parts of the whole Amazonian-Caribbean region where today ayahuasca is being used in a way commonly referred to as "traditional." Although I doubt that ayahuasca has been used "for millennia" in general I cannot claim to have found its "origin" neither in time nor in space. In this analysis, I am going to show that in the already fairly large area of the Peruvian lowlands south of Iquitos (where I conducted fieldwork, mainly in the Ucayali valley) the use of ayahuasca is probably less than 300 years old.

I was first drawn to Peru by the musical practice accompanying ayahuasca sessions. Therefore, I do understand many researcher's attraction to this fabulous substance because it allows us to take a glimpse at the médico's (usually invisible) activities even after a single session involving the ingestion of ayahuasca – and to begin understanding them by participant observation. However, when staying in the field without looking for "shamans" or ayahuasca, one becomes aware of a multitude of complex relations between cosmologies, arts, storytelling, conviviality, and medicine, as un-

---

Figure 1: This map shows the areas occupied by indigenous groups mentioned in the text in a simplified and approximate manner. There are many more groups which are not shown. Andine Quechua and mestizo populations can be found mainly within the cities and along the big rivers. Mestizo settlements (caserios) are found also within "indigenous territory." The map is taken from Google Earth®, indications by the author.
derstood by large parts of the “non-shaman” indigenous or mestizo population that explicitly refrain from ayahuasca use. It seems that both “shamanism” and ayahuasca have been significantly overestimated in studies about western Amazonian people since around 1970 (cf. Brabec de Mori, 2008). Therefore I feel inclined to analyze some of the ethnohistorical processes regarding the distribution of ayahuasca usage in the Peruvian rainforests. There are precedents for such an approach, most remarkably by Gow (1994), who suggests that the introduction of “ayahuasca shamanism” (the therapeutic use of ayahuasca) to the southern Peruvian lowlands took place relatively recently via missions, urban areas and mestizo settlements. Shepard (1998, p. 326) indicates that the current formula of mixing Banisteriopsis with Psychotria leaves has been introduced about 50 years ago among the Matsigenka of Manú. He recounts that in both Matsigenka and Asháninka societies, Banisteriopsis seemed to be known and used, although not in conjunction with Psychotria and therefore without or with very limited “hallucinogenic” or visionary qualities. The same observation is shared by Bianchi (2005), thus indicating that the use of many plants including Banisteriopsis may well be ancient. Despite many well-founded arguments regarding plant usage including several psychosmetics, it appears that ayahuasca as we know it today is not as old. Calavia Sáez (in this volume) stresses that exactly the visionary and thus communicative (often quoted as “telepathic”) quality of the compound ayahuasca has led to its vast popularization among indigenous groups.

One may criticize that I am skipping the indigenous point of view on the phenomenon, despite many indigenous practitioners who refer to pre-Columbian roots of ayahuasca use. I do so consciously because it is a known issue in anthropology that creation myths refer to the present rather than to “history” as understood in the West, as shown for example by Gow (2001) or Illius (1999, p. 128). Also, indigenous protagonists often use references to pre-Columbian roots as a (well-working) strategy to obtain a stronger position in the globalizing world. This strategy is now well-documented, for example by de L’Estoile, Neiburg and Sigaud (2005) or Léopold Calabrer (2008). Finally, I actually do represent the opinion held by indigenous people who do not engage in the commerce around ayahuasca. After some years of systematic research in the Ucayali area (on topics not specifically connected to ayahuasca use, mainly musical and other artistic practices) it became clear to me that the majority of locals does not consider ayahuasca as something necessary besides its key function in attracting tourists, researchers and development projects in present days (cf. Brabec de Mori, 2008).

Why to Provide a History for Ayahuasca

When I first presented my arguments to fortify Gow’s hypothesis in Austria at the 2005 National Latin Americanists’ Conference, and especially in December of the same year in Lima, many discussants rejected the idea, in some cases in fairly emotional terms. The same happened at the 2008 Heidelberg conference, from which the present volume emerged.

Let us briefly consider the reasons why so many serious researchers are doubtful about a recent distribution of ayahuasca. Of course, one is ever to be skeptical about things one learns in the field. After all, there are a lot of tall tales going around. One reason appears to be the bias mentioned earlier, namely that Westerners still—perhaps even unconsciously—tend to connect “old” with “precious” and specifically “indigenous,” and correspondingly, “new” with “invented, constructed, copied.” Within indigenous groups, the perception appears the other way round. Chaumeil (1998, p. 15-32) describes recent developments in Yagua medical practices, stressing innovations like telephones, parabolic antennae, and syringes as being used by present-day Yagua “shamans” for communication with spirits, for spiritual operations, and so on. If today’s Yagua perceive everything new as interesting and powerful and thus pursue implications of these items into their ways of living, it is probable that they did this in the past too.

Another reason, however, seems to be the seductive image of being able to glimpse into a phenomenon which allows us to understand certain processes but which is also framed in the West as drug abuse, so that we feel the urge to “justify” it vis-à-vis the rest of the West. It makes a difference indeed whether we report to the public that we are investigating a hallucinogenic drug that was spread relatively recently through Catholic missions and by rainforest mestizos, or whether we report that we are researching a traditional remedy that has been used by forest Indians for at least five thousand years. The crucial point, I fear, is not what anthropologists and ethnohistorians think about the issue, but rather the opinion held by the public, the drug and biopiracy policy, and in the end, even by some research funders.

Another aspect grows just out of this public opinion, namely the “Globalization of Ayahuasca.” This process developed since Burroughs and Ginsberg’s Yage Letters (1963), but grew to an important issue only during the last two decades. There is increasing ayahuasca tourism, and ayahuasca healing ceremonies are held throughout the Western world (see e.g. Tupper, 2009; and various contributions to the present volume). Here, ayahuasca receives a new role in therapeutic and psychosocial processes which it never had in the western Amazon. “Modern ayahuasca shamans” (or “plastic-medicine-[wo]men,” see Tupper, 2009, p. 125) and users usually attribute “curing power” to this plant preparation without acknowledging that in the western Amazon ayahuasca represents but one small aspect of a highly developed system of medicine and conviviality. This system does not depend on ayahuasca (e.g. for the Shipibo-Konibo, see Tournon, 2002; Leclerc, 2004; Brabec de Mori, 2007, 2008).

