From the holdings of the Department of Special Collections , Princeton University Library, Princeton, NJ

These documents are either in the public domain, or can only be used for educational and research purposes (Fair use) as per U.S. Copyright law (text below). By accessing this file, all users agree that their use falls in the public domain or within fair use as defined by the copyrightlaw. We do not charge any permission or usage fees for the publication of images of material inour collections, including those provided by Princeton University Library, via our website, catalog, or directly from staff.For more information regarding copyright, credit, and citation please review the information onthe Copyright, Credit and Citation Guidelines page of our website.
https://library.princeton.edu/special-collections/policies/copyright-credit-and-citation-guidelines. If you have any questions, including how to order higher-quality images from the collection, contact Special Collections Public Services via our Ask Us! Form. https://library.princeton.edu/special-collections/ask-us

Princeton University Undergraduate Senior Theses, 2025-2026 Anthropology, 1961-2026

2018-08-06

Estar Con La Planta | Being With Plants: Ecologies of Knowledge and Ritual Healing in the Peruvian Amazon

Salazar, Carolina

http://arks.princeton.edu/ark:/88435/dsp01f7623g30h

U.S. Copyright law: The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, §108, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research. If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excess of fair use that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve a violation of copyright law. https://www.copyright.gov/title17/title17.pdf

From the collections of the Princeton University Archives, Princeton, NJ

Statement on Copyright Restrictions

This senior thesis can only be used for education and research (among other purposes consistent with "Fair use") as per U.S. Copyright law (text below). By accessing this file, all users agree that their use falls within fair use as defined by the copyright law. They further agree to request permission of the Princeton University Library (and pay any fees, if applicable) if they plan to publish, broadcast, or otherwise disseminate this material. This includes all forms of electronic distribution.

U.S. Copyright Law (Title 17, United States Code)

The copyright law of the United States governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or other reproduction is not to be "used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship or research." If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or other reproduction for purposes in excess of "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement.

Inquiries should be directed to:

Princeton University Archives
Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library
65 Olden Street
Princeton, NJ 08540
609-258-6345
mudd@princeton.edu

ESTAR CON LA PLANTA | BEING WITH PLANTS

Ecologies of Knowledge and Ritual Healing in the Peruvian Amazon

by

Carolina A. Salazar

Thesis submitted to
the Department of Anthropology, Princeton University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts

April 16th, 2018

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis.

Carolina A. Salazar

Para Sita y Tito

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my advisor, João Biehl, for your invaluable insight, constant guidance, and infinite kindness. It has been an honor to work with you. Your passion for anthropology drew me to this world and I could not be more enthralled.

Thank you to my professors at Princeton. To Lauren Coyle for seeing me through my Junior Paper and for instilling in me a curiosity for the unknown. To Nomi Stone, Bridget Purcell, Anne McClintock, and Rob Nixon: you have driven me to inquire into a world of possibilities. Thank you to the Anthropology Department, and especially to Mo Lin Yee, for welcoming me with open arms and showing me all the support one could ever wish for.

Thank you to the Environmental Studies Program. Thank you to Angela Petsis for your vibrancy, and Paul Gauthier for your trust.

Thank you to the Class of 55' Fund for their crucial support; truly, none of this would have been possible without your generous contribution. I hope to give back to the world, duly.

Thank you to F and Mena; to LD and MC, for helping me navigate the intellectual landscape of the Peruvian Amazon. The work you do is invaluable and I wish the very best for you all.

Thank you to the Shipibo of Nueva Betania for taking me into your home.

Infinite thanks to the S-O family. To Don P, Doña A, Romo, and Bo, for your patience in showing me the world of Shipibo plant healing. For your healing mission and your knowledge. To Cece, for organizing an incredible experience. To Alo and Ete, for looking after me so well, and for being the unsung heroes of Rao Shobo. You have all shown me generosity beyond words and this work is for you.

Special thanks to the forest, beings and master plants of Nueva Betania. For presenting me how things can be and how we can be with you. You showed me your medicine.

A special shout out to my friends. Nancy, Vera, Olivia, Esther, Diego, and Aidan: you have made these last years unmatchable and I cherish you with all my heart. A great thank you to my roommates; cheers to apartment life. And thank you to my A's family; Princeton would have been a very different place without you.

To Logan, thank you for being a voice of reason, and above all a source of incredible joy in my life.

And immeasurable thanks to my family. To my parents, Maria José and Alfredo, for raising me up strong and loved. For giving me the chance of a lifetime and for embarking with me on this new adventure. Thank you to my sister Adriana; I wish I could be as awesome as you are and I cannot wait to see what the future holds for us. And thank you to my grandparents Sita and Tito for stirring in me an insatiable curiosity and love for nature. You are all so dear to me.

Preface

My fieldwork was carried out between Lima, Pucallpa, and Nueva Betania, the latter being the main focus of this thesis. I travelled twice to my field site. The first time I went alone, during August 2017, at the end of winter in the Southern Hemisphere and the dry season in the Peruvian Amazon. During this first visit I attended mostly to the intricacies of ayahuasca ceremonies. On my second visit, I stayed in Nueva Betania from the end of January and to beginning of February 2018, a period coinciding with summer in the Southern Hemisphere and with the rainy season in the Peruvian Amazon. L, my close friend and a fellow Princeton student, accompanied me during this visit. This time I focused intently on the techniques of plant diets and ecological knowledge creation among the local Shipibo peoples.

All my interviews were carried out in Spanish. I have translated them into English to the best of my abilities, hoping to stay loyal to their original significance. All the names of human subjects that appear in this work have been given aliases to protect their identities.

Words in their original Spanish or Shipibo have been italicized on their first textual appearance and appear non-italicized henceforth (unless for particular emphasis); often they are accompanied by what I deemed to be the closest English translation, given their local usage. These are words that I believe carry their own vernacular meaning beyond what a simple translation can express.

Table of Contents

Introduction 1
- Distance Had Very Little To Do With It 4
- The S-O family 9
- Ritual Healing in the House of Medicine 21
- Shipibo History 27
- Nature and Ritual Healing in the Anthropocene 34

1. Nueva Betania as a Socionatural Region 43
- 1.1 Imaginaries of Nature and the Making of Nueva Betania 44
- 1.2 Political Economies, Social Spatialities, Vernacular Landscapes 49
- 1.3 Terra Anfibia 55
- 1.4 Political Economies, Modern Markets 57
- 1.5 Piripiri for the Narcos 66

2. Being with Plants 71
- 2.1 Social Lives of Plants 72
- 2.2 The Plant Diet, Proper 76
- 3.3 Communications 84
- 2.4 Plant-Cultural Ecologies of Knowledge 93
- 2.5 Classification, Knowledge, Subjugation 108
- 2.6 Hierarchies 114

3. La Medicina 117
- 3.1 The Body as Place of Encounter 118
- 3.2 Therapeutics in-encounter: Pharmakon 122
- 3.3 Curing vs. Soothing 124
- 3.4 Pharma Flows 125
- 3.5 Piripiri and Ayahuasca as Life 127
- 3.6 Mantid Intimacies 129

4. La Actualidad 137
- 4.1 Anachronistic Space, Anachronistic Practices 138
- 4.2 Mapping Diagnostics 143
- 4.3 Neo-colonial Myths, Environmental Justice: Making and un-Making of the Liveable 146
- 4.4 Non-Binary Modernities: Knowing More, not Knowing Better. 150
- 4.5 Radical Displacement 154
- 4.6 Uprooted: Zombie Ayahuasca 158

Conclusion 161
- A Garden for the Wealthy 162
- Keeping Doors Open 163
- Environmental Justice, Social Justice 166
- On Extinction, Systems, and Individuals 169
- Decolonizing the Future: New Modernities in the Anthropocene 170
- Becomings: Lives Beyond 173

Bibliography 177

Table of Figures

Figure 1: Map of Peru and Major Cities (Source: Mapbox n.d.) 2
Figure 2: Map of Pucallpa in Relation to Nueva Betania, along the Ucayali River (Source: Mapbox n.d.) 3
Figure 3: Main Street in Nueva Betania, dry season 13
Figure 4: A view of the S-O family grounds 15
Figure 5: Doña A with her granddaughter and the macaw. 17
Figure 6: One of the S-O family's houses 18
Figure 7: Detail of embroidered kené art 22
Figure 8: Preparing the ayahuasca brew over the fire. The ayahuasca vines and chakruna leaves can be seen in the pot 30
Figure 9: Cross-section of a harvested ayahuasca vine, before it was used to make the ayahuasca brew. 164

Introduction



Figure 1: Map of Peru and Major Cities (Source: Mapbox n.d.)



Figure 2: Map of Pucallpa in Relation to Nueva Betania, along the Ucayali River (Source: Mapbox n.d.)

Distance Had Very Little To Do With It

I first heard about the native community of Nueva Betania from F, a now grown-up childhood friend working in the Peruvian jungle and interested in matters of indigenous medicine, and from his cousin, Mena, leader of a branch of the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Alianza Arkana[1] that works with the Shipibo people. Located on the shores of a large meander of the Ucayali River – a meander that has reconnected with itself producing a large island that it encircles – Nueva Betania is an officially recognized Shipibo native community[2], populated by about 370 people (Ministerio de Cultura and Viceministro de Interculturalidad 2017). Although officially established in 1975 (Ministerio de Cultura and Viceministro de Interculturalidad 2017), the history of Nueva Betania, and of the Shipibo people that now live there goes much further; how these stories break into the present will be illuminated in the following account.

Measured in a straight line, 26km separate Nueva Betania from Pucallpa, the capital of the Ucayali region in eastern Peru. During the night at Nueva Betania you can discern the relative position of Pucallpa from a halo of light that hovers above the trees. The flatness of the terrain means that the trees are often the only obstacle for what lies in sight; looking up at night, the stars (said to be rowers in canoes by the Shipibo) shine bright and infinite for most of the span of the sky; until, near the horizon, the artificial glow of Pucallpa begins telling a more earthly story. This is a terrain not easily traversed on foot; it is mostly jungle and farms in between. As there is no road connecting Pucallpa and Nueva Betania, the only safe way to get back and forth is by boat.

---

[1] Access Alianza Arkana's website at: http://alianzaarkana.org/

[2] Meaning that it is officially recognized by COFOPRI, Peru's *Organismo de Formalización de la Propiedad Informal*.

Using satellite map tools, I calculated the distance of the route down the river between Pucallpa and Nueva Betania to be roughly 50km. This formal distance stretches or collapses according to the type of boat you take down the river, how many stops it makes, and the fare you are willing to pay. A trip between Nueva Betania and Pucallpa can take between two to five hours, either direction. As we negotiated our travel plans, we were advised to take the *rápido* which was scheduled to leave at 9:00 am instead of the *colectivo* supposed to leave two hours later. Boat-time is the official measurement of distance between Pucallpa and the native communities located down along the Ucayali River. The boat denominations are given by the speed of the boats; rápidos, as their name suggests, are quick boats, but that also makes the fare steeper. A ride on the rápido costs S/.15 (approximately $5) and takes usually two hours to get to Nueva Betania, zooming along the river.

Sitting beside me on one of these trips was a middle-aged man, who introduced himself as a schoolteacher; the rápidos were powered by what this man proudly identified as "a Johnson motor". The rápidos were thus understood as being very superior to the slower colectivos, which were powered by extremely loud makeshift outboard petroleum motors. The latter make a long list of stops along the river, collecting and dropping off people at every bend of the Ucayali, lending them their name, colectivo. This was a name also shared by the large public transport buses in the city, likewise known for their rather cramped conditions and infamous reckless driving. The colectivos take about five hours to get from Pucallpa to Nueva Betania They are known to be more dangerous than the rápidos during the rainy season due to their higher tendency to capsize in whirlpools in the overgrown rivers, and cost S/.5 (about $1.5) a ride.

Given that I had never really heard about Nueva Betania except directly in the context of Shipibo traditional healing, I was initially under the impression that it was some kind of mysterious faraway place, or at least one regarded as such. This rendering was partly of my own making; I could have certainly been more aware of things happening back in my home country. But something in me wondered whether Nueva Betania had been made to be far away, having been imagined and treated as such by curious visitors. From F and Mena I had heard amazing things about the Shipibos: their art and healing work, their incredible knowledge of the natural world, and also their tangible vulnerability in the face of market forces, economic development, deforestation, river pollution, among others. As a repository of such knowledge and systemic conflict, why had I and so many others never heard about Nueva Betania?

L, sitting next to me during my second visit to Nueva Betania as we cruised upstream from Pucallpa to the community, mentioned how he was surprised at how many packed boats went up and down the river. He had imagined we would have to hire some form of private transport to take us all the way to Nueva Betania. Instead, here we were, in a boat fitting around 40 people, all bound from the city to the native community. The connectivity between Nueva Betania and Pucallpa had taken him by surprise.

I began to think that the remoteness of Nueva Betania was then based much more in the collective imagination than an on-the-ground reality – something created much more by humans in their minds, attitudes and actions towards Nueva Betania than on the landscape itself. This vision was certainly the norm within 'urban' people living in Pucallpa. As we flew into Pucallpa a woman seated in the same aisle as L and me leaned

over and asked where we were from[3]. I told her that L was American, while I was a Peruvian originally from Lima studying in the United States. I asked her if she was from Pucallpa. She said she was, and continued on to tell us about out how she was recently in Iquitos and how "they had a much nicer riverside boulevard" than the one in Yarinacocha[4]. She then asked where we were headed to. I told her we are going to Nueva Betania, for an anthropology research project, With a contorted look on her face, she mused: "Why Nueva Betania? Only half an hour from Pucallpa there were already native communities – so why so far away?"