In the 21st century, ayahuasca is often taken out of its context and is presented as a cure-all (which it definitely is not). Although the present volume shows that the discourse around current uses of ayahuasca is not as simple, in the course of romantic popularization it might acquire a status comparable to LSD, which was attributed similar qualities by many enthusiasts among Timothy Leary’s followers. In the face of these tendencies I think it is necessary to wipe the slate clean and reconsider the following issues: (i) where did the hallucinogenic compound ayahuasca come from, (ii) when was it actually discovered, (iii) how did it spread among “numerous indigenous groups,” (iv) what was its role in indigenous and mestizo conviviality and (v) what is its role nowadays. In this article, I am going to treat mainly the issue of its spreading—thus, we will perhaps not even answer the first question, but we may stimulate the debate around the topic.
Preliminary Observations

Beforehand, we should distinguish between two styles of ayahuasca use that are popular among western Amazonian people, and which are mutually exclusive (save rare exceptions): first, the use of ayahuasca by a specialist (about 95% male), who then uses his clairvoyance for curing, manipulation or sorcery, while his patients, victims or audience do not ingest the drug. This is what is commonly referred to as “ayahuasca shamanism.” 2 Mainly the indigenous groups living on the big rivers and in easily accessible regions prefer this style, as do riverine mestizo médicos (vegetalistas). Urban “ayahuasca shamans,” however, often also administer the brew to some of their clients.

The second way of using ayahuasca takes place within a group, usually men, in order to experience the effects like an entertaining cinema, to strengthen group identity, to acquire certain abilities or to summon success for warfare and hunting. This second usage is found mainly with backwood groups, the Awajún and the Mai Huna in the north, and in the south the Asháninka, the Amin Waki, Sharanawa and the Madija, for example. Curing and sorcery among these groups is done by a specialist, usually without using ayahuasca. 3 Notably, this style reached the Brazilian peoples who created the Santo Daime, Barquinha and União do Vegetal churches (cf. Labate, Rose & Santos, 2009). Bianchi (2005) builds his argument in favor of a more relative view on ayahuasca usage in the Peruvian rainforests upon exactly this distinction between “curanderos” occupied with healing (our first group) and “shamans” concerned with woodland magic (in our second group). In my opinion, the fact that ayahuasca was used either in curing ceremonies performed by specialists or in identity-strengthening social events even adds to the theory that it was distributed within multi-ethnic missionary reducciones or rubber camps, where many minority groups suffered from identity problems, while other groups even performed their curing rituals there. 4

Within both missions and rubber camps, Christianity played an important role. In my master’s thesis (Brabec de Mori, 2002, p. 143-145) I tried to distinguish mestizo and indigenous styles of conducting ayahuasca sessions by the amount of “Christian camouflage,” which seems more present in mestizo than in indigenous settings; corresponding to Gow’s (1994) observation that:

one of the most remarkable aspects of the ayahuasca curing session is the way it implicitly parodies the Catholic Mass. This is most dramatically evident in the way in which the shaman blows tobacco smoke over each little cup of ayahuasca before it is given to the drinkers. (p. 107)

This is but one instance of “Christian camouflage.” To give another example: I observed in almost any ayahuasca session that co-drinkers, patients, and present relatives at some point of the session (collectively and/or individually) received a similar “sacrament” by the conducting médico, as he blew tobacco smoke or perfume over the persons’ head, body and – often folded – hands. All this “Christian camouflage” does not seem to have emerged from the intention to disguise the ancient ayahuasca practice within contexts dominated by Christian dogmata, but rather indicates that the practice evolved entirely within these contexts. I will not go into further detail here because Gow (1994) has already provided a profound analysis.

When Gow (1994) writes that his “analysis is somewhat speculative and suffers from a lack of hard data to back it up” (p. 92), he touches upon a crucial point. The ethnohistory of western Amazonia is very complicated and poorly documented. Researchers who gathered broad comparative data in the course of extended journeys, like Tessmann (1930) or Girard (1958), were not interested in analyzing a particular people’s past, also clinging to common dogmata of their time. From Girard until now, most ethnographers in the western Amazon concentrated their research on a single community, and sometimes even on a single village or family.

Thus, reliable ethnohistorical comparative data is relatively rare. Although the “hard data” to back up Gow’s “somewhat speculative analysis” is still not available and, due to Amazonian peculiarities in historical evidence, perhaps never will be, let us discuss a number of further indications, call it “soft data,” that point towards a relatively short history of ayahuasca use at least in the Peruvian rainforests.

Parting Point: the Shipibo-Konibo and their Teachers

A very powerful healer from downstream, his name was Agustin Murayari, after his death transformed into the ayahuasca liana. His wife, Maria Luisa, who had knowledge of all the medical plants, after her death converted into the chakruna bush. That’s why you have to use them together, they are husband and wife. 5

For most of the time that I spent in the field I lived and worked with Shipibo-Konibo people. I participated and tape-recorded many ayahuasca sessions with Shipibo-Konibo médicos. Beside my high esteem for these experts’ mastery I was soon confronted with some problems that did not fit into the picture of a millennia ayahuasca tradition.

First, a very prominent figure, known in almost any study about the Shipibo-Konibo, is the meraya, a legendary master healer. Today, very few or no meraya are alive or active. 6 The meraya is described as a person who disposes of direct connections (kano) to the spirit world and is thus able to transform into an animal or a spiritual being at will. The common picture of a meraya performing a curing session is that he stays within his mosquito net (bachi) while patients and audience are sitting outside. The meraya smokes or ingests a tobacco preparation and starts to sing in a highly valorized falsetto voice (wilish). Then, some curious boy would lift the mosquito net and would be scared because he could not see anybody inside but everybody could hear the “spiritualized” meraya’s voice. The meraya does not have to drink ayahuasca to accomplish such transformations.

Second, a highly renowned médico told me a story (quoted above) about where ayahuasca came from. In this story, a man called “Agustin Murayari” transforms into the ayahuasca liana after his death. His last name, Murayari, besides sounding very like Shipibo-Konibo in its consonance with meraya, is of Kukama origin and until today very common in Kukama and thus in riverine mestizo populations. This goes together with the numerous cases of Shipibo médicos telling me that they had been instructed by Kukama or mestizo teachers. 7 Kukama-rooted mestizo populations can
be found along the whole Ucayali river, but people who identify themselves as indigen­
ous Kukama exclusively dwell in the region of Puinahua on the lower Ucayali. Kukama are generally perceived as very powerful and dangerous ayahuasqueros by the Shipibo.1 The upriver Asháninka, on the other hand, are both admired and feared by most Shipibo for their abilities as herbalists, rangers, and warriors. Asháninka brujos are regarded as powerful but due to their vast knowledge of plant3 and animal magic. However, the Shipibo do not connect them to ayahuasca. I have never heard of any renowned ayahuasquero on the Ucayali river who had been instructed by someone from upriver, say, from the south, or from more remote areas. A survey of recent individual migrations of ayahuasqueros in the Ucayali valley reveals that almost without exception, the teachers came from downriver, and the students traveled towards the bigger settlements to meet them. After having learned how to use ayahuasca, the students traveled upriver again, or returned to more remote places where they carry out their practices.

Figure 2: These maps show migrations with respect to the careers of ayahuasqueros of dis­
tinct ethnic origin (in case they migrated at all): Map (A) shows the migrations of my informants’ teachers from their birthplace (if known) to the place where they taught the student. All of them (except one who travelled north due to family rea­sons [white arrow]) came from downriver, and in four cases from Lamas, Rio Napo or Iquitos, respectively. Map (B) shows the migrations (if undertaken) of my informants from their birthplace to the place where they were instructed in ayahuasquerosismo. The general tendency is going downriver or toward the river (the arrow at the left is from a very remote area to the town of Aguaytia. Only one student travelled upriver, also due to a migration of his whole family [white ar­
row]). Map (C) shows migrations of my informants from the place where they were instructed to their current place of residence, with another clear tendency of going upriver and in some cases away from the river toward more remote places. Only two Shipibo ayahuasqueros travelled downriver from the upper Ucayali (white arrows). Besides the mentioned tendencies, the three maps highlight a cer­tain importance of the Puinahua region. The map is taken from MS Encarta®, indica­tions by the author. The data was obtained from interviews with 56 ayahuas­queros during 2001-2006.

Recent Introduction of Ayahuasca

In order to analyze the history of ayahuasca, it should be reconsidered in which groups ayahuasca use is assumed to be “traditional” and in which groups it is not, i.e. where people do not use it or still remember when they started to. Among the first group, we find most indigenous and mestizo populations of the Peruvian north; and also the groups on the big rivers (Marañón, Huallaga, Ucayali): the Awajún, Quechua de Lamas, Kukama, Shipibo, Asháninka, and Yine, for example.

“In between” we may consider the Yaneshá', Sharanawa and Amin Waki, as well as the Kaxinawá (Huni Kuin) and Matsigenka, and many groups in Madre de Dios. Among these groups, there can be heard at least some stories about an introduction of ayahuasca use from neighboring groups. Calavia Sáez (in this volume), for example, recounts that there were stories collected in 1925 among the Kaxinawá that indicate that they had learned about ayahuasca from the Yaminawa. Santos-Granero (1991, p. 117-121) relates that Yaneshá’ people are aware of the introduction of ayahuasca from downriver mestizos.15 Gray (2002) and Alexiades (2000) present details about the recent adaption of ayahuasca among the Arakmbut and Ese Eja in Madre de Dios. Among the Kakataibo and the Madija populations, ayahuasca has been in use for less than 50 years. The Iskobakebo in Ucayali apparently never used it.

These facts alone seem sufficiently convincing to draw a picture in which ayahuasca had traveled from northwest of Iquitos via llamas and the Cushabatay passage up the Ucayali river and then reached the better connected groups in the south. In the late 19th or early 20th century it then crossed the Brazilian frontier into Acre, where Indians and seringueiros started to use the brew, before the Santo Daimé church was founded in 1930. Groups which then remained isolated came in touch with ayahuasca only recently, that is, after their (renewed) contact to riverine societies.

The few Iskobakebo16 who live on the Rio Calleria (who had been deported by missionar­ies in 1959 from the upper Rio Utiquiria) told me in unison that as far as they know neither their ancestors nor their neighboring backwood groups ever had any knowledge of the ayahuasca brew.17 According to Momsen (1964) and Whiton, Greene and Momsen (1964), the Iskobakebo's forefathers (usually referred to as “Remos”) seem to have been in contact with Shipibo and missionaries, although these authors hardly mention any exact dates. There are reports of a large population of “Remos” on the Calleria river in 1690, and mentions of sometimes violent contacts between Shipibo and the proselytized (“Remos”) in a reducción on the Calleria river around 1790. As indigenous people from different families, villages, or groups were forced to live together in these reducciones, there was extensive cultural ex-
change among them. However, despite a potentially decade-long contact between Shipibo and “Remos” by 1790, today’s “Remos,” the Iskobakebo, have never heard of ayahuasca.

A similar observation can be made with respect to the Kakataibo on the Río Aguarayta. I could not observe any traces of ayahuasca use except for Don Emilio Estrella, who had learned ayahuasca drinking together with his father among the Shipibo on the Río Pisqui. Emilio, when drinking ayahuasca, sings in Shipibo language and style. He said that Kakataibo magical and medical songs were of no use with ayahuasca. Frank (1994, p. 181) confirms that the Uni (Kakataibo) do not use ayahuasca. This is amazing because he presents a compelling ethnohistory of the language and style. He said that Kakataibo magical and medical songs were of no use with ayahuasca. Frank (1994, p. 143-150), began to separate from the riverine Pano during the 18th century. From 1790 on, when the Franciscan mission in Sarayacu was founded, they were described as cannibals, and as such avoided by both the Shipibo and the missionaries. Stigmatized in this way, they retreated into the woodlands between the Pisqui and Pachitea rivers and developed as a “separate ethnic group.” If the Shipibo people at the reducciones of Manoa (Río Cuzhbatay) and Sarayacu had used ayahuasca for generations, then it would seem very strange if their one-time close relatives, the Kakataibo, fleeing into the woods, had completely abandoned its use and forgotten about it.

Don Joaquin, an old Madija, told me that his brother Manolito was the first among the (Peruvian section of) Madija who tried ayahuasca together with Sharanawa peers. Initially most Madija were skeptical and thought Manolito would die, but then got disabused and nowadays many Madija “know how to drink ayahuasca.” Manolito drank it for the first time around 1975-80. Pollock (2004, p. 209) mentions ayahuasca use among Brazilian Culina (Madija), but stresses that they consider it as having been introduced from Panoan neighbors.

Distribution via Missions and Rubber Camps

Ardito Vega (1993, p. 17-18) recounts that starting from Quito, Jesuit missionaries established missions from 1636 onwards in what was then called Maynas, but only the missions on the Napo, Pastaza, Marañón and Huallaga rivers could be held for a longer time. There they tried to establish Quechua as a common speech, a lingua franca (Ardito Vega, 1993, p. 69), which is spoken with variations by many indigenous populations in those regions ever since.

The first mention of ayahuasca in written accounts that I know of is given by the Jesuit Pablo Maroni (1737; cited in Naranjo, 1986, p. 120), probably from the Napo region: “For divination, they use to drink a [Brugmansia] juice […] and others, from a liana they vulgarly call ayahuasca, both very efficient for depriving of the senses (author’s translation).” The Jesuit Franz Xaver Veigl (1768, p. 189; cited in Tournon, 2002, p. 51) reported: “Among the harmful plants one finds the so-called ayahuasca, which is a bitter reed, or more specifically, a liana. It serves for mystification and bewitchment […] The indios constantly drink a preparation of its juice and within an instant lose their minds (author’s translation).” Both authors do not mention the place of their observations, but it can be assumed that Maroni around the Río Napo, and Veigl somewhere in Maynas, maybe in Lagunas on the Marañón river or, as the southernmost possibility, in Xebros on the lower Huallaga. Anyway, both authors’ observations were made within the context of missionary reducciones.