It is always unsettling then, to realize how economic expansionist forces – often quite detrimental to the native community – find their ways too easily into areas like Nueva Betania. That this place was on-the-ground so entangled in the flows of these neoliberal, extractivist, and touristic forces, yet so much of a remote island in the hegemonic social imagination, set the ground for its vulnerability and further political isolation. This ghosting of sorts further endangers the livelihoods of the humans and non-humans (beings of 'nature') that call Nueva Betania their home. This condition and imaginary remoteness is tragically shared by many other rural or native communities in Peru.

❖ ❖ ❖

Having done research on Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) for my Junior Independent Work (Salazar 2017), stories of people engaging in CAM often transported me back to my native Peru, most specifically to the rising popularity of

[3] I suspect that the lady sitting beside us was alerted to our or L's foreignness since we were speaking in English between us.
[4] Yarinacocha is a very well known lake near Pucallpa, also a famous tourist and local attraction for leisure activities.

treatments involving Shipibo plant medicine and the use of ayahuasca: a brew made out of the *Banisteriopsis caapi* vine (ayahuasca in Quechua or *oni* in Shipibo) and the leaves of the Psychotria viridis (chakruna in Quechua or *cáhua* in Shipibo), known for its medicinal and psychotropic properties). Just a year ago, these terms were for me shrouded in mystery and hearsay. I had read about how people from various parts of the globe would come to Peru – mostly heading to Iquitos or Pucallpa – in order to engage in ayahuasca healing rituals, or undergo plant diets and learn the techniques of plant healing from the Shipibos, pinpointed as the masters of the medicinal use of ayahuasca. The mom of a close friend of mine from Lima would swear by this type of 'natural' medicine, after she got deeply engaged with CAM during and after her battle with cancer, which she was adamant to successfully beat. In Lima— a colonial city thick with class and race dynamics that often disavow the ways of the natives, of the non-white, of the non-officially educated—Shipibo plant medicine was becoming something to be reckoned with.

I had initially thought about focusing my research on this urban embrace of CAM, especially concerning Shipibo ritual healing[5]. My initial involvement in this world, however, seemed to always refer to the Shipibos themselves: all my contacts, the people I asked for advice and to share their experiences and knowledges would again and again point me towards to the native community of Nueva Betania. Originally, I had also thought that the Shipibos of Nueva Betania would be more of a node connecting me to the consumption of CAM and Shipibo plant medicine in Lima. Once in Nueva Betania, however, an intensely rich story began to flourish, and I could not help but give it a central role in research and writing. Although unexpected, I doubt that this was a chance encounter. Embodied flows of ritual healing knowledge had taken me there. Navigating

[5] Ritual healing is the more general term under which Shipibo plant healing falls.

the tendrils of ecologies of ritual healing and environmentalism, I had arrived at Nueva Betania to this anthropological study on being with plants, or as the Shipobo say, "estar con la planta." Perhaps it was time healing knowledge and techniques flow the opposite way.

The people and beings of Nueva Betania have been exceptionally generous to me, presenting me with the opportunity to tell a multi-layered story whose participants are not only humans but also plants, animals, ancestors, market forces, intergenerational change, even what we may think of as geological features. In my study of Shipibo ritual healing in Nueva Betania, many worlds came together, enlivening and highlighting each other through encounters and interactions, and through flows both local and global, thus creating a meshwork of lives and forces that could be best described as a complex ecology.

The S-O family

During my fieldwork, I came to work closely with the S-O family. Don P, now 71 years old, came to Nueva Betania from Bajo Ucayali (now called Loreto), an area located further up north, in the Peruvian Amazon. While his brother had moved to Lima, Don P met Doña A, and relocated with her to Nueva Betania, a still small and only recently officially recognized native community where Doña A had family ties. The S-O's extended family was much larger than the kin I got to meet (as not all of the extended family lived in Nueva Betania); those who stayed in Nueva Betania were indeed close-knit. Don P and Doña A have a lively group of children: Emi, W, Bo, Romo, and Ete. Bo and Romo are powerful healers, as is Don P, and experienced in their use and knowledge

of medicinal plant healing. Bo is the older of the two, followed by the thirty-six-year-old Romo. At twenty-four years old, Ete is the only girl and the youngest of the siblings present in Nueva Betania. Ete is married to Alo, and they have a young daughter together. Alo, a Shipibo himself, was not originally from Nueva Betania; he came from another native community, and now lives with the S-O family. W was one of the siblings not living in Nueva Betania; he had married Cece, a Belgian woman who had come to live in Ucayali, and now helped the S-O family organize sojourns of people who want to visit Nueva Betania and stay with the S-O family. I never learned about the circumstances under which Alo and Ete met and decided to form a family, and no one told me how Cece came to Nueva Betania and married one of the S-O brothers[6]. Most of the people whom Cece helped organize stays for at Nueva Betania wanted to do ayahuasca ceremonies, or do a plant diet, either to learn about Shipibo plant healing or to be cured from some ailment. Some also wanted to learn how to become healers themselves. As this process took a long time of apprenticeship through plant diets, future healers would be regulars at the S-O family grounds. Wiso, whom I came to know well, was one of them: at twenty-three years of age, he hailed from Chiclayo, a coastal city in Northern Peru, and was regularly back in Nueva Betania with the S-O family to engage with plants with the goal of becoming a healer himself.

It was Cece who helped the S-O family set up what was now formally known as Rao Shobo. Rao Shobo – meaning 'house of medicine' in Shipibo – was the name given to the organization that the S-O family set up, through which they organized people's

[6] Although in this case, another family from Nueva Betania, one of whose members had used to date Cece, said it had been sorcery performed by the S-O family that had made Cece join their family; due to this, the other family deeply resented but also somewhat feared the S-O family. The S-O family denied the claims of sorcery and said it was simply jealousy that caused the other family to call them sorcerers.

stays with their family; it was also the name of the largest *maloca* or ceremonial hut in the S-O family grounds in Nueva Betania, after which the organization took its name. Perhaps the foreigner, Cece had a more entrepreneurial grasp of what was necessary to set up in order to attract visitors and successfully organize their stays with the S-O family, not only physically, but also in the virtual and telecommunications sphere. And so Rao Shobo was given a website and made into a 'center' where people could come and stay[7]. Cece still organizes people's stays, although she no longer resides in Nueva Betania. I initially got in touch with her via email, through Rao Shobo's website, and then progressed to talking to her via phone and Whatsapp[8]. Cece had moved to Oxapampa, where she was raising a family with W. The sounds of her family – mainly two small children – were ubiquitous in the voice messages she sent me over Whatsapp. Oxapampa was also a strategic location – for although still in the Peruvian jungle, it is part of the 'high jungle' region of Peru (versus the 'low jungle' such as is most of Ucayali and within which Pucallpa and Nueva Betania lie). The high jungle, more of a cloud forest, does not flood in the rainy season, and Oxapampa is considered to be a relatively large jungle city with decent infrastructure. For Cece and W, the lack of flooding makes it easier to raise their children. Indeed, during the flooding season many families from Nueva Betania who have small children move in with relatives in Pucallpa, as water levels from an overflowing river can reach from a couple of centimeters to about waist level during particularly bad years. Ete liked to tell me how much her daughter would get bored and cry inconsolably during the worse days of the rainy season, when she could not leave the house due to the high floods. Oxapampa is also known for its colonies of foreigners. As I

[7] Rao Shobo's website can be accessed here: http://www.shipiboamazonia.org/
[8] Whatsapp is a texting application in Peru much more popularly used than 'regular' texting.

understood it, Nueva Betania was a purely Shipibo native community; other non-native communities, who house *mestizos*, are called *caseríos*. I was unsure whether non-Shipibos could raise families in Nueva Betania.

In any case, Oxapampa also has internet and cell phone coverage; Nueva Betania has no internet service, and cell phone coverage pretty much only over a one square meter area near the port (this area was marked by a carved out tire and a small wooden bench) exclusively during the dry season. During the rainy season, there is no cell phone service at all. One of the families in the village have a telephone booth; they sell prepaid calling cards which they restock every time they go into Pucallpa, and so whoever wants to use their phone booth service can do so by buying the cards off them. This is for outgoing calls only, and for very short conversations at that, since a 3 minute call would cost S/5 (about $1.5). This often sufficed for those in Nueva Betania who were also in contact with people coming and going from Pucallpa, but for the ends of running Rao Shobo and having to organize foreigner's stays at the center, an active two-way communication was needed. Cece thus organized people's stays from Oxapampa, and would then relay the news to the S-O family whenever one of their members went to Pucallpa, or, during the dry season, whenever they managed to get a call in. Used to the immediacy of readily available wireless communication, I was surprised at how, on my two visits, and seemingly with all other visitors to Nueva Betania, everything regarding our stay and transport seemed to work out seamlessly in spite of this most precarious technological infrastructure.

Among the S-O family members, it would be Romo whom I would talk to and interact with most as I tried to learn about Shipibo ritual healing and other systems that affect Nueva Betania, his family, and the Shipibo culture at large. He had been the

community leader at Nueva Betania for some time, and as such was very aware of the rhythms and disruptions that marked and affected people's lives. Romo was an active citizen of Nueva Betania, often going up to a turret with a speaker and broadcasting live messages, half in Shipibo, half in Spanish. Some of his messages spoke passionately about the need to continue practicing Shipibo traditions, carrying on with what their ancestors had taught them; intertwined with them, or at the end, would also come up invitations for the youth to join Romo and others in a soccer practice.

❖ ❖ ❖



Figure 3: Main Street in Nueva Betania, dry season[9]

[9] All the pictures henceforth are the author's, unless otherwise stated.

The native community of Nueva Betania, standing on the shores of the Ucayali River, has a main dirt street that runs perpendicular to the waterfront, beginning by the port or dock by the river bank, and going all the way until it was engulfed by the trees. Most people's houses in Nueva Betania are built along this main street; the street is kept free of vegetation by people's ambling up and down its length. During the rainy season this main street would become slippery mud, and on days when the puddles would begin to dry up, family chickens (which roamed free around town) would delight in pecking at the insects and tadpoles swimming in the shallow puddles. Nueva Betania, as it stands now, houses about 370 families according to the latest census data (Ministerio de Cultura and Viceministro de Interculturalidad 2017). The population is highly seasonal, though, and Romo said more than 100 families, for a total of about 600 inhabitants, can sometimes be living in Nueva Betania during the dry season. Houses are mostly made out of wood gathered from trees found further into the jungle, and for the roofs, large palm leaves to waterproof the houses. The houses, very much huts, also stand on stilts, about waist-high, to prevent their flooding during the rainy season. Due to this elevation, stairs lead up to every home. Most of the houses along the main street have an open half – consisting of a wooden frame and a roof – and then a closed-in private area, or are fully enclosed homes, some a single large room, some with internal partitions.

The S-O family grounds do not stand along this main village street. Instead, their family compound – composed of about three family houses, plus the large ceremonial *maloca* (Rao Shobo proper), and a number of other small houses built for visitors – is located along the river and to the left side of the village if viewed from the river. The vegetation around there has not been cleared up as much as along the houses in the main street, and the space between houses, although rid of very large trees, functions as a

winding, extensive medicinal garden which Don P tends to. What I originally thought to be undergrowth was actually what Bo, Romo and Don P described to me as a 'plant-' or 'living-pharmacy' – home to many medicinal plants that had been initially cultivated by Romo's grandfather (on Doña A's side, who had lived in Nueva Betania for longer).



Figure 4: A view of the S-O family grounds

Some eagles seemed to be nesting on one of the larger trees; butterflies would flutter around. Fireflies called this space their home, revealing themselves at night; a long white crane would sometimes stroll by, silently. Three tiny praying mantises lived on one of the medicinal plants – one with tall stalks and small leaves, used for making a mate drink. In the Shipibo world, the plants are spirited, actors and agents themselves. As I

learned this and came to further interact with the plants, they would make themselves ever more present to my curious eyes**.**

Roosters, hens and chickens, kept for their eggs and for meat, would run around the houses, pecking at insects. Although seemingly self-sufficient, family members would often feed them some leftover plantain or rice during mealtimes. Chickens knew this and would roam the house whenever cooking was taking place. During the dry season (as in my first visit in August), the cooking setup was a large pot placed over an open fire, running on wood. Wiso, often to be found cooking plantains on the open fire using a grill, would also usher the smaller chickens away from the fire. He told me how a few days before one of the baby chickens had apparently been mesmerized by the fire, perhaps attracted by its warmth, and jumped into the flames promptly roasting itself to death. We both laughed, amused but also a little unsettled by this story; but the effects of such a sight took shape in a Wiso that was often very vigilant around the fire, shooing away any small animals that came too close to it. During the rainy season (as in my visit between January and February), this same setup was transposed into a small extension of Don P and Doña A's house, under a roof so that the fire would not be extinguished by the rain. A completely new kitchen and dining hut for visitors had also been built during that visit, and this kitchen had a stove that ran on gas.