About 1800, when the forefathers of the Kakataibo and the Iskobakebo were already outcast from the riverine society, is the earliest date when ayahuasca may have been used among the peoples on the banks of the whole Ucayali river and may have reached some of the Asháninka and Yine populations who already were in permanent contact with missionaries or “Conibos” (of course, this does not include the entire Asháninka or Yine groups). Weiss (1975) recoupts the probable first mention of ayahuasca use among Arawakan people by Samuel Ocampo in 1884 on the Urubamba river: “Last night the Campos took an infusion of camalampi, which they say produces in them an effect like that of opium or, rather, that of hashish” (p. 476).

During the 19th century, the mission of Sarayacu and the numerous travelers passing by there provided a first set of ethnographic observations. Tomás Alcántara, for example, describes a curing session performed by a Shipibo sucking specialist (Tournon, 2002, p. 70). However, there is no plant mentioned save the omnipresent tobacco. In 1861 Ernest Grandidier observed a curing session where the “demirugo” used “piri piri” and describes a ritual process very close to what we see today among Shipibo, but does not mention any hallucinogenic or narcotic drug. Saint Cricq, during his expedition 1843-1847 (cited in Tournon, 2002), observed that “yuhues or doctors in magic […] pretend to have secret conferences with their protector yarina during a lethargy produced by a narcotic (author’s translation)” (p. 80). He is the only one who mentions the use of a “narcotic” drug, though many other travelers obviously observed curing sessions and often provided exact descriptions.

The indigenous groups “in between” then got exposed to this new cultural practice by the second big wave of migrations, the infamous “rubber boom” between approximately 1860 and 1920. These groups were likewise concentrated in the rubber camps together with workers from downriver and thus exchanged their cultural values (cf. Taussig, 1987 for the Putumayo region). We must keep in mind that during the few decades of the “rubber boom,” demographic mass movements swept repeatedly from Iquitos to Madre de Dios in rapid succession and these alone would have had the power to spread a cultural item like ayahuasca use from the Río Napo to the Río Madre de Dios. Yet, groups isolated by then remained untouched by ayahuasca.

The Words: Ayahuasca Terminology

I presented the above ethnohistorical review to underline and introduce my argumentation, which is in fact based on the comparison of the present-day’s terminologies and musical styles. To start with the etymological approach, I must admit that I am not a trained linguist. However, it quickly became obvious to me that many terms used in the Ucayali valley in the context of ayahuasca curing were loan-words, unlike the terms used for processes of curing without using the brew. The following terminological analysis is far from complete, but helps to highlight certain tendencies.
Let us begin with the central term, “ayahuasca”: Most groups present “emic” terms to denote either the liana, the brew, or both. However, there are many peculiarities to be observed. The Kukama term is *chichipu*, from *ichipu*, a term including any liana from the woods.25 Shipibo-Konibo call both liana and brew *nishi*, which is again the term for any liana. Most Panoan groups use the same (or a comparable) term, as e.g. *nishi pae* (liana-drunk) with the Kaxinawá. However, Panoan groups also call the brew *onti* (*onti*, *onti*), meaning “person,” perhaps referring to the ayahuasca creation story mentioned above, which in many variations can be heard throughout the Peruvian lowlands.

The Asháninka word *kamarampi*, which is also found among the Yine (*kama/ampi*) and the Matsigenka (*kamarampi*). Its etymology is rather unclear: Weiss (1975, p. 246, 470) derives it from *kamara*, vomit, poison. Gow (personal communication) assumes that it is more likely rooted upon *kama/apa* (khaki-colored) and *-pi* (elongated object).26 My Asháninka informant César Caleb translated it as “dead-liana” from *kama* (deed-related), though he could not confirm *rampi* as “liana.”27

Besides their “emic” terms, all ayahuasca-using groups also use the Quechua word “ayahuasca,” even in mother-tongue discourse and songs. The terms south of Iquitos are very imprecise. Shipibo-Konibo language, for example, has exact terms for almost every usable plant, which are never as indifferent as *nishi*, the same being true for Kukama and Kaxinawá. Although very doubtful, the mentioned “emic” terms may be interpreted as direct translations from Quechua ayahuasca (dead-liana) or from one of its components.

Second, the names for the specialist *médecins*: This area is far too complex to be discussed in detail here, but it seems sufficiently clear that many names are connected to the use of tobacco (Asháninka *sherepari* or Yine *monchi*), for example, but none to ayahuasca. The indigenous terms derived from the “Spanish” *ayahuasquero* probably are secondary formations, e.g. *nishi Seenism* (Shipibo: liana-drinker), or *nishi pae wanika* (Kaxinawá: drunk by liana). One more detail may be mentioned here: as was hinted at before, the Panoan *meraya* or *mukaya* seems to be derived from the Kukama last name *Murnari* (historically a clan name, also and a plant name).28

The Kichwa terms *supay*, *shitana* and *banku* are known and used in the whole Peruvian lowlands, also in mother-tongue discourse and song.

Regarding the various techniques in direct connection with ayahuasca, we encounter similar processes. Of course, in the northern Kichwa-dominated regions, a rich corresponding terminology is provided. However, there are certain terms understood throughout the lowlands. The omnipresent *ikaro* is a good example, as Luna (1986) derives it from Quechua, where it is supposed to mean “to blow smoke (in order to heal)” (p. 92). However, this is not beyond doubt. Muysken (personal communication)29 assures that it is not a Quechua word. Rivas (personal communication)30 suggests that the term seems to be of Kukama origin (therefore pertaining to the Tupi linguistic family), confirming my own observation: the Kukama of the upper and central Ucayali explained independently of each other, but explicitly, that any song in Kukama is called *ikaro* and the corresponding verb was *ikaratu* “to sing,” while the specific ayahuasca songs were either referred to also as *ikaro* or, on the central Ucayali, as *marriri*.29

Some more Kichwa terms are known by all ayahuasca-users, especially in song-related terminology: *warmikara* (“woman-ikara,” love magic song), *shitana* (witchcraft song) and *manchari* (from Quechua *machari* “to get frightened”: a song for curing the susto-syndrome), in particular. *Arkana*, the protection or protection song, derived from Quechua *arkay* “to block” by Luna (1986, p. 100), may also have Tupi roots as suggested by Rivas, or may even be of European, spiritualistic origin (*arenaum*).

It can be seen that etymology is a highly complex issue in the region, and besides causing much confusion, we can only isolate one tendency, which is clear: many ayahuasca-related terms that are known in the Peruvian south are rooted in the north and none used in the north come from the south. The predominance of Kichwa and to a certain extent Tupi/Kukama points towards two movements in the course of which these languages have been carried from the north to the south: the Jesuit expansion and the rubber boom.

The Music: *Ikaro*

At this point, I will present what I, being an ethnomusicologist, consider the most convincing argument: the music.31 Generally, in western Amazonia, music production is strongly connected to social events like drinking feasts, puberty rites and curing sessions. There is very little to no evidence of working songs and lullabies, for example. Since during missionary history, most of these events were forbidden, the oral transmission took place in a subcultural setting. Today, due to efficient religious conditioning in a vast part of the population, new economic orientations and of course the Peruvian laws (e.g. in case of clitoridectomy or warfare), these events are only rarely performed outside a tourist context. The main area for publicly practicing, transmitting, composing and performing songs is nowadays defined by the omnipresent ayahuasca sessions. Also, songs which have nothing to do with curing or ayahuasca, as well as curing songs which are not related to ayahuasca sessions are often performed, though much less openly.

In many of the relevant languages there are fairly exact terms for such curing songs outside the ayahuasca context. The Yine know songs they call *kamchi pirana*, which will protect somebody from spirits, dead persons, or bewitchment. There are love magic songs for seducing women or men (*gahuklewlu shikale*), and also neat medical songs, for example a song for healing furuncles (*janalewlu pirana*). All these curing songs are considered to work through thorough singing and putting *fe* (faith) into it – the singer does not have to be especially initiated and does not have to drink ayahuasca. There are songs for *toe* (*Bryconmasia sp.*) ingestion (*gayale shikale*), but there is no term for ayahuasca-related songs except *ikaro*.

In the Shipibo-Konibo language there are also many names for different kinds of curing songs, like songs for curing susto shock (*ratekati ikhu*), songs for love magic (*nekari*), songs for protection (*paanati*), for example; there are terms denoting songs for “curing” a boy to become a good hunter (*mechati*), for “curing” people to perform better in inventing art designs (*kené onanati*), songs for enhancing physical appearance to the opposite sex (*metsati*), and many more which are specifically em-
bedded in Shipibo “curing.” Although these songs are nowadays often performed under ayahuasca influence, they are still regarded as effective if also sung or whistled by an experienced médico during daytime and without ingesting anything.

The ayahuasca-lacking groups Kakataibo and Iskobakebo also have their terms for medical songs, in the Kakataibo case xonkaiti (“xoncailt”) in Wistrand Robinson, 1976, p. 6), with many sub-terms for etiologies and effects (ibid, p. 9). The Iskobakebo call their tobacco-related songs yomaat. My Iskobakebo informants also told me that besides tobacco, their médicos (called yoshilya or janebo) occasionally used tos in their sessions.

With the Asháninka terminology I encountered many inconsistencies between what my informants and translators told me and what is found in the literature. Weiss (1975, p. 471) refers to imarentakàna as “sacred songs” performed while in ayahuasca inebriation, and Kindberg Dejonge (1976) defines as follows: “Ishikoroti: is a vocal form sung by men that can be heard when they drink masato at their feasts or when they drink ayahuasca (author’s translation)” (p. 1). I never came across the terms imarentakàna or ishikoroti. In my recordings there appear songs with religious character called weshirianti, which were also registered by Weiss (1975, p. 470) as oevalrianci, and which have nothing to do with ayahuasca. All medical songs were described as ikara sung by the sherepiaari (the médicos) when they licked tobacco juice or drank ayahuasca.

Awajún people in the Peruvian north, for example, know the magical songs anén, which are only vaguely connected to the usage of ayahuasca, which is ingested collectively there (cf. Brown, 1985).

Medical or magical songs are obviously common in the groups I worked with, and have also been in use without ayahuasca ingestion. These songs usually involve elements in their musical structure that are embedded in the respective group’s aesthetic framework so that they cannot be easily recognized as medical songs unless one analyses their lyrics and performance context. Also, these “emic” curing songs hardly ever imply loan-words from Quechua or Spanish but are usually performed exclusively in mother-tongue.

Within an ayahuasca context, a different picture emerges: among the Shipibo, there is one song category that does not sound like other Shipibo songs and which is exclusively used in ayahuasca sessions: ikaro. Implementations of Quechua lyrics are restricted to this category. Something similar happens in Yine sessions: songs exclusively performed in an ayahuasca context, which are called ikara, do not per se fit into the Yine aesthetic framework. Yine médicos usually sing in Quechua, Spanish, or even Asháninka during ayahuasca sessions, but hardly ever apply their mother-tongue.

The musical structure of ikaro is the only song structure compellingly similar between the Río Napo and the Río Urubamba. There are three musicological factors that support the theory of a relatively recent integration of ayahuasca within the groups south of Iquitos: (i) the mentioned intercultural redundancy in ikaro structure, holding against (ii) the high pace at which the respective groups develop their very different musical traditions, and confirmed by (iii) the extremely high degree of interconnectedness of ayahuasca with ikaro throughout the whole complex.

If ayahuasca would be in use for centuries or even millennia among the mentioned groups, as it is often assumed, or these groups even discovered the principle of ayahuasca independently (as is suggested by some authors and practitioners), it would appear rather illogical that especially the music connected to ayahuasca sessions would be the only music fairly similar among all the groups. The assumption that local groups did not communicate among themselves before being “civilized” by missionaries cannot be held anymore, and interethnic contact was an important issue also in pre-Columbian times. Santos-Granero (2007) shows the high importance of non-kinship, long-distance friendship in the western Amazon. Many of my informants also told me that they had participated at drinking feasts in different indigenous groups. However, the music related to drinking events is by no means interculturally redundant as is the music of ayahuasca sessions. The only reasonable explanation for this phenomenon is that this music is rather new and was distributed among these groups from the same source. The musical structure of ikaro, though alien to the aesthetic criteria of the Ucayali people, does fit into intraculturally defined frameworks of musical structures in the northern Peruvian, Kichwa-speaking indigenous societies.

The main indigenous groups which were mentioned in this paper are represented in the following seven commented transcriptions of ikaro, which are sorted geographically: Río Napo, Iquitos, lower, central and upper Ucayali.33 For space reasons, I can only present a single sequence out of the usually very long songs. During a singing performance, these sequences are repeated with minor variations in musical structure; usually a sequence remains virtually unchanged until the end of a song, though performed each time with new lyrics.

Figure 3: recorded in Tacshitea on 06-02-2005, in a demonstration setting without ayahuasca ingestion (D 5450); A song for attracting women, sung by Euler (*1966), a Napornua who lives in Tacshitea on the central Ucayali. He declared that he had learned singing from his father, who emigrated around 1960 from the Río Napo and who learned ayahuasca curing there. The lyrics are in Kichwa, and Euler (throughout
the whole long song) only uses syllabic vocable singing in the last phrases of the sequence. The structure is a bit complicated, regarding the varying repetitions not shown in the transcription, so I have marked the major features of the ikaro’s Gestalt: the introductory phrase A shows a typical two-level structure, starting at a.

The second level lies at g, divided by a higher tone, usually a third up. The descending transitional passage B here shows semitonal progressions, which Euler avoids in the other sequences. The second part is made up by a “dialoguing” form, switching between the deep voice phrase C with the minor melodic peaks in D, until ending the song “flattening out,” shown in E.

Ikaro (various purposes) by Solón, mestizo, Iquitos.