Due to their relative separation from the main village, the S-O family houses sported a more open plan than most of the houses on the main street, having less people that usually walked around there that did not belong to the family. On the large family house, in which Ete, Alo, Don P, Doña A and a couple of other family members slept, walls only rose halfway up, and entrances had no doors. Doña A would often be found lounging in this house during the dry season, together with Don P. Doña A would

sometimes embroider, or help take care of her granddaughters. A large (and vociferous) red-and-green macaw would always be by her side; the macaw seemed to have chosen Doña A as the only person who could closely interact with it without eliciting a clamorous complaint from the bird.



Figure 5: Doña A with her granddaughter and the macaw.



Figure 6: One of the S-O family's houses

Romo's house was smaller, closer to the river, and sported also some wooden paneling with spaces in between, giving some privacy while creating a porous inside-outside space. Some of the other houses only had one or two wooden walls, with the rest of their faces being open. Only Cece's old house – in which she no longer lived and so was given out for visitors to stay in – sported a completely closed-off section, enclosed by wood paneling with large windows, and which could be locked from the inside.

The S-O family had also built a number of houses for doing plant diets away from the hustle and bustle of the family homes and the village. These were built across a creek, and were much more barebones than the other houses – consisting of only a raised platform and a roof, completely open. Most houses would have hammocks to sleep in or

lay in during the day, some of them also having mosquito nets over the hammocks. Beds were mattresses resting on the wooden floor, this time all of them with a mosquito net over them, protecting those who slept under them.

During my first visit to Nueva Betania, I stayed at Cece's house, which still bore some signs of her previous life there, mainly dream-catchers hung on the inside walls of the private room in the house, and the relentless presence of a brown mutt dog whom Romo told me used to be Cece's dog. The dogs of the community, and who lived on the S-O's family grounds, were only half-tame, except for Cece's dog. But once I allowed Cece's dog to come onto the house's platform, at least other two dogs would always follow. Other people would scare them away with sticks or machetes. I still had to learn how to assert my space. Yet, in the space full of excess meaning that was Nueva Betania to me (and with this excess meaning being definitely much more undefined to me during my first nights and first stay there – it would transform into understanding and comprehension as days went by, as I visited more than once, as I got to know the S-O family better, as I learned about plant diets and about the jungle around Nueva Betania), the presence of a dog – often understood as being able to tap both into a human and an unseen realm, unavailable to our human senses and attunements – was somewhat of a comfort, at the expense of all the scratching, barking and running around that would happen at night during the private lives of the dogs of Nueva Betania. My privacy inside this wooden room was also in exchange for having to share this private space with perhaps other unwelcome tenants. Two large tarantulas lived on the ceiling; they posed little problems as they often stayed up there. A smaller, yet still substantial tarantula, however, lived inside the wooden room, and it had the tendency to perch on the door lock during the night. Not really knowing how to handle these creatures, the first night I

got locked in my room by this furry arachnid that would insist but to sit out her nightly hunting shift on the door lock. The next day I asked Ete to help me clear the house of some of its spider residents. Apparently, the tarantulas and this other large grey species of spider that lived in the houses were actually pretty harmless; no one had ever died or suffered too much from one of their bites. It was the urticating hairs of the tarantulas that you had to be wary off. If the tarantula got startled or sensed they were in danger, they would scrape off these urticating hairs off their abdomen, sending them flying in your direction. These extremely tiny bristles, if they came in touch with your skin, or worse, your eyes, would cause an intense irritating reaction that could last uncomfortably long. If you are going to kill them, it has to be with one strike, Ete told me. Otherwise, you could just shoo them away.

On my second visit, L and I were housed in the ceremonial maloca since Cece's house was being used by Isla, a French man doing a plant diet in order to learn Shipibo plant healing. I had learned about the tricks of mosquito-deterrence during my first stay in Nueva Betania, and so in this second stay, L and I made sure to keep pieces of *espiral* – the local name for anti-mosquito incense, which was spiral-shaped – burning throughout most of the day, strategically places throughout the house. The mosquito netting which encased the maloca was not as effective as one might have guessed (unlike the finer netting that encased sleeping mattresses, which worked wonders at keeping mosquitos out, even if an occasional ant or smaller insect would still creep in), and so it was always the espiral that saved the day. Thankfully, in this area, mosquitos did not transmit malaria or yellow fever. Dengue, however, had had occasional outbreaks throughout the year. There had not been dengue that year yet, and in any case, Romo assured me that they knew how to cure dengue with the plants that they had. If it got really bad, you

could in either way go back to get treated in Pucallpa. As much as the mosquitos were an annoyance, Romo also said that they were a blessing in disguise, especially since, unlike Iquitos, they did not carry many diseases. They had kept many loggers, miners, and settlers, of non-Shipibo origin away. They were too annoying; non-locals who were not used to them would find them too much to bear.

Ritual Healing in the House of Medicine

In Cece's house or in the maloca – more clearly anywhere in Nueva Betania, even when inside a house as we just saw – one would never be alone. Nueva Betania was marked by almost these inescapable presences – a feature which was also well ingrained in Shipibo tradition and cosmology, which regards plants, animals, and even what might be called geographical features as having spirits; these were also called spirit 'owners' or 'mothers' (for example, the anaconda was the owner or mother of the ayahuasca; it was its dually material and spirit presence). Nueva Betania was surrounded by trees – although not to the same extent as it was when it was a younger community, before the logging companies came in, Romo told me. The S-O family grounds were full of medicinal plants, kept by generations of healers. The more one looked, felt, learned, the more presences would make themselves noticed. Apart from the mosquitos, large spiders and tarantulas that lived in both Cece's house and the maloca, small lizards would also appear, climbing up and down the netting, wooden beams, or even the inside of the roof of the houses. Insects seemed to crowd Nueva Betania's aerial space. In the river, the murky water conjured up images of fish and perhaps other reptilians lurking beneath. I was assured it was safe to swim there, and so it was. After a couple of leisurely swims and

baths in the river, my imaginaries dissipated; if anything, it was perhaps the pollution that I was worried about, not the fish or caimans. Men would fish in the river, catching the peculiar-looking *carachama*[10] and other species that would then be boiled, grilled, or cooked together with rice to be eaten. I was told to be wary of snakes, to always look where I was stepping, particularly at night, and carry a flashlight with me. I did not see a single snake during my stay, except embroidered in the Shipibo art, *kené*. "Don P makes sure this area is safe," Wiso told me. He makes rounds, making sure there are no snakes or other harmful presences around the houses, keeping us all safe.



Figure 7: Detail of embroidered kené art

[10] Scientific name: *Pseudorinelepis genibarbis.*

But just as present would be the agency and social role of plants and animal spirits – residing in their physical manifestations as the medicinal plants in the garden or the eagles, possums, and praying mantises roaming around – and in how they affected people's treatments of these animals, their regards for them, modes of use and interaction. The plant spirits made themselves perhaps most present during the plant diets – times of liminality and learning which I will discuss in depth in Chapter 2 – and during the ayahuasca ceremonies.

Carried out at night, Don P leads the ayahuasca ceremonies in the maloca, rao shobo (again, meaning 'house of medicine'). Doña A sometimes sits in and then lies by Don P's side. The ceremonies last throughout the night, starting at about 9:00 p.m. Having prepared the ayahuasca brew earlier, Don P brings it into rao shobo in a repurposed plastic water bottle. Participants sit on mattresses arranged so as to form a rough circle, rectangle, or oblong shape; at one end sit Don P, with the ayahuasca brew and other ritual healing tools, such as his *mapacho*[11]. Romo, who leads his own ayahuasca drinking as well as Bo, also bring in their own ritual healing tools; among them are the *agua de florida*[12], a caiman's tooth, carved pipes, some rocks, a large shell to discard mapacho into, and a bouquet of wild basil – also sweet smelling, to be used by Don P to move around energies in the air as the ceremony goes on.

Although each ceremony somewhat varies depending on the people present, Don P, the ayahuasca brew, and the ceremony tends to follow this a general outline. After having arranged the mattresses, people come in around 8p.m. We would sometimes talk

[11] A type of wild tobacco, *Nicotiana rustica,* smoked in a pipe or rolled into cigarettes, used for ritualistic purposes.
[12] A sweet-smelling cologne, used to disinfect wounds but also to render the person wearing it sweet-smelling in order to attract healing spirits.

and exchange stories before the ceremony, also setting each other at ease, which I found important since the ceremony itself involved times of extreme emotional as well as physical vulnerability. Don P would often come later, at about 9p.m., when it had already been dark for some time. He would bring with him the ayahuasca brew and set it down. He would don his ceremonial garments – covered in ancestral and powerful kené patterns. The transformation was visually intense; seeing Don P, this fairly old but vital man, seemingly grow when enveloped by his flowing, intricately decorated robe used for instances of ritual healing only. Don P would irreverently joke that in times past, healers would wear the robes with no other clothes underneath; he said he would preferred to save us the sight and so he would wear shorts under his robe. Buckets were placed at the foot of each mattress, for each participant, as it was understood that most people would vomit. Don P and Romo, however, would always boast that they no longer vomited: a sign that they had already been largely cleansed by the medicine and had no illness to be extirpated from them.

A candle would be lighted; it was often the sole source of light. I was at first hesitant to use my flashlight when I needed to move around or look for something during this 'sacred time'. Don P, however, reassured me that it was ok; I could do anything that I felt would make me more comfortable, and he actually asked that I use my flashlight to help him see how he had set up his tools. Don P would then gently shake the ayahuasca bottle and unscrew open the cap. He would sing an airily whistled song to the ayahuasca, directed into the brew from the opening of the bottle. The ayahuasca was then poured in a small measuring cup for each of the participants, their drinking order chosen by Don P. The healer would often ask the participants how much they wanted to drink; this often depended on whether this was the first time people were drinking or not and whether

their bodies took more or less of the brew to produce an effect and a strong *mareación* (translated to "dizziness", this is the physical feeling brought on by the ayahuasca brew during the ceremony).

The small ayahuasca-filled cup would then be given to the taker; it would be cupped between their hands, and the takers would focus and ask the plant what they wanted out of their visions. The brew was then drank. Although the brew can vary depending on how it is cooked – the ratios of ayahuasca to chakruna used, as well as the time spent reducing it over the fire, together with the content of the particular pieces of ayahuasca and chakruna used (which, due to their vegetable nature, used to be rather variable) – it is often of a dark golden, dark orange or almost brown intensely saturated, opaque color. Its consistency is that of a thick liquid, and the taste is strong and very particular, not too pleasant. Don P was aware of this, and, upon drinking himself, would often exclaim quite sarcastically, "qué rico!" (delicious!) after he had drank down his own cup of ayahuasca. Behind the sarcasm, however, I sensed great love and appreciation for this brew; perhaps the taste was quite repulsive, but to Don P, it carried immense significance behind it.

After everyone drinks their share of ayahuasca, participants sit or lay down to meditate. The brew takes a while to start to be effective; it can take from half hour to a full hour. As the effects are felt, visions soon start coming to those who took the ayahuasca. If effects are not strong enough, sometimes a second round of ayahuasca drinking is performed. The visions coupled with a strong feeling of bodily dizziness – mareación – last for about three hours. Sometime during the mareación, healers such as Don P, Romo, Bo, Doña A, or others present, start intonating *ícaros* – powerful healing songs. These are songs that came from the plants that these healers dieted, and are now

used to please the plant spirits and guide them to heal the people present in the ceremony. I thought the ícaros to be beautiful songs, often thoroughly descriptive, telling of the life processes of plants, of the features of the plant spirits and of their powers. Through the ícaros, knowledgeable healers invoke the healing spirits of plants and animals to come in and help them identify an illness and heal the person suffering from that illness. The presence of these spirits is necessary for the curing to take place, so goes the story, and it is the healer's job to invoke them and control the spirits in such a way that, depending on the case, they either tell him or her the cause of the problem or illness, or help him or her perform a spiritual 'surgery' upon the sick person ("Plant Spirit Healing" 2015).

Ícaros are said to help rearrange the patterns that cover the skin of people – patterns often unseen but that exist in nature, most notably on medicinal plants and on the skin of certain animals – such that, if these patterns had been rendered disorderly through happenings in the person's life, they could now be reset to a beautiful, harmonious and orderly pattern, restoring health and wellbeing to that person. The ayahuasca shows the state of these patterns to the healers, and then, through their ícaros and the invoked medicinal spirits, the healers can restore harmony onto that person.

The ícaros last for about three hours, with breaks in between. People often throw up towards the end of the mareación; if they are able to stand and walk outside the maloca (it is quite hard to walk properly under the mareación) they then throw out the bucket's contents. Don P sometimes also performs a few more healing rituals within the ayahuasca ceremony on particular people themselves, according to what he deems necessary.

The arrival of morning is marked by the call of the roosters. People often doze for some hours in the maloca, and then retire to their own living grounds or to continue going about with their day. Although the effects of the ayahuasca itself are strong during the mareación, the feeling the morning after is often one of peace and wellbeing, speaking to the anxiolytic properties of the ayahuasca. It is said that its medicine acts bodily apart from conferring visions and encounters with spirits; as such, even when small doses are given to beginners, the ayahuasca medicine leaves the body with a sense of wellness after the ritual.