Figure 4: recorded in Iquitos on 02-03-2001, during an ayahuasca session (D 632); Don Solón (*1919) usually performs this very long ikaro (42 min) when beginning an ayahuasca session. We can observe features similar to Euler’s song—the two-level phrase A, a melodic descent with phrase B, then a dialogue-like switching between C and D while flattening out in E. Don Solón often does not sing the phrase D exactly as shown, but rather like Euler’s phrase D in the end of the sequence transcribed in Figure 3. Note that many additional phrases involve syllabic singing.

This song does not serve a particular purpose, the singer rather uses it to open his visionary space and to call upon many allies and entities in a certain succession (see Brabec de Mori, 2002, p. 136-137 for a structural analysis of the whole song).
We could interpret the phrases B-B-D as one long B, leading from A to C. Thus, the structure seems a little mixed up, but slowly descending in this way it sounds better to Shipibo ears due to intracultural aesthetic criteria. However, the opening A and the switching between C and D define this song as ikaro-type, as was also explicitly mentioned by the singer. Four more Shipibo ikaros from the lower Ucayali in quite different interpretations are analyzed in Brabec de Mori (2007), revealing the same melodic structure.

Figure 6: recorded in Puerto Callao on 19-02-2001, during an ayahuasca session (D 626); This interpretation by the Shipibo Roberto (1937-2002, born on the Aguaytia river, lived on the Calleria river) excels in the high vocal range and falsettovoice, which is esteemed by Shipibo (but not e.g. by mestizos). Despite it being unusual for Shipibo, Roberto uses many Kichwa terms and filler syllables, which are employed by Shipibo exclusively as a conscious reference to downriver traditions. Roberto’s teacher was a Kukama banku.

We could interpret the phrases B-B-D as one long B, leading from A to C. Thus, the structure seems a little mixed up, but slowly descending in this way it sounds better to Shipibo ears due to intracultural aesthetic criteria. However, the opening A and the switching between C and D define this song as ikaro-type, as was also explicitly mentioned by the singer. Four more Shipibo ikaros from the lower Ucayali in quite different interpretations are analyzed in Brabec de Mori (2007), revealing the same melodic structure.

Irkar (/arkara) by Alfonso, Shipibo, Puerto Belén

This remarkable song is performed in yoshin joi, the spirits’ language, by Alfonso (*1956 in Puerto Belén), a Shipibo from the upper Ucayali. Though it was sung in a demonstration setting without ayahuasca ingestion, it was perfectly pronounced, and as Alfonso repeated the song, every syllable was in the same place. He said that it would work as arkana (i.e. a defensive song) to fight the spirit of the dead. The language applied here does not show reference to any known western Amazonian language, and the singer explained that these were the spiritual entities’ words (yoshin joi).

Structurally, the song does not show the mentioned features very clearly. For example, in phrase A the higher tone only ascends a second, and the two parts are on the same melodic level at b. In spite of these minor variations and a somehow chaotic progression form B to E, the features are present and the song undoubtedly sounds like an ikaro when heard.

Figure 7: recorded in Pucallpa on 05-02-2001, during an ayahuasca session conducted by José and his wife Rolinda (D 613); José (1920-2003), a mestizo who was born in Contamana and lived in Pucallpa, almost always uses in his ayahuasca songs dance rhythms from the northern Amazon region (pandilla, chimaychi, rondador) as well as dance rhythms from the Andes or the Peruvian coast (huayno, marinera). This is also true for this song, integrating the ikaro form into a pandilla-like sequence (a consequent 5-beat phrasing and congruent melodic shaping of A, C, and D, with only B differing in its transitional position between A and C). However, the ikaro features are still present and very clear.

José performed this song, as he explained, in order to summon a beautiful girl from Mapalva, Brazil, so that she may appear dancing to the singer whom she should help to construct love magic.

Figure 8: recorded in Puerto Belén on 15-08-2004 in a demonstration setting without ayahuasca ingestion (D 5319); This remarkable song is performed in yoshin joi, the spirits’ language, by Alfonso (*1956 in Puerto Belén), a Shipibo from the upper Ucayali. Though it was sung in a demonstration setting without ayahuasca ingestion, it was perfectly pronounced, and as Alfonso repeated the song, every syllable was in the same place. He said that it would work as arkana (i.e. a defensive song) to fight the spirit of the dead. The language applied here does not show reference to any known western Amazonian language, and the singer explained that these were the spiritual entities’ words (yoshin joi).

Structurally, the song does not show the mentioned features very clearly. For example, in phrase A the higher tone only ascends a second, and the two parts are on the same melodic level at b. In spite of these minor variations and a somehow chaotic progression form B to E, the features are present and the song undoubtedly sounds like an ikaro when heard.

Figure 9: recorded in Ramón Castilla on 26-11-2004 in a demonstration setting without ayahuasca ingestion (D 5363); Let us finally look at this love magic song by Bernardo (*1930 in Sepa on the Urubamba river). What stands out is the extremely deep voice and also the language applied, Yine. According to Gow (personal communi-
carnation, 04-02-2008), almost every Yine médico using ayahuasca would sing in Quechua, Spanish, or even Asháninka, but never in Yine. Bernardo also prefers singing in Spanish and sometimes Quechua. However, on my own request, the present example employs Yine language exclusively. Bernardo’s teacher was a Kukama. The characteristic features are again not as clear as in the first examples, but they are recognizable.

The seven examples discussed above constitute sufficient musical evidence that the song structure called ikaró is truly recognizable between the Napo and the Urubamba rivers. The examples may appear fairly different, especially as they cannot be listened to in this place. However, these differences in interpretation remain within the limits of individual freedom and thus underline that every médico has his own ways and usually insists that his songs are distinct from songs by other médicos. Therefore it is again surprising that the songs can be so similar (cf. Brabee de Mori, 2007). One has to consider how different the non-ayahuasca-related songs - from non-ayahuasca medical songs to drinking or love songs - are in the presented indigenous groups.

With a trained ear one can quickly distinguish a Yine song from a Kukama song. For example, by just listening to the melodic and rhythmic features, a task completely impossible when confronted with the above examples.

Conclusion

In the preceding sections I presented a scenario of how ayahuasca probably traveled upriver. I suppose, although my knowledge is insufficient here, that in Colombia, Venezuela and Brazil very similar results could be obtained in corresponding studies. Many authors agree (e.g. Zuluaga, 2004, also Gow, Illius, Santos-Granero, Mader, among others) that ayahuasca was discovered by some western Tukanoan people, a hypothesis that fits well into the above analysis. Regarding the Peruvian Amazon, ayahuasca use first spread from the Tukano among the now Kichwa-speaking groups that emerged from Jesuit missions in the Ecuadorian and northwestern Peruvian lowlands and among the Kukama. In a second phase it spread among the peoples in the Peruvian north, reaching southwards to the Quechua de Lamas and Shawi populations. The third phase was its journey upriver on the Rio Ucayali, probably with the rubber workers, finally crossing the Brazilian border into Acre. The ultimate phase, which is still in progress, is the acceptance of ayahuasca among groups that only recently re-established contact with riverine populations, as was shown for the Kakataibo, Madija, Arakmbut and Ese Eja – and among groups outside the Amazon basin, which is the main topic of the present volume.

The line of argument that I presented is based upon my observations among Ucayali médicos who appear to be instructed in ayahuasca use exclusively by teachers from the north. This was followed by a review of historical data, i.e. where and when ayahuasca was mentioned, or hinted at, in missionaires' and travelers' reports. The historical data was put in coherence with the ethnographies of populations who suffered long-lasting phases of isolation (Kakataibo and Iskobakebo). I also analyzed numerous terms connected with ayahuasca which are used among the different indig-
involving human and non-human beings, which can be learned and applied only through years of studying and – if one so wishes – even without drinking or adminis­tering ayahuasca at all.

Let me finally consider two ethical issues that are, however vaguely, connected to the question of the age of ayahuasca use: First, in ayahuasca tourism and exoticism, many times a simplistic view is imposed on the indigenous people, as if they all have been traditional ayahuasca shamans since ancient times. The ecological and socio­economic consequences in western Amazonia caused by such an overestimation of ayahuasca are generally overlooked. Such practices do not “help the poor people in Amazonia,” as is very often pretended or even honestly intended by organizers of corresponding activities. The resulting cash flow rather leads to dramatic inequities in the social life within slums or indigenous villages (cf. Tupper, 2009, p. 125). Indig­enous people who are not involved in the ayahuasca commerce (and who still represent a vast majority (e.g. in the Ucayali valley) in many cases suffer from exactly these inequities and have to develop strategies to cope with the situation. For example, many Shipibo-Konibo individuals do not agree with the “ayahuasca-shaman” identity concept that has been collectively imposed on them (cf. Brabec de Mori, 2008). 6

Second, there is an urgent problem in health care: During my years in Pucallpa, I could observe many transformations and distortions of the relevance of Amazonian medical knowledge. Many médicos are shifting their main occupation from curing patients or producing and counteracting sorcery to providing spectacular experiences for visitors from the West. The change itself does not pose a problem, as Amazonian people have always been “modernizing” themselves flexibly and at a high pace, leaving behind our “modern Western society” as surprisingly conservative. However, from these shifts in medical care have emerged some serious threats. I have to insist that in the western Amazon, the terms “medicine” and “curing” are not understood in an esoteric or spiritual way but rather in a pragmatic sense of treating people who are suffering from more or less fatal problems. Within local society, many people still do not trust in, or have no (economic) access to, “hospital medicine” but have nevertheless lost faith in their médicos because many of them do not treat their kinspeople anymore. Therefore, many indigenous and mestizo families are nowadays trapped in a vacuum of medical care. The exclusive focus on the plant drug, as is suggested by well-paying Westerners, is seductive for many local curing specialists themselves. Younger “shamans” often do not even know how to cure certain problems. They are trying to bring to perfection the visionary experience of ayahuasca but no longer study the whole system of Amazonian medicine in order to cure the virulent illnesses among local people. In many places it seems that, without providing alternative facilities to care for the sick, a more spiritually oriented use of ayahuasca is on the way to substitute the former system of pragmatic curing; a system that was preserved, developed, and kept self-reproducing despite epidemics, conquest, missionary condition­ing, and rubber slavery.

I hope to have contributed to a more relative view on the ayahuasca phenomenon. Ayahuasca usage, both in western an Amazonian setting and in Western society, has its powers and offers certain possibilities. However, getting rid of romantic images (like “traditions preserved from the Stone Age”) and analyzing the role of ayahuasca in indigenous history and identity in a more critical way can be very helpful to actually concentrate on the present use or abuse of ayahuasca. In the long term, I think, there is no practical reward to be expected from romanticizing and obscuring the prove­nance, history, and consequences of ayahuasca use. Presenting arguments that are carefully built upon historical or ethnographical data is more effective (also in trials regarding ayahuasca use) than taking for granted poorly evidenced millennial traditions.

---

1 I would like to thank Elke Mader, Fernando Santos-Granero, Anthony Seeger and Bruno Illius for encouraging me to work on this topic, and for the valuable information they provided. Very special thanks to Peter Gow for kindly discussing with me the whole topic and academic reactions to “River People.” I also want to thank Bia Labate and Henrik Janggabberle for their feedback at the Heidelberg conference and on the manuscript, and Roxani Rivas Ruiz, Pieter Muyssken and Edwar­do Víveros de Castro for helping me with etymologies. The Vienna Phonom grammarchiv pro­vided technical support for my recordings which are also archived there (recording references in the text are given as Phonogrammarchiv signatures, e.g. “D 5576”). Christian Huber kindly helped in correcting the manuscript. Last but most heartily, I would like to thank Euler Papa Siquius, Cristóbal Seldon Tello Lozano, Manuel Tamani Pacaya, Roberto Mori Valera (R.I.P.), José Fatuma Odeicio (R.I.P.), Alfonso Isumo Rosendo and Bernardo Rengifo Díaz, who are the authors of the analyzed songs.

2 Narby also formulates more explicitly: “According to the archeological evidence gathered by Naranjo (1986), Amazonian people have been using ayahuasca for at least five thousand years” (Narby, 1998, p. 164).

3 Although these médicos are commonly referred to as “shamans,” I prefer not using that term because of the many popular associations attached to this concept and because of its etic impos­i­tion. I prefer médicos, which is the (nevertheless reinterpreted) term most often used by both mestizo and indigenous locals in the Ucayali valley when speaking Spanish. However, during my fieldwork, I have noticed that some médicos consider themselves chamanes, especially if talking to tourists or researchers.


5 “Investigaciones Interetnicas. Algunas novedades sobre los Shipibo-Konibo y sus pueblos indígenas vecinos. Perspectivas desde la etnomusicología.” Colloquium given by the author at the Facultad de Letras. Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Mar­cos (Lima, Peru, 2005-12-14).

6 “Estudios etnográficos sobre la economía del ayahuasca en los Llacta de la provincia de Anday, Departamento de La Libertad.” Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Mar­cos (Lima, Peru, 2005-12-14).

7 This is also true for many other groups in the Peruvian lowlands. Illius (1992) or Luna (1986), among many others, present several examples how new technologies are incorporated and inte­grated into existing systems.

8 This is a complicated issue that cannot be treated extensively in this paper. However, I may point towards therapeutic applications in cases of drug addiction, psychosocial disorders, spiritual pro­gress, and also towards uses for artistic purposes (cf. Luna & Amaro, 1991), which are all sec­ondary items appearing when ayahuasca meets western concepts and health problems; the same is true for the Brazilian ayahuasca churches (from a western Amazonian point of view). There are many indications (cf. Calavina Síez, 2000; Gow, 1994; Bianchi, 2005; Brabec de Mori, 2008) that very probably the main use of ayahuasca in western Amazonia consists (and in more remote communities still consists) of producing and counteracting witchcraft. Toum­non (2002, p. 392-401)
also eludes to even many “psychosocial” problems within the indigenous societies are treated
without applying ayahuasca.