It is for these Ayahuasca healing ceremonies and for powerful healers such as Don P, that the Shipibo are often associated with. As this ayahuasca ritual healing (and to a lesser extent plant diets) has grown in notoriety, we now see "[t]he emergence of ayahuasca tourism and increased interest in traditional healing and medicinal plants" ("Our Alliance" n.d.). This increased interest, although benefitting many, Shipibos and non-Shipibos alike, is part of a complex story, which together with other political-economic forces, "create[s] a complex socio-economic context in which Shipibo community members are now practicing traditional ecological knowledge in new ways." ("Our Alliance" n.d.) This thesis explores the many ways of this knowledge.

Shipibo History

The Shipibo are an indigenous group, inhabiting wide areas mostly along the Ucayali River in Peru. At about 32,000 people, they "represent approximately 8% of the indigenous population of Peru." ("Our Alliance" n.d.) Pottery found in the Ucayali area dates back 4,000 years, although they might have belonged to a culture predating the

Shipibo (Belaunde 2009, 51). Speakers of Pano – the language family to which the Shipibo language belongs to – are thought to have arrived in Ucayali around 400-500 A.D., although others argue for an earlier arrival; this has not yet been determined (Belaunde 2009, 51). They had extensive contact with the Quechua-speaking Incas, with whom they exchanged agricultural and artistic knowledge, as well as cosmologies and medicinal healing practices, as well as with other "neighboring communities belonging to the Arawak linguistic family, such as the Machiguenga, Yine, and Asháninka" (Morales 2002, 2008, cited in Belaunde 2009, 52; my translation) It is unclear how ayahuasca came to be used by the Shipibo, in the context of these intercultural relations. Although the ayahuasca vine is native to Ucayali, some theories suggest it was the Incas who showed the Shipibos how to use it; these theories are in accordance to elements from the Shipibo mythology (Belaunde 2009, 52). It is also believed that the Incas might have shown Shipibos the art of cultivating and using cotton for their kené art (Belaunde 2009, 52). As such, intercultural relations are very much woven into Shipibo ancient history, botanical knowledge and practices, and cosmology and mythology.

The Shipibo differentiate themselves from other Amazon indigenous groups by being an exclusively riverine community; as such, they always live along the shores of rivers, for example in contrast to the Asháninkas, who inhabit inland spaces. Traditional livelihood activities include hunting, fishing, and some amount of farming.

The name Shipibo comes from the idea that the Shipibo come from the *shipi* – a type of small bearded monkey ("Shipibo Konibo (Peru): Historia, avances y perspectivas hacia el futuro del pueblo indígena Shipibo Konibo" 2003) "The suffix –*bo* then serves to pluralize in the Shipibo language" (Belaunde 2009, 15; my translation). Another cultural group, with which the Shipibo are closely associated are the Konibo. In a parallel fashion

to the Shipibo, the Konibo are said to come from the *koni*, a type of eel ("Shipibo Konibo (Peru): Historia, avances y perspectivas hacia el futuro del pueblo indígena Shipibo Konibo" 2003).

Due to their similarity, after the reduction of their numbers, the Shipibo and the Konibo are often grouped together as a sole ethnic group, the Shipibo-Konibo.[13]

Central to the Shipibo lifeworld is their close relationship with plants, most importantly with medicinal plants. The facets of this relationship – and how it is enacted and is developing presently – will be the focus of many discussions throughout this work. This relationship is mainly understood through ritual healing: a technique that includes ayahuasca ceremonies and plant diets, both focused on the use of medicinal plants and in establishing healing and learning relationships with plant spirits[14]. As previously outlined, ayahuasca – called *oni* in the Shipibo tongue – is prepared together with the leaves of the *chakruna* or *cáhua* tree to prepare a powerful brew, which has been used for countless generations for its medicinal and divinatory (or communication) properties (see Chapter 2).

[13] In the case of the S-O family, they identified themselves as Shipibo, and so I use the more accurate term Shipibo and not Shipibo-Konibo to refer to them.

[14] Plants are also understood to have medicinal properties in their 'physical' bodies; chemical compounds, if you will. People who know about the healing properties of the plant but do not necessarily have any sort of deeper spiritual connection with the plants can perform this non-spiritual type of plant healing. When necessary, healers will also heal using plants in a purely physical form, depending on what is called for in the moment. This will be further explained in Chapter 2.



Figure 8: Preparing the ayahuasca brew over the fire. The ayahuasca vines and chakruna leaves can be seen in the pot

When trying to cure someone from an illness – this can be a physical, psychological, or emotional illness – the ayahuasca brew will be taken in a ceremonial setting by a healer who then administers it to the afflicted person. The healer will usually sing ícaros – songs of powerful knowledge – that talk about the properties of different medicinal plants and healing spirits, inviting them and controlling them to use their healing medicine upon the sick person. Often, during ceremonies, animals will appear around the ceremonial hut; this is understood as a sign that the ícaros and healing being carried on is attracting good spirits, who, pleased, will then manifest themselves as

tangible animals around the ceremonial hut. Ceremonies will last throughout the night, as the healers sing through the *mareación* – a state of hallucinogenic dizziness brought on by the ayahuasca – and perform a number of other techniques throughout the ritual, often blowing on participant's heads, shaking a bundle of sweet-smelling leaves, to get the energies flowing as the night goes by and the *cargas*, or negative energies that had been weighing down participants, are released. During this time, the healer may also perform a search, attempting to figure out the cause of the illness; beyond the usual physical, psychological or emotional sources, it may turn out that some other person seeking to harm the ill person inflicted it. Many of the people who take the ayahuasca will, after about two or three hours into the ceremony (but depending on their own organism, the rhythm of the ceremony, the concentration of the brew, and their own state of mind), throw up, expelling with the ayahuasca the impurities that plagued their body and made them ill. Participants in the ceremony will have to prepare themselves well in advance of it, abstaining from sexual activities and from ingesting foods such as pork or spices for about three days in advance.

Plant diets, on the other hand, can also be used for healing some sicknesses, depending on the plant the person is dieting. However, perhaps their most salient role is in that plant diets are the process that healers, or prospective healers, become involved in in order to learn their healing techniques. A *dietero* – as the person doing the diet is called – will usually have to abstain from food, sexual activity, and sometimes contact with other human beings for some time, depending on the type of plant they are dieting and the intention behind the diet – whether it is to cure themselves of an illness or become a healer themselves. The diets can range from under a week for very mild diets, to a month or almost two months for a single diet with a more powerful plant. Often, people seeking

to become healers will do various diets in succession, leaving a time of rest from diet in between dieting different plants. Although no solid food is taken, coconut water (drank straight from a coconut, opened by a machete) can be drunk throughout the day.

A more senior healer will often teach the dietero how to diet properly. Likewise, they will deliver to them the plant that they will take for the diet – often taken once or twice during the day, either in the morning and in the afternoon, or only in the afternoon. Often these will be prepared in a concoction or a sort of cold tea, but depending on the plant and in the effects being sought, sometimes the vapor is used or other modes of coming into contact or ingesting the plant are used instead. It is understood that the healer will then learn different healing techniques, insights, and ícaros from the plants while plant dieting (depending on the type of plant and on the dietero themselves, and on how well the diet is carried out), who will sometimes appear to the dietero as realizations, understandings, or even disguised as a family member, friend, or person in dreams. The dietero then creates healing knowledge together with the plant they are dieting. The idea is, partly, that in abstaining from food and typical daily human activities, the person will come to physically resemble a plant, at least to a greater extent, making it easier for the plant to communicate effectively with them (Belaunde 2009, 36-37).

Due to their ability to create knowledge *with* a person, these plants are referred by the Shipibos as being intelligent, as wise or as master plants. Indeed, "intelligence is a property endemic to plants, not to human beings" (Belaunde 2009, 36; my translation); through diets, these knowledges can be found, gained, and incorporated into the dietero, thus creating plant-human knowledges through these encounters (this knowledge creation is the main subject of Chapter 2). Examples of master plants that are dieted are *tanti rao*, *piripiri*, and *toé*. Although some of these refer to a particular type of plant, other

denominations, such as tanti rao or piripiri, contain within them a number of plants, linked under the same name due to the effect that they have on the person that takes the plant. Once the person takes the plant, it is said that the person 'is with the plant' – *está con la planta*. Meditation, solitude, and peace are recommended. During the diet, the dietero will often face challenges – often manifesting themselves as hunger, sexual desire, or emotional distress and pain – that need to be overcome in order to correctly learn plant medicine. The senior healer or knowledgeable shaman will guide the dieteros and teach them how to do the diet – but then, the learnings of the diet fall on the dietero and in their compliance with the plant diet. Plant diets are also separated into levels of difficulty; tougher diets in turn make the dietero wiser and a more powerful healer. However, the breaking of more serious diets also carries with it more serious consequences, and could even bring about death for the dietero as it betrays the plant it was dieting with, who will in turn retaliate against the dietero making them ill or even killing them. As such, dietero and plant are active agents in the creation of Shipibo plant healing knowledge.

This deep plant knowledge and connection with the natural world, along with plan medicines and ayahuasca ceremonies have recently brought national and international attention to the Shipibos. Many people from outside the Shipibo group will now seek ayahuasca rituals, either as a form of CAM for an illness or problem Western medicine has not been able to placate or cure, for solving personal problems, or for helping people overcome drug abuse and addiction, for example. As ayahuasca becomes more globalized, it is also sought after by novelty seekers and New Age psychonauts.

Shipibo healers are extremely knowledgeable about the medicinal properties and ways of using Amazonian plants. Through these healing activities – and ways of using

plants for protection, against humans, spirits and animals alike – Shipibo healers and medicinal plants have played a key role in guaranteeing the survival of the Shipibo living in the Peruvian Amazon in the Ucayali region – a landscape that, for all its biodiversity and richness in plant healing and cultural knowledge, can also an unforgiving landscape if it is not navigated knowledgeably and with adequate resources.

Nature and Ritual Healing in the Anthropocene

In its growing global notoriety, Shipibo ritual healing, and within it most specifically the ayahuasca brew, have come to the attention of Western science. In their 1998 study, titled "The Scientific Investigation of Ayahuasca: A Review of Past and Current Research", McKenna, Callaway, and Grob, write that "[o]f the numerous plant hallucinogens utilized by indigenous populations of the Amazon Basin, perhaps none is as interesting or complex, botanically, chemically, or ethnographically, as the hallucinogenic beverage known variously as *ayahuasca*." (1998, 65) This interest of ayahuasca to Western science is due to "the chemical nature of its active constituents and the manner of its use [which] makes its study relevant to contemporary issues in neuropharmacology, neurophysiology, and psychiatry." (McKenna, Callaway, and Grob 1998, 65) Indeed, preliminary reports of the investigation of ayahuasca for treating patients with "recurrent depression" suggest that ayahuasca, even with a single dose, "has fast-acting anxiolytic and antidepressant effects in patients with a depressive disorder" (Osório et al. 2015, 13-14). As such, ayahuasca has started to present itself as a highly promising treatment for ailments that often frustrate currently available Western biomedical intervention regimes and pharmacological resources.

These studies support the "ethnomedical observations on the diversity of treated conditions" by ayahuasca (Frecska, Bokor, and Winkelman 2016). Other scientific and pharmacological studies (Frecska, Bokor, and Winkelman 2016) further support the potential viability of ayahuasca to be used to treat "diseases of civilization" such as depression, neurodegenerative diseases, and metabolic diseases, among others (Ruiz-Núñez et al., cited in Frecska, Bokor, and Winkelman 2016).

Those within the psychiatric world have also seen the potential of ayahuasca. Eduardo Gastelumendi, a renowned Peruvian psychiatrist, helped co-found Takiwasi, a center geared towards using ayahuasca ceremonies for the treatment of substance addiction. He holds ayahuasca ceremonies in high regard as a form of psychiatric journey itself – a vision for the medicalized use of ayahuasca that he shares with the McKenna brothers (McKenna and McKenna 1993, 16-17). The McKenna brothers, also together with previously mentioned publications (Frecska, Bokor, and Winkelman 2016) see great promise in ayahuasca for treating what they deem a widespread 'illness' of modern Western life (McKenna and McKenna 1993, 16-17). In their book *The Invisible Landscape*, they write:

> It is in this unenviable position, then that we find the modern temper: anguished by the imminence of Death, yet trapped in profane, historical time and thus able only to regard death as nothingness; the saving presence of a sacred, transcendent mode of being is absent from the contemporary world view. Thus modern man stands today at the very edge of the abyss of death and nothingness, and it is precisely here that one can perceive a useful role for a modern shamanism. Again there is a need for a doctor of the soul, a figure who can bring mankind into close and fruitful confrontation with the collective unconscious, the creative matrix of all that we are and have ever been. (McKenna and McKenna 1993, 16)

Moving beyond what was proposed by the McKenna brothers (McKenna and McKenna 1993, 16), we might also consider the Shipibo ritual healing and plant medicine as a way to think beyond environmental collapse and extinction. In adopting a new relationship[15] with ecologies of traditional knowledge, ritual healing, and various kinds environmental activism, we can enlarge our sense of resources for action within larger sociocultural and political spheres of decision-making especially concerning multiple obstacles that we created for survival and flourishing in the Anthropocene.

Shipibo plant medicine is deeply connected to the natural world – indeed it is plants themselves that teach healers healing techniques. Thus, even if one sees the Shipibo ritual healing as a deep spiritual endeavor, the fact is that materiality of the natural world is at its core. It is in material beings of the natural world that the spirits of plants, animals, and the 'elements' (water, earth, air) reside in; in fact, the spirits are inseparable from their material manifestations – what we may call nature. The Shipibo are therefore deeply aware of the importance of the maintenance of a healthy and lively natural world, upon which they depend, and which they are tied to – not only for what we may consider routine lifestyle activities such as farming or fishing, but for making the jungle a place livable for humans (apart from other-than-human beings) through the practice of plant medicine.

My aim in this thesis is not to determine (as if one could) what 'truly' constitutes nature and the human; I do not wish to further such a simplified, dualistic mindset. Instead, I want to highlight is the very real porosity of the so called human and natural worlds and their cross-pollination –what the writer Amitav Ghosh in his book *The Great Derangement* calls "the uncanny intimacy of our relationship with the nonhuman." (2017,

[15] This may be a new position for the hegemonic Western tradition, although it is not new for the Shipibo.

33) My approach to the environment, the lives of the Shipibo people in Nueva Betania, and their plant medicine, is thus one attentive to webs of presences, encounters, and relationships which produce ecologies of knowledge and practice around ritual healing. Here, subjects co-shape one another, such that "those who are in the world are constituted in intra- and interaction." (Haraway 2008, 4) In the world of Shipibo plant medicine, encounters and relationships take place not only between humans, but between species, between humans and the other-than-human: animals, plants, what we may call geographical features or weather events. Worlds which we would usually consider separate, at least in the hegemonic Western tradition, are rendered immensely porous by the Shipibo: not only in their cosmology, everyday practice, and the way they interact with the world around them, but also in instances of political participation, where by they advocate for recognition of the world of the human and the natural as a whole ("Shipibo Konibo (Peru): Historia, avances y perspectivas hacia el futuro del pueblo indígena Shipibo Konibo" 2003). This integrated human-nonhuman sense of the world has been a foundation for Shipibo cosmology throughout time. It stands against Western hegemonic ideologies, which have usually followed a narrative of human triumph over nature, followed by an eventual escape from nature and technological domination, rendering the natural world a resource for human use and extraction (Engels and Hunt 2010; Marx and Elster 1986).

We are now reckoning with human action upped to the scale of a geological force, and so are very much compelled to reconsider how it is that we relate to the so-called natural world. The way that we interact with it is mediated through our understandings of nature – culturally, socially, historically mediated understandings, which I will call, throughout this account, *imaginaries of nature*. Although the term imaginaries may allude to

imagination – something that, again, in the Western hegemonic tradition is usually thought of as a non-thing, a non-reality, and a made-up – these imaginaries are intensely real. They are real in the sense that they have deeply affected encounters between colonizers and native populations throughout the Americas. They have mediated the way in which resources were used by rubber barons in the Amazon during the Rubber Boom, and justified the enslavement of people such as the Shipibo for rubber extraction. They have made the Amazon into a world of hidden richness, and awaiting discovery; but also into a space of terror and death (Taussig 1984; 2004). But now, in the Anthropocene, the effect of humanity's action on nature can be read even in the geological records: the fact that we have had an alarming impact on natural systems is quite literally written in stone. We thus also have a colossal responsibility, and a responsibility to understand anew and to act in novel ways

The fact that the human and the natural world are irrevocably intertwined is now almost irrefutable by Western scientific standards. This climate of entanglements at a global scale manifests itself just as intensely at the local level; yet the scale of these entanglements are perhaps more personal, their effects more intimate, and just as deep, especially in relation to communities who are highly attuned to interactions and encounters between the human and the non-human, but who have been cast aside in the telling of the state of the modern world and its effects on populations.

The main focus of the thesis is the Shipibo people of Nueva Betania, their plant medicine and ritual healing as particularly articulated by members of the S-O family: an immensely rich theatre for innumerable entanglements, local and far-reaching. Shipibo plant medicine lies at the confluence of a plurality of mutually affecting systems and worlds: it forms an ecology. Within Shipibo plant medicine lie worlds of interspecies

communications and relationships; of human and other-than-human knowledges, agencies, and liveliness; of the value of biodiversity beyond market value; of flows of power and pollution; of histories of violence and healing; and beyond, all of which ought to be put into the limelight, as a cohesive system in the era of the Anthropocene if we are to learn how to re-think and re-constitute our interactions with the world.

By regarding ritual healing as an ecology we also move beyond a static vision of ritual healing and indigenous lifestyles, as they have often been characterized in the past. The anthropologist Shane Greene explains how there has been a "sole concentration on 'primitive medicine' as essentially a magico-religious phenomenon based on local traditions conceived as being culturally and historically static," always positioned "in contrast to Western medicine" along an axis of "asymmetric binaries [that] was the template to these early anthropologies of ethnomedicine" which pitted, for example, "bio- or modern medicine versus primitive medicine", "science versus magic/religion", "modern versus traditional", "all of which fall directly in line with: progress versus stasis" (1998, 635). Instead, I want to portray Shipibo ritual healing and the creation of plant knowledge as a dynamic, situated practice: a space-time of active entanglements, of encounters that generate affects and meaning and constitute reality for those involved and even perhaps for those beyond.

As mentioned earlier, my study of Shipibo plant medicine does not occur in a vacuum; nor does it occur to try to 'demystify' what these healing techniques are, or, worse yet, to try to 'validate' them through comparison to Western healing techniques and world-views. Of course, what we may call translational work does occur throughout my account, and it does such that the reader can come to understand the practices being carried out, as well as the worldview that underpins them. As a central part of Shipibo

cosmology, plant medicine (which has certainly changed throughout time) also tells a deeply rich story about the effects of new political economies on Shipibo livelihoods. To learn about Shipibo plant medicine is to also hopefully de-center Western hegemonic modes of knowledge creation, to understand the politics of oppression and knowledge creation, thus ensuing alternative, more caring modes of engaging with peoples and world around us.[16]

I am evidently very supportive of understanding native points of view and worldviews since they have been historically ghosted and omitted from dominant discussions about how to live in the natural world, how to use it, how to understand it and create knowledge *with* it. Native communities, like the Shipibo, have not been passive agents whatsoever. Beyond the development of their own activities and symbolic order, they have engaged in Western hegemonic markets, in economic, academic, and political scenes. Yet their Shipibo culture and way of engaging the world is often view as a precursor to science and their livelihoods as primitive, such that the loss of their traditional livelihoods is often simply viewed as an externality of 'modernization', the agents of which are often large extractivist operations led by large corporations and enabled by a neoliberal government. This need to readjust their way of life is no new endeavor for the Shipibo either. Consider their contact with the Incas in pre-Columbian

[16] That being said, I want to clarify that I am by no means against Western science, Western medicine, or deny their importance in discovery, social, technological and even (thankfully!) environmental advancement more generally; their role in the world is, as well, primordial. However, I want to also bring forth the manners in which Western practices have had their roots in historically colonial schemes, realizing how power structures have allowed the Western voice and way of viewing the world to be hegemonic. As such, we can veer away from perceiving these Western hegemonic notions as ultimately objective, or as the only system in place, creating a notion of correct versus incorrect, or of true versus alter modes of understanding the world. I wish to expose the colonial heritage of Western knowledge-creation, so that we may think more critically about it and in turn about the way the hegemonic "we" think about the world and interact with it.

times[17], the Catholic missions of early colonialism, and the Amazon Rubber Boom between the 19th and 20th century – which have all presented challenges to the Shipibo's survival. Again and again they have managed to endure and to re-establish their lives through and around these invading realities. Nowadays, the Shipibo face yet another challenge – both local and global – brought on by abrupt environmental change, growing embeddedness in expanding markets, along with underrepresentation in political and economic life and decision-making that negatively affects their collective livelihood.

As I heard from my interlocutors and observed in daily practices, late liberal political economic operations were reaching Nueva Betania and involving its people in novel forms of ecological or spiritual tourism, logging and mining operations, drug trafficking, an expanded market for the sale of handicrafts and Shipibo art. All mingled with a sense of cultural and environmental loss, these realities will be a central axis of the thesis' first chapter.

Estar con la Planta | Being with Plants is a story of encounters which, according to Ghosh overcome the category of being purely "of Nature, whatever that might be," and instead "confound the very idea of 'Nature writing' or ecological writing" to become very much "instances, rather, of the uncanny intimacy of our relationships with the nonhuman." (2017, 33) This is also a text about the Shipibos, the S-O family, and people in Nueva Betania; and thus a text about plants, the actors that shaped my experience and understanding of Shipibo ritual healing and knowledge creation as we dieted with them, conducted ceremonies with them, and learned with and about them. As the anthropologist Marisol de la Cadena writes about earthly beings in the Peruvian Andes,

[17] This was seen as a rather benign exchange, and the Incas traded with the Shipibo instead of conquering them.

the lives of my interlocutors and mine were both "'only' partially connected" yet "inseparable" (2015, Preface). Our lives are also connected and co-constituted by the systems we participate in and that work to shape and make our lives and the lives of others. This text is thus composed "in translation by many of us." (Cadena 2015, 2) This is the only kind of text that I can produce to honor what I learned from the Shipibos about the histories and forces that have made and continue to make the community of Nueva Betania in the Peruvian Amazon.

The Shipibo have in the patterns on Ronin, the Cosmic Serpent, a source that tells them what has happened, what is happening, and that holds all the possibilities of what is to happen. For me, I have the tools of a tentative anthropology, a keen eye and an openness to learn and understand, always with the generous guidance of the knowledgeable Shipibo and their multiple entities. The extensive reach of medicinal plants reach in the Shipibo lifeworld is such that very few things lie outside their sphere of affects and significances. In the story I crafted, I have chosen a number of them, that I think work towards rethinking knowledge and our modes of being in and being with-the world – mediated often through Shipibo modes of being-with-plants. I want the Shipibo way of viewing and being-with-plants, and being-with the world, to travel beyond Nueva Betania and become intensely present with us.

1.

Nueva Betania as a Socionatural Region

1.1 Imaginaries of Nature and the Making of Nueva Betania

> There is a simple point here. Places and what passes for nature have a consuming materiality. And so do place-making and nature-making, makings that make no sense without attention to practice. So, again, how did this place come into existence?
>
> —Hugh Raffles, *In Amazonia: A Natural History*[18]

Green expanse, rivers crossing it. In the rainy season, these rivers are a tan brown, almost golden color. Even from the seat of a 737-500 LCPerú airplane bound from Lima to Pucallpa, Ucayali (four hours late because of the closing of the Cajamarca airport, go figure) these snaking waters look like behemoths. I chose the window seat to have a good look at the landscape below, especially as we approached Pucallpa. I wanted to take it all in. Somehow looking at the landscape, I thought, could give me some answers. The jungle below resists; as it resisted the entrance of white settlers in the times of the Conquest, and, perhaps somewhat less successfully, the entrance of the Caucheros and Rubber Boom operations; the dense trees resist my gaze. I think whether I can place Nueva Betania somewhere along its shores – an endeavor I know to be futile from this removed, homogenizing perspective. From up here we are given an illusion of a jungle of dominance, of secrecy, of plenty, a dense two-colored carpet.

I am a relative newcomer. This would be my second time in Nueva Betania, coming in this time for a week between January and February in 2018; I had been down in Nueva Betania once before in August 2017, during what is the end of the North American summer and the dry season in Pucallpa. Having been down in Nueva Betania once before, I knew that for me the more intent looking and learning would happen on

[18] Raffles 2002, 61

the ground, closer to the people, beings and systems that inhabit, shape and make Nueva Betania.

Different stories spring out of the green mass below. Dotted geometric patterns in the landscape speak of oil palm plantations. I would probably be unable to differentiate them if not for the undergrowth having been removed to allow human circulation under the palms; it is a homogeneity built for ease of harvesting. I realize how many different things homogeneity might mean, ironically. Oil palm monocultures were a deathly homogeneous; not an even spread of many forming a whole, but the erasure of everything else but the oil palms themselves. Seen from above, their eerily geometric-dotted patters was an unwelcome graft on a wound in the jungle below, where there was too little going on, for too long, for too wide. These monoculture palm expanses spoke of the scale of the palm oil industry; they spoke of neoliberal schemes of removed mega-production; of production here and consumption somewhere else; of this being that somewhere else to those consumers, in turn; of local, organic ecologies and livelihoods (of humans and non-humans) cut and burned away to insert this piece of land into the global neoliberal economy through the commodity-making of these monoculture oil palms. Below these palms, humans compete with smaller non-oil palm species for ease of movement and harvesting. Nutrient deserts linger below the palms – thinly masked by the apparent green from above. Were they to leave some vegetation for decay under the palms, these oil palms could perhaps yielding more, and areas planted could decrease or at least stop growing. The palms, with no undergrowth, do not resist my eyes so much. I wonder if I have been accustomed to the easily see-through, the easily consumable; to the city trees that inspire awe but are just there, perhaps symbols of status and their existence almost solely for purposes of beautification. However, in less affluent, drier and sandier areas,

small trees stop landslides on now-populated sand dunes. I wonder if one of these tree-uses is more of a two-way relationship than the other.

The non-plantation aerial jungle landscape, however and very thankfully, still seemed to dominate. Perhaps what we were seeing in our flight in was the same picture Raffles presents to us in *In Amazonia*; "that iconic view of dense and boundless forest veined by sharply golden rivers" (Raffles 2002, 3). As for Raffles, this was a "long anticipated panorama that was already part of my experience well before I saw it for myself." (Raffles 2002, 3) Although Raffles talks about this image in relation to his arrival to Igarapé Guariba in 1994 (Raffles 2002, 3) – located in Brazil and geographically very far from Nueva Betania and Ucayali in Peru – I have no doubt that the landscape and nature[19] I saw from above coming in to Ucayali was very much the same. It was the same seemingly impenetrable green expanse; the same mysterious place, holder-of-secrets; the same rivers. A set of "enduring imaginaries" (Raffles 2002, 3) had created, below me, a jungle pre-emptively experienced (Raffles 2002, 3). This partly-failed, predetermined consumption from above is "a classic landscape picture in the terms of Raymond William's famous observation that the genre is underwritten by the erasure of the labor through which nature is made — not to mention the effacement of landscape's own work of nature-making. Actually, this image goes even further, offering a land without social relations or history, a land of potentiality. In this sense, its abstraction makes it a classical Amazonian landscape, one in which the implied view is both entrepreneurial and extractive." (Raffles 2002, 60)

[19] All mentions of nature henceforth, unless otherwise stated, will carry implicitly with them this sense of questioning of hegemonic imaginaries of nature, as I will advocate for a view of a nature that is not separate from human systems and human perceptions of it.

To forget the forces of nature and wilderness-making that form the hegemonic Western imaginaries of nature is to overlook the historical, political, colonial and gendered forces that contextualize and create the present situation of Nueva Betania – and the systems that it operates within and as part of, that in turn shape the lives of people, plants, animals, and other non-human beings in the area and beyond. For someone not from Nueva Betania, or perhaps not well acquainted with it, the community may have a certain 'remoteness' about it, just as the woman on the flight had expressed to me.

But Nueva Betania is anything if not entrenched in political economies. The fact that they remain out of public thought and sight is perhaps telling of how we conceive of places and people that inhabit the Amazon in what are still dubbed native communities. What we see when trying to pierce the green of the jungle – be it from above, or at ground level – is perhaps more us-hegemonic-human than jungle or 'nature' itself; it is an entanglement of the historical, the political, the economic. From its colonial roots, this is a vision wrought by the separation of humans from nature. Noel Castree alerts us of the dichotomies that rule imaginaries of nature, explaining how there is an "ontological separation of the natural and the social [that] has, since at least the European Enlightenment, been associated with other dualisms organizing our thought, such as rural–urban, country–city, and wilderness– civilization" (Castree and Braun 2001, 6). The understanding of the making of the worlds in which Nueva Betania operates – and together with it, the lives of those such as the S-O family and their practices such as Shipibo plant medicine – point to not only a local reality, but also to a generalized story of the making of "wild" territories and their "wild" inhabitants.

This trope of the wild lands, empty of people and full of savages, are very real imaginaries. What I mean by this is that they created a premise for the carrying-out of very real acts of mass violence. Close to the border with Brazil, and connected to Iquitos through the Ucayali River, Nueva Betania lies in an area that saw itself, if not colonized by the waves of Spanish Conquistadors, deeply affected by the relatively more recent Amazon Rubber Boom – initially lasting between 1890 and 1920 (Tully 2011, 65) and seeing a more brief revival during the second world war. The anthropologist Michael Taussig presents us with a history of creation of these spaces of terror and death during the Rubber Boom era in his work *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (2004). The events, agents and systems that create these spaces of terror and death are manifold; yet what stands out, among the many painfully poignant events, is a mirror-like, dualistic creation or making of the local native populations by the European or non-local rubber barons (for many of them were not European but American, such as the concessionary Vanderbilt family; the Bolivian Vaca Diaz, "a ruthless monopolist who forced out competitors on a lawless frontier"; the Brazilian Colonel Resendo da Silva; and the "sinister" Peruvian Julio César Arana [Tully 2011, 66]) and foreign settlers. In this narrative, the local native populations were paradoxically presented as both tame and savages, justifying their enslavement, torture, and inhumane treatment to get them to work in the rubber plantations – trying to beat the supposed laziness out of them at the same time as stopping alleged rebellions and keeping power structures (Taussig 2004, 37-92) which in turn perhaps prompted an attitude of resistance from these local populations, systemically forcing an imitation of the savages they were quite literally made to be. The atrocities enacted upon the local populations included, but were not limited to, genocide, enslavement, extractivism, and systemic and slow violence.

Landing in Pucallpa, making our way out of the city into Nueva Betania, and once in Nueva Betania itself, I can see that these effects endure: in the people, the landscape, the very existence of Nueva Betania with its Biblical name and as a multi-family, state-recognized, half-Evangelical native community. Yet these effects are not inert ghosts; they have taken a life of their own, providing a backdrop for the political economies and everyday life that we see now in Nueva Betania.

1.2 Political Economies, Social Spatialities, Vernacular Landscapes

To get to Nueva Betania from Pucallpa, one can take one out of a series of boats, the previously mentioned rápidos and *colectivos*, commuters that go back and forth along the Ucayali River, along whose banks lies Nueva Betania along with a number of other Native Communities – most of them, if not all, established in the same fashion as Nueva Betania was, by missionaries sometime along or after the time of the Rubber Boom (between the late 19th century and the Second World War). Due to the higher speed and safety of the rápidos, for our travels we take Cece's advice and board the 9am rápido.

The boat ride itself is a slideshow of the political economies and realities that involve and surround the lives of those in Nueva Betania. Barren trunks of trees, humongous and now piled up on barges, are tugged up or down river, piled by large yellow machinery at the edge of banks of plots of land whose riverside vegetation has been stripped away, and now erode. The rainy season hoists up the boats at ground-level, such that from the water you can see the riverside 'entrances' to many villages and native communities on the way to Nueva Betania. During the dry season, tall eroding ledges are laid bare and only logging machinery, a couple of large trees, and small billboards

signaling the names of the communities – together with people waiting for the boats – peek over the edge. Apart from the aforementioned monocultures, such as oil palm plantations, narcotrafficking, illegal gold mining, illegal logging operations, and land trafficking are some of the larger threats to the safety of the jungle and people living in native communities in the area.

What is the particular story of Nueva Betania, however? How did this place come to be – and come to be as it is? While at Nueva Betania, I thought it would just be a matter of asking – perhaps almost anyone in the community – in order to learn from them what the history – official and vernacular – of Nueva Betania was, especially that preceding what I could immediately witness by being there. I asked Ete, the 24-year-old daughter of Don P and Doña A, what was the history of Nueva Betania – how it was funded, when, by whom, how it came to be, historically and as it is now, and how the S-O family came to live here. Surprisingly (at least it seemed surprising to me), Ete did not know, even though she had been born and raised in Nueva Betania. However, she told me that Romo knew. The first time I went to ask Romo, he was in the middle of a soccer game, as the appointed goalie. Romo leads Nueva Betania's soccer team, and was seemingly putting his heart and soul into the game as he flipped and flew to catch any balls that strayed too close to the goal – and so he offered to talk with me later that night. A muscle tear during the game, however, left Romo in need of some good rest – and so I got the story two days later. One thing I learned was that time did not mean the same thing here as it did back in the city – and I needed to learn how to work with this new time. Alas, 48 hours later, I was sitting on some patches of tree bark and small tree trunks besides Romo, accompanied by L. We sat under a small barebones shed under which Romo and Don P had started preparing some ayahuasca about an hour ago, boiling the

oni vines together with some cáhua leaves from one of the multiple leafy cáhua trees a couple of meters away, at the far edge of the medicinal plant garden. I ask Romo what he knows about how Nueva Betania came to be. "The founding, the creation of Betania[20] – that is what you are asking me, right? Ok. So, why Betania, right? Betania was founded by Shipibos. It was officially recognized as a native community by the government in 1975. But it had already been founded; it already existed since a long time before that. The story goes that Betania was founded by seven Evangelical families, who came onto this area and named it Betania, because they wanted it to be a Christian, Evangelical community. There is an Evangelical church in the community … but they have not been able to make it fully Evangelical." I ask if the Evangelists and Evangelicals were local people, and whether the Evangelists and the Shipibos were the same people. Romo tells me that it was indeed a "Shipibo community founded by Evangelicals who were themselves Shipibo. They came from Bajo Ucayali [what is now Loreto]." But Romo clarified: "The Evangelicals were always accompanied by a leader Evangelist, a pastor." And was the pastor local, Shipibo? "No," said Romo. "They were other people, who had come to Evangelize." As Romo pointed out later, Evangelization was indeed extremely pervasive among the Shipibo community, and the presence of Evangelists was felt strong throughout many Shipibo native communities. Even if, as Romo put it, "they did not succeed" in making Betania a purely Evangelical community, the storyline of the village was common to many other creations of native communities along the Ucayali and Amazon rivers in Peru during or after the Rubber Boom. "Us Shipibos did not use to live

[20] Romo would often refer to Nueva Betania as simply Betania – this was due to linguistic shortening of the name, but also to the history of how Nueva Betania came to be, which we will learn more about in brief.

in multi-family communities," Romo informs me. "We lived in single family groups, one large family. But in time we came together to form a community."

Although perhaps benign or just incidental-sounding in Romo's words, the transformation from living in large family units to living in communities – and with it the establishment of the *Comunidades Nativas*, native communities, among which Nueva Betania is one – is deeply entangled with the bloody history of the Amazon Rubber Boom and Christian missions in the Peruvian Amazon. If you walk or paddle down for some hours down towards the Brazilian border, Romo was saying, you can find large pots: the ghosts of a rubber operation that used to take place around those forests. "Here there used to be *shiringa*, rubber. That area housed the largest rubber *chacra* in the world. From here, the rubber would then be sent to Iquitos," Romo informed L and myself. He had investigated about this history himself, upon connecting with a friend from Spain, whose grandfather used to work at the rubber *chacra*. "His grandfather had worked at this chacra, so he also wanted to know. He had this very old map. He is the one that showed me how this used to be the largest shiringa chacra. You can tell! You can see it; if you go from here onwards, you will reach this place where they used to cook the tree latex, you can still see it. It is now overgrown with vegetation, but there is still a lot of shiringa; truly a lot. That was also a hard time, the time of imperial rubber." They were able to come across the ruins of this rubber while making their way down to Cerro Aguja in the Sierra del Divisor. A lonely, conical peak (part of the only mountain range in the Peruvian Amazon yet still standing notably on its own), Cerro Aguja now lies in what has been recently declared, during Ollanta Humala's presidency in 2015, a national park (SERNANP n.d.) The ghosts and legacy of the rubber boom live strong in the landscape and in the Shipibo. "It was worse than the [Spanish] inquisition," Wiso told me about the

Amazon Rubber Boom, as I sat on a log by the cooking area where he was preparing some grilled plantain. Having learned about the terrible things that were done to the Shipibo and other jungle native groups, but not experienced himself the pain of this time, Wiso knew about it mostly "through the words of others" (Taussig 1984, 467). For this same reason, however, he also seemed freer to tell me more about it. Wiso then explained to me how the Shipibo used to live in large single-family groupings, of up to thirty closely related members. Large families made these clans powerful, as was needed since they did not live in multi-family communities, and the families could be relatively far away from each other. The Amazon Rubber Boom, however, would change this structure. Seeking cheap labor for working in the newly-established rubber extraction operations – mainly to supply the making of rubber tires for European wars and industrialization – rubber patrons turned to the indigenous people, who could be directly enslaved to extract rubber or pushed into a system of debt-peonage – what seems to have been a thinly veiled excuse for labor, a "fictional trade", and was simply another ideological mode of enslavement (Taussig 2004, 65). In many parts of the Amazon, rubber extraction was only made possible due to the "abundant and cheap 'arms'" of enslaved native populations (Taussig 2004, 58). The history of rubber extraction in the Amazon – and all the structures around it – have thus been inseparable from the creation of slaves out of the local natives; indeed, as Taussig puts it, "[i]n the colonies labor was rarely detachable from the being of the worker." (Taussig 2004, 94); and as such, was in turn inseparable from the creation of a culture of terror (Taussig 1984), whose intensely colonial ghosts live on not only as abandoned rubber processing plants, but also inscribed in the community structure that the Shipibo now live in. To get native 'arms' for working the chacras during the Rubber Boom, native families were sacked: individuals killed, women raped, others enslaved.

Oftentimes, entire families except for a few members were wiped out; those surviving individuals, in exchange for their life, were then hired by the rubber patrons and rubber workers to guide them through the terrain, often asking to be led to another family's grounds, where they would in turn massacre most of the family and then enslave others. Gathering into multi-family Shipibo communities was thus a result of the decimation of not only their numbers, but the complete breaking of the Shipibo family unit. Small families could not survive in the jungle; gathering into multi-family communities was the step to be taken to gather again into larger groups in order to survive. Evangelical and other Christian groups, led by missionaries or Evangelist pastors like the one mentioned by Romo, would find land and build a church and some houses – a marker of livelihood around which Shipibo survivors would gather and try to re-establish their lives.

In outlining this history, however immensely tragic it is, I reject the making of Shipibo into static victims. Unimaginable atrocities were endured by them – personally, and by their kin – but to gather and reconstitute the Shipibo way of life, even when their former lifestyle was violently usurped, was a marker of resilience – and indeed helped many individuals, their families, and their cultures survive and keep on thriving and being dynamically lived. When we thus think of the effects of slow violence, structural violence, and the effects of political economies and global forces on the modern Shipibo life – we must remember that this is not the first time that this group has endured pseudo-apocalyptic events and conditions. But the effects take their toll – as they did then, and as they are doing now, and resilience and dynamicity-for-survival have a limit.

Asking if there was any chance that rubber extraction would take on again, Romo said that a couple of Brazilians had been making some inquiries about it – but that nothing as big as it had been would ever happen again.

1.3 Terra Anfibia[21]

> We have been wading in *terra anfibia*, an amphibious world of mobile porosities where land and water become each other, and where humans and non-humans are made and unmade by those same sediments that bring histories and natures flooding into the immediacy of the now.
>
> —Hugh Raffles, *In Amazonia: A Natural History*[22]

The landscape of modern Nueva Betania, although unassuming at first – lazy river flowing by – is ultimately a vernacular landscape, less pristine than it may seem, much more affected by time, by geological and human activities alike; in its geography and landscape can be seen the marks of a long and recent history. The changing of names – going from calling the place Betania to Nueva Betania, turned out to be more than a simple shortening of a fairly long biblical name. "This is the third village of Betania," Romo, told me, still sitting on the logs by the shed. I have had to change my position to try to hide my legs from the ants and the mosquitos. "The village before was down there… One, two, three." Romo points to the three sites that Betania has occupied, further along the bend of the river down towards the Brazilian border. So people would mention Betania, when referring to the general area, the historical being; Nueva Betania was more pointedly this local portion of the village. And what happened to the first two Betanias? I inquired. "The landslides swept them away. The river proper used to flow through here, but now it flows down another route. Now we don't get landslides, because this is now a lake."[23] So that is why this was called Nueva Betania. I had thought the "Nueva" came from this being the second Betania (Bethany, in English) to the biblical Bethany. And it was, but at the same time was not. It was the New Bethany to two older

[21] This is a term I borrow from Raffles 2002, 182.
[22] Raffles 2002, 182
[23] In calling this part of the river a lake, Romo was referring to the bend in the river that rejoined itself, thus making the waters slow-flowing, lake-like.

Amazonian Bethanies. But that original Amazonian Bethany was never New Bethany; it was Bethany itself. An original, here in the Amazon jungle. I guess for the Shipibos that came to inhabit the community it was indeed the first Betania they encountered. But then the forces of nature had prompted a Betania two-point-oh and now a Nueva Betania. It was also this geological process – the forming of an island, a connecting not-quite-oxbow-lake (more of a fluvial by-pass) that had allowed the current Nueva Betania to exist as such, and in the same location, now for much longer than its predecessors. In a landscape that we usually imagine as primordial, unmoved – the proportions of the river perhaps giving it more of a gentle giant facsimile to the untrained eye – two settlements had been swept away in a matter of two or three generations. Some of the houses of the older part of Nueva Betania – part of the second installation of Betania that was not swept away – still glint in a near distance, as Romo points them out for me. They seem both far away and close, a mirage. The flatness of the terrain renders anything beyond the river bend and an initial sentinel row of trees invisible, and these houses are the last thing my eyes can reach before the direction of the river, and its accompanying row of trees, bends away, out of sight. But they are probably about 20 or 30 minutes away by walking distance. And the rápidos take only minutes to get from there to the docking port of Nueva Betania. In this case, my eyesight is perhaps not too reliable; but the river speaks of flows, transportations, a beyond but also a before. Just as it pressured the change from a Betania into a second Betania, into a Nueva Betania, it speaks of changes, of other places, of things that can be brought and taken away: fish[24], pink dolphins, river spirits; people, people on rápidos and colectivos, on canoes, people formerly in the search of

[24] Shipibo tradition says that it is the Anaconda that is the daughter of the river, and patron of river and rainbows. The anaconda, if displeased with the conditions of the river and the actions of people, will take away with her the rains and fish and move somewhere else.

rubber; timber, some legal, some not; heavy metals, oil spills; drug traffickers, economic possibilities; Shipibo lives; Betanias, Nueva Betanias….

1.4 Political Economies, Modern Markets

Don P had come to Betania recently after its official creation, moving in with Doña A to begin their life together. There were now three generations of the S-O family living in Nueva Betania, with Don P and Doña A being the oldest; Romo, Bo, Ete, and their other brothers, sisters, wives and husbands (such as Alo, who is Ete's husband) being the middle generation; and the younger generation being the still young 4 daughters of Romo and 1 daughter of Ete and Alo. The second and third generations of the S-O family tree had all been born in Nueva Betania. Growing up, Romo had shown the most drive to become not only a healer but also a social and political activist.

Romo, together with other family and community members from Nueva Betania, created a film: *Rao Jonibo – Hombres Medicina* (Sinuiri 2011), which was screened at the Ani Xeati Film Festival in 2017 ("ANI XEATI FILM FESTIVAL" n.d.)[25]. In it, not only do we see a young Romo, at the time leader of the community of Nueva Betania, urging people to take action and work with authorities to look for a solution on how to save Nueva Betania's crops from the inordinate flooding of that season; but we also see Don P talking about the "biographical landscape" (Raffles 2002, 4) of Nueva Betania, deeply affected by logging operations. "Look at our land," says Don P; "they have already come in. The companies have already come in. They paid us, so now we cannot complain. And

[25]Can access the Ani Xeati film festival's page at: http://www.shipiboconibo.org/ani-xeati-film-festival. The film *Icaros: A Vision* (Caraballo and Norzi 2016) was also screened at this festival.

with that money, what have we done? The companies and their workers are happy because they can now work. And the consequence now is the noise." (Sinuiri 2011; my translation)

Logging is a common economic activity in the area. Although deforestation is not as bad as in other areas of the Amazon – for example in certain parts of Brazil – the destruction of primary forest, as will be explained to a greater extent in Chapter 4, makes the Shipibo lifestyle harder to sustain as it is deeply entangled with and reliant on the productivity and wellbeing of the forest and its natural resources. In a vicious cycle, people are each time thrust deeper into an extractive market economy, and soon find themselves migrating into cities. "Companies also came in looking for timber," tells Don P in the film; "from so much extraction, a canal formed, leaving a deep mark down the middle of the community." (Sinuiri 2011; my translation) The effect of logging was experienced multi-fold: it was engraved in the land, but this tree cutting also cut deep into the cultural fabric of the Shipibo community.

Currently, most people living in Nueva Betania support themselves through farming in *chacras* – farms located behind the community, about a half-hour walk away, where crops such as papaya, bananas and plantains, cassava (locally called *yuca*), among others, are grown mainly for local consumption, but on occasion taken to Pucallpa and sold in the market if the families are looking to make some cash.

Monocropping and logging operations have a complicated relationship with the Shipibos. Beyond illegal logging operations, and illegal land-grabbing, sometimes land is legally sold to large-scale agriculture or logging projects, lured in and then bound into a contract by money, without realizing what will be the long-term consequences. Sometimes, the encounters between loggers and the people of the native communities,

trying to resist, are bloody, mostly at the expense of the community members. Land traffic is not unheard of, with native lands being sold off to monocropping operations without the consent or knowledge of the community members.

❖ ❖ ❖

Today, one could say that the S-O family benefits from tourism, and from the larger exposure and growing notoriety of Shipibo plant healing, mainly through the vector of the ayahuasca brew, of rapidly growing international notoriety. "Tourism is really strong in Peru," Romo tells me during one of our conversations. Indeed it is; tourism arrivals in Peru have been growing steadily since the 1990s (before that tourism was not such a large part of the Peruvian economy), reaching around 4.6 million people in 2016 ("Peru Tourist Arrivals | 1980-2018 | Data | Chart | Calendar | Forecast" 2018) and projected to keep on growing, from a "10.1% of GDP in 2016 […]" to "11.7% of GDP in 2027 (World Travel and Tourism Council 2017, 1). Indeed, "[t]ourism to Peru has more than tripled sine the year 2000" ("Tourism" n.d.) The naming of Machu Picchu as a New Wonder of the World, together with a gastronomic boom have co-created a newfound appreciation for the traditionally Peruvian, a movement deeply enmeshed also with marketing strategies to give Peru a facelift, installing it as a brand heavily oriented towards tourists. But, as Romo also pointed out in our conversation, although tourism in Peru is very strong, "in Ucayali it is not so much." Tourism is thus highly regionalized, with Machu Picchu receiving almost half of all visitors that come to Peru ("Tourism" n.d.).

Ucayali does not really figure among the top destinations. But it has encountered newfound international fame in its plant healing legacy and use of ayahuasca. A lot of people now travel either to Iquitos or Ucayali to try ayahuasca. Some do it for the "experience". Others go on healing retreats, seeking in Shipibo plant medicine cures for psychological, somatic, psychosomatic, and emotional ailments for which they have not found an answer to in Western medicine. Others, perhaps a minority, go to places such as Nueva Betania in order to do plant diets and become healers themselves. Psychology and Western medicine, even in Peru, has also caught on to this growing interest in ayahuasca and Shipibo plant medicine, as outlined in the Introduction; centers such as Takiwasi in Tarapoto, in the northern Peruvian high jungle, are now even certified by the Peruvian Health Ministry ("Takiwasi" 2018), and focus on Spanish and French-speakers, offering ayahuasca retreats and healing programs fully in French. I was curious about the ritual healing that went on in centers such as Takiwasi. Isla had apparently been there, and so I asked how things happened at Takiwasi; he described their plant diets as "very strong diets". Isla was doing a healing apprenticeship in Nueva Betania on my second visit, and had previously done diets and/or undergone treatment at Takiwasi (he did not outline the exact procedures he partook in while at Takiwasi). After undergoing treatment or diets in Takiwasi, Isla, a psychologist himself, wanted to learn how to become a healer; but apparently Takiwasi has a strong policy against apprenticeship in its program. They only do healing; they only take patients. So the French man had come to learn to Nueva Betania. How did Takiwasi compare to Nueva Betania? I had asked Isla. Isla told me Takiwasi was more "professional," more of an institution; Rao Shobo in Nueva Betania was basically a family-run business that worked well because they were a family of knowledgeable healers, but had rather lacking infrastructure. "There is also better

sanitation [at Takiwasi], among some other things that are missing here," he told me, as we waited, sitting in the large ceremonial hut the night before an ayahuasca ceremony. It was true; at Nueva Betania, there was clean water only sparingly, sourced from a well that was only functional when there was electricity. Electricity, in turn, depended on the availability of oil or petrol that was brought in from Pucallpa. During the rainy season, many people left Nueva Betania, and petrol, electricity, and water from the well would be available only very much once per month or less. A central generator run by the oil would power the lights running down the main street of the village, until about 10p.m., for about two nights per month. During these electricity days, music would blare from houses; people would drink and party. The S-O family would fill up large plastic bins with water from their well, built among the family houses. I did not see lids on any of them, and by the second day, mosquito larvae would be suspended in the water storage bins, as well as in smaller puddles. The other option was to use water from the river.

The money brought in by the greater amount of tourists visiting Rao Shobo, and undergoing treatments, or participating in ceremonies or even apprenticeships, however, showed in the infrastructure of the installations of Rao Shobo. From my first visit in August 2017, to my second visit in late January to early February 2018, a completely new, large hut completely encased by mosquito netting had sprung up; this was the new kitchen and dining area. The large ceremonial hut, where L and myself were staying, had also been refurbished by encasing it in mosquito netting. There had been a recent effort to build ecological latrines – some within the village, and one right here on the grounds of the S-O family's Rao Shobo.

But the growing popularity of the ayahuasca brew, and of Shipibo healers, in relation to tourism, was somewhat more complex than simply being an increased source

of monetary income for Shipibo families such as the S-O family. With tourism seemed to come economies of knowledge, or economies of claims to knowledge. Romo told me how, if you go into a Shipibo community, "you can go up to a family and they will inform you [about ritual healing]. But they don't live with it anymore; they don't have it with them. They only have information about it that was handed down to them from their family." Moreover, because of increased tourism, Romo tells me of how people, previously non-practitioners of plant healers – even if Shipibo – will claim to be shamans or healers, many of them not having acquired mastery over healing spirits and nor created knowledge from plant diets[26]; or having entered the trade and learned some techniques simply with the objective of making money afterwards from selling their services. Romo was outspokenly, if calmly, disapproving of this. It reminded me of the story of Quesalid in Lévi-Strauss' "The Sorcerer and His Magic" (1963, 167-185). Quesalid, a "Kwakiutl Indian from the Vancouver region of Canada […] did not believe in the power of the sorcerers" and, in order to try to expose their tricks, became involved in sorcery and shamanism himself, eventually becoming a shaman (Lévi-Strauss 1963, 175). Although unsure of whether this other man was "a real shaman or only made up" Quesalid then makes up his mind that "he is a shaman" since "he does not allow those who are made well to pay him." (Boaz 1930, 40-41, cited in Lévi-Strauss 1963, 178) Don P, as the rest of the S-O family, did accept payments for their healing services. However, the difference that Romo was getting to was that their interest in plant healing did not come from a lucrative drive sparked after the practice was proven to make a good amount of money when oriented towards tourists and foreign visitors; instead, it came from a family history of proven powerful healers, and a personal interest in learning how to heal.

[26] More on the techniques of creating healing knowledge through plant diets will be outlined in Chapter 2.

Even more telling of the corrupting effects of being market-driven in the Shipibo ritual healing world, for Romo, was the way that plant medicine itself was prepared – if it could be called medicine of any quality anymore. Market-driven shamans would often add extra ingredients into their ayahuasca brews – just to make the people (tourists) taking the ayahuasca feel dizzier, with more mareación. In this sense, ayahuasca and its effects were no longer what Romo described to me as a "door" to a world of healing spirits; instead the brew prepared now aimed to imitate the effects that foreign people imagine ayahuasca should have. I was struck at how the dizziness induced by ayahuasca had been commodified and fetishized. Imaginaries of ayahuasca fed into the making of this fetish-commodity of this co-opted mode of mareación. In turn, this also fed the string of stories of people perishing after participating in ayahuasca ceremonies, be it from apparent overdoses, the ayahuasca brew interacting with other substances in people's bodies, or people acting recklessly while under the effects of the mareación. There were also people who would take the brew once, twice, three times, and would then think they were experienced enough to try to brew it at home and conduct rituals themselves, even giving it to other people, Romo explained to me. It was these stories of misuse, out of context, pandering to commodified views of the brew, and often resulting in deadly effects, that most often made it to the news, and gave ayahuasca an underserved vile reputation among those unaware of how these accidents came to be. Word that goes around in Lima (which I know by firsthand experience) is that once you take ayahuasca, you will have a 'trip' lasting two days, and that it is an extremely dangerous thing to do. It now all seems to me highly ironic; since it is these non-Shipibo urbanite people, if not the only ones, are definitely part of the crew that has contributed to the market forces and imaginaries of ayahuasca that now help create these more dangerous permutations of the

brew. Romo tells me that he thinks ayahuasca – the ayahuasca brew- should be just that: the ayahuasca (oni) vine and chakruna (cáhua) leaf. A well-learned healer will not need to supplement their brew to cause mareación – their ayahuasca brew should induce that *mareación*, and in any case the brew can be cooked for longer; other inputs should not be added when the brew is going to be given to people who are not healers themselves (some other plants would occasionally be added to the ayahuasca brew taken by healers themselves, but never for others). Mareación is not to be an end to itself but a marker of how concentrated the brew is, a state brought on by the oni and cáhua allowing the healer to then communicate with healing spirits, access their ícaros, and learn about the source of a person's illness. For a patient taking the brew, a safely made ayahuasca brew will also mean a safe and productive healing experience.

The commodification of ritual healing, most notably the ayahuasca ritual, had also served to erase distinctions within the Shipibo community itself as viewed by others. As Romo told me, not every Shipibo was a healer; there were many others skilled in different trades, as had happened for a long time: there were fishermen, artisans, warriors – and now economists, politicians, chemists, doctors. He had continued in his father and mother's steps in becoming a Shipibo healer. Due to the highly commodified status of ayahuasca in the global sphere, however, the whole of the Shipibo were often viewed as shamans. I specify shaman here and not healer, since this is the word that Romo used to describe those that go into plant medicine and ayahuasca rituals simply to sell it; shaman had a hyper-traditional ring to it that helped pander to the foreign, uninformed tourist. In commodifying ayahuasca, these shamans would then strongly tie it to a Shipibo tradition, further stirring the imaginaries of the primitive and of the indigenous that foreigners brought with them, and soon all Shipibos were immediately linked to shamanic practices

when, although plant healing was an extremely important practice, it happened alongside other forms of daily life that are in comparison quickly overlooked or simply not thought about.

Complications in the perception of the practice of plant healing and ayahuasca rituals not only came from outside of Nueva Betania. Romo would tell me how many people in the community, mainly those living along the main road of the town, were afraid of their ayahuasca rituals, of their plant healing. "The Church will tell them it's from the devil," Romo told me about the Evangelical's teaching about ayahuasca rituals and plant healing. "So some people are afraid." This idea of traditional techniques as diabolical had emerged from the very start of the Christian missions; yet the way that this image and social force of the diabolic came into being is indeed an interesting and perhaps somewhat paradoxical one (Taussig 2004, 143). The idea of ayahuasca rituals and plant healing as diabolic (different to native notions of sorcery) did not predate the Christian missions. Thus, "was not the diabolic memory here at issue that of the Spanish and not of the Indians? The momentous irony was that in struggling to erase these 'memories,' the Church was in fact creating and strengthening them as a new social force, thereby ensuring the transmission of myth into reality and memory into the future." (Taussig 2004, 143) This idea of diabolic practices had certainly lasted into the present with some inhabitants of Nueva Betania, namely the more strictly Evangelical Shipibo. In these modern Shipibos another seeming irony from the Catholic missions lasted: in that they still "believed firmly in the efficacy of sorcery" and the healing powers of shamans (Taussig 2004, 143). Plant healing practices and ayahuasca ceremonies were thus never really regarded with indifference by those that followed a closely Evangelical lifestyle – and as Romo said, often regarded it with fear. In my fieldwork experience, fear was also a

reaction I saw from people who were knowledgeable about the inner workings of plant healing and ayahuasca rituals; however, it was perhaps somewhat more akin to concern and an observant seriousness; an awareness of the agency of plants and non-human beings that became involved in these ceremonies and liminal periods, and perhaps of the dire consequences of not performing these techniques properly.

Asking Romo about his own faith, he created a picture of conflation. He was a believer in God, he told me; yes, he did believe. But his silence after and staring into the dark tree-pierced horizon, together with his tale about the workings of the Church in Nueva Betania, told of a more complicated story. Many people in Betania carried on this mode of faith, if so one will; believing in God while not being in complete accordance to what the Church does to their people, to their land, and to their tradition (directly or indirectly), and continuing to practice Shipibo plant healing and living according to Shipibo tradition. Practicing Shipibo plant healing in Nueva Betania in the present day thus asked for the creation of a space of sociocultural negotiation.

1.5 Piripiri for the Narcos

> And so it goes, the far away rubbed against the familiar, the primitive against the modern, the forest against the city, race rubbed against race in a magic-creating friction. These imputations of magic in Otherness enchant the medley of difference in a poetics of place and race that is no less political and economic than it is aesthetic.
>
> — MichaelTaussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing*[27]

"About 10 or 15 years ago, they would pass through here; there were many drug traffickers [*narcotraficantes*]. So, so many. And it was extremely dangerous." Romo's story

[27] Taussig 2004, 179

rang true of many other jungle communities. Drug trafficking used to run strong in the Ucayali jungle; 1994 was the peak of coca plantations in Ucayali, as "the extension of the areas cultivated with coca leaf reached 21.400 hectares," being the area with the second largest coca cultivation in Peru (García 2013, 7; my translation). Masisea, a town located further south down the Ucayali River from Nueva Betania, still produces some coca leaf (García 2013, 8). Coca leaf has been used extensively and most notoriously by the Incas, as well as other cultures in Peru, and continues to be used for its nutritional and energetic properties, as well as its spiritual significance; however, large plantations of coca leaf are also tied to drug production and trafficking, as farmers with few other options for making a living turn to the plantation and selling of coca leaf and cocaine paste to drug cartels. In the year 1995, 42.99% of all coca leaf production of Ucayali would go to drug trafficking operations (García 2013, 9). This makes communities highly unsafe due to the illegal and violent nature of drug cartels, which soon take over control of communities. Farmers often make little and suffer both at the hands of the drug traffickers and the police; and people from communities live in fear and become vulnerable. Nueva Betania and the area around it were especially susceptible to the presence of narcotraffickers due to its close location to the Brazilian frontier and along a stretch of the river that could take people over from Peru to Brazil; as such, it constituted "a region of transit of drugs produced in neighboring areas, that would then transit through their territory on the way to the frontier with Brazil." (García 2013, 10; my translation) Efforts to decrease drug production and trafficking has mostly rested upon the Peruvian Police; their actions include eradication of illegal coca leaf plantations; decommission of drugs such as cocaine paste; decommission of chemical substances destined for cocaine paste production; destruction of cocaine paste laboratories; among other interventions and intelligence

operations, sometimes supported by international governments and organizations (García 2013, 10-14). The lack of resources of the Peruvian Police, and the dangerous conditions under which they work, however, make themselves tangible (García 2013, 13-14); and many areas have seen themselves forgotten or in lack of aid.

Nueva Betania was one of these places; although not recognized as producers of coca leaf or cocaine paste themselves, there were in an area of extremely high drug trafficking transit. As Romo pointed out, drug traffickers would go up and down the river around Nueva Betania on a highly regular basis. "They were well armed. No one else could get in here, and the drug traffickers would control all the communities around here," continued Romo. Seeing that they were getting little help from the Police or the government, the community members decided to take action themselves. "The communities organized themselves. They gathered piripiri and blew it on the drug traffickers. And all of them fell asleep. Their strength left their bodies; they could not move. So then the community members, between all of them took the drug traffickers, put them on rafts and sent them down the river. Now there are no drug traffickers because we were able to defend this stretch of the Ucayali River. This is how we defend the Ucayali River, and how we have been able to keep it relatively clean, unlike Iquitos, where the pollution is very strong in the Amazon River and much harm has been done. Because there are many oil companies, that cause many oil spills."

Nueva Betania might have been left overlooked or unattended by the government; but they had never been hopeless, they had never been truly alone in their resistance. They had used piripiri – a group of plants considered strong healing plants ("In them are all the secrets of medicine," Romo told me once) to sedate the drug

traffickers[28], proceeding to then quite literally flush them down the river and out of Nueva Betania. Together with piripiri, the Shipibo of Nueva Betania had negotiated what they consider a space of jungle resistance: against drug trafficking back then, and now they did so against other forms of activity that endanger their spaces of livelihood, such as pollution from oil companies (as happened in Iquitos). With piripiri, the Shipibo had, in their fight against insecurity involved the participation of other-than-human beings in the making of spaces of resistance. Through this encounter, there came into being a fascinating technique of resistance that was "indigenous and nonindigenous"; and through the encounter of piripiri and narcos, had shaped "lives in ways that, it should be clear, do not correspond to the division between nonmodern and modern"; actions like this one instead "confuse that division and reveal the complex historicity that makes the region 'never modern'" (Latour 1993b, cited in Cadena 2015, 5)

Borrowing a term from Jane Bennett, who in turn borrows it from Bruno Latour, through this encounter piripiri becomes, indubitably, an actant; Bennett explains how "an actant is a source of action that can be either human or nonhuman; it is that which has efficacy, can do things, has sufficient coherence to make a difference, produce effects, alter the course of events. It is 'any entity that modifies another entity in a trial,' something whose 'competence is deduced from [its] performance' rather than posited in advance of the action." (Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 237, cited in Bennett 2010, Preface).

Nueva Betania becomes a safe space through piripiri; a safe space made by the actions an effects of plants and humans acting together. The use of piripiri was in turn

[28] Scientific research into piripiri or *waste* has now produced some insight into the biochemical effects of piripiri, and it is thought that many of the effects for which it is traditionally used (effects that can be brought on chemically, without really bringing into consideration other contextual realities) come from a combination of the compounds found in piripiri plus those found in an ergot fungus that piripiri is often infected with (Plowman, Leuchtmann, Blaney, and Clay 1990, 452–62).

made possible by the deep plant knowledge of the Shipibo, created in encounter between, in this case, piripiri and the Shipibo. With piripiri, Shipibo are- and become-with. Thanks to piripiri, they can keep on being, and keep on being with plants, even notoriously so when dealing with challenges we might recognize as "modern" (such as pollution from oil companies and drug trafficking). In these encounters, with humans and non-humans, through people and plants, a both ancient and novel mode of life (Ghosh 2017, 162) and resistance – a perhaps indeed never modern one – comes into being.

2.

Being with Plants

2.1 Social Lives of Plants

On my first visit to Nueva Betania, I lived with the S-O family, as an anthropologist, guest, and part unplanned patient. During my first day on that first visit to Nueva Betania, I was left alone for most of the day – to settle in, and rest, as Cece, who helped plan my stay, said would happen. That night, Romo would come to my hut, and ask me what I wanted to do during my stay. I was careful, perhaps even wary – what was I allowed to do, to say? What should I participate in – or should I just observe? Where to draw the line? Romo sensed my anxiousness, a trait that certainly infused other areas of my life beyond this particular moment. He told me it would be good for me to participate in the ceremonies, see what they can do for me to stop me from feeling so anxious.

I thus became an unplanned mini-patient for them. I was for sure not one of the big cases, or anyone that they considered would be "a lot of work" to cure. This qualifier was reserved for people such as the French girl that got there on my last night of stay during my first visit. She was sent there by her family to cure her cannabis addiction, and was to stay at Nueva Betania for four months. The day she arrived, everyone experienced higher than usual sightings of and interactions with spiders, especially tarantulas. In the space full of possibilities and bursting with meaning that was Rao Shobo, I wondered if this meant something beyond, well, just that. Another "hard work" case was that of an older woman from Belgium. From Ete's and Alo's description, she was very rich, extremely overweight, and in a terrible state of grief. Having lost her only child, she could not find an answer to her depression in Western medicine, and so she decided to come to get treatment at Rao Shobo with the S-O family. She stayed for many months, it was not specified to me how many. From what I was told, she lost about half her previous body

weight, and got good results from the treatment. She never let the children from the village or the S-O family come near her, however; upon seeing them, she would cry, being reminded of her own loss. In comparison, my