8 Cf. Weiss (1975, p. 243-244) on the Ashininka or Santos-Granero (1991) for the Yanomáma. As
for the exceptions mentioned, in Matsigenka curing sessions, all present men use to drink the
brew (Bauer, 1992, p. 87). The latter practice is found also among the Kaxinawá (Deshayes &

9 This somewhat speculative hypothesis may be strengthened through an analysis of rubber-camp
populations, taking into account that the people preferring the “group-style” were mainly back-
woods groups who lacked “ethnic” identity due to kinship-based identity structures, while the
“shaman-style” users belonged to the dominant riverine groups who during the rubber boom al-
ready perceived themselves as ethnic (tribal) groups after decades or centuries of ethogenesis in
missionary influence. Thus, it also seems logical to assume that the seringueiros in Acre, where
the Brazilian ayahuasca churches emerged, and which consisted of mainly backwoods Indians
and workers e.g. from Pernambuco, “cabochoized” in the camps, also preferred the “group-
style.”

10 Highly abridged, translated (by the author) story about the origin of ayahuasca as told by Ben-
jamín Mahua in 2006 (D 5570).

11 Personally, I met two Shipibo médicos who were considered mereyos by their peers. Both prac-
ticed curing without drinking or administering ayahuasca, one of them even without using tabac-
co or any other substance.

12 Let me mention just one example out of many, suggesting an interesting path: Hilario, a young
Shipibo médico ayahuassquero living in the upriver community of Ahatuyap, works in a “classi-
cal” Shipibo style. I knew him by recommendation from his teacher and uncle Tito, who lives in
San Francisco near Pucaipas. Tito told me that his own teacher was called José, a mestizo who at
least learned his art from Solón, an old mestizo médico born and living in Iquitos, who works in a
“classical” iquitosino mestizo style.

13 This fits well with Góis’s (1994, p. 96-97) observation that among Piro and Campa on the lower
Urubamba river, downriver ayahuassqueros, starting with Shipibo-Konibo, are generally consid-
ered more powerful than locals.

14 Shipibo-Konibo often insist that the Ashininka have knowledge about certain “piripiri” that give
them the power to make themselves invisible, make them see in the dark, or even to disable guns
pointed at them.

15 Santos-Granero (personal communication, 2007) also pointed out that this was about 80 years ago
at maximum.

16 The Iskobakebo represent only a small group, but Króskożyński, Stórańska-Kaïska & Martyniak
(2007) present evidence of a relatively big population of probably related indigenous groups that
still live in voluntary isolation along the frontier of Peru-Brazil.

17 Recorded interview, 29-03-2004 (D 5220).

18 Recorded interview, 09-07-2004 (V 1751).

19 Recorded interview, 25-06-2005 (D 5456).

20 Chante y Herrera (1961, p. 80-81) describes a scene involving the ingestion of “ayahuasca”, but
he neither specifies year, place, or group of this observation, nor does he declare his source. The
compelling similarity of wording in the Spanish original texts suggests that he actually copied this
passage from Maroni, whom he knew. Note that Chante y Herrera lived from 1788-1801. He
never left Europe and his tome is compiled from secondary sources only.

21 Today, in the Ucayali valley, “pirí pirí” denotes Cyperus spp. in regional Spanish. However, in
the 19th century, “pirí pirí” was used all over the world to denote diverse “witchcraft powders”
and the like. Therefore it can not be said with certainty that Grandditer observed Cyperus use.

22 Roxani Rivas, email to the author, 29-03-2008. Rivas also had learned among Kukama that aya-
huasca was a new hallucinogen to them, email to the author, 15-10-2008.

23 Email to the author, 04-02-2008. Santos-Granero, in an email to the author, 02-03-2008, could
not confirm the suffix “-pirí” but pointed out that the word’s root could also be “kamaari,” demon.

24 Recorded interview, 24-01-2006 (D 5570).

25 As noted above, Quechua was established in the northern Peruvian rainforests as a common
speech among many indigenous people who today consider themselves e.g. Kichwa del Napo or
Kichwa del Tigre. Also, as can be seen, there is a distinction between Quechua (or Kichwa) which
is spoken in the Peruvian and Bolivian highlands, from Kichwa, which can be found in the Ecua-
dorian, northern Peruvian and southern Colombian lowlands. Some researchers (e.g. the Summer
Institute of Linguistics, see http://www.ethnologue.org) interpret Quechua and Kichwa as two dif-
ferent languages pertaining to the same linguistic family.

26 Roxani Rivas, email to the author, 29-03-2008.

27 Pieter Muysken, email to the author, 2008-10-07.

28 Roxani Rivas, email to the author, 29-03-2008.

29 The Kukama were “reduced” very early, yet with difficulties, by the Jesuits during the 17th and
18th centuries, which not only explains how the term ikara spread among the north-western Per-
uvian kichwa-learning peoples but also accounts for the fact that it is nowadays regarded as
kichwa-rooted. This would be the only migration of an ayahuasca-related term northwards.

30 I have done research about musical practices outside the ayahuasca context as well as related
to ayahuasca sessions. As for the latter practices, see Brabec de Mori (2002, 2007, 2009).

31 For example, the Kakataibo’s sonkait shows many similarities with other “incantation type” med-
ical songs, as e.g. reported for the Brazilian Suya by Seeger (1987) or by Hill (1993) for the Ven-
ezuelan Wakána. It seems, though this is still premature, that this medical “incantation type”
singing is a truly Pan-Amazonian phenomenon.

32 One might perceive the abundance of loan-words as part of a broader trend, namely considering
such “foreign” words as stronger or more powerful. This appears logical in the case of the Span-
ish (the dominating class) and Quechua (the legendary lincas’ language) words that are actually in
use. However, as I have pointed out above, such words are almost exclusively applied in ayah-
huasca-related songs but not in curing songs or magical songs outside the ayahuasca context.

33 There is no example for Ashaninka ayahuassqueros is present in several websites, e.g. http://scnr.
net/2007/12106/ayahuasca-icaros-by-juan-floros (visited 07-02-2009). Floros’ teacher was a Kukama. His published songs exhibit a
structure and lyrics that also could be performed without any alteration e.g. by a mestizo from
Iquitos. The mentioned example is very similar to Fig. 7 in this paper.

34 Taussig (1987) points towards that direction in his study about the interdependence of colonialism
and healing/witchcraft in southern Colombia.

35 The latter four authors told me in personal communication, 2007 and 2008.

36 See for example the quotation by Narby in the introduction to this article, or the website
http://www.amazon-indians.org/page14.html which is entitled “The Shipibo Indians: Masters of
Ayahuasca.” There are many of such identity-imposing (re-)representations of Shipibo culture to be
found on the internet and in the literature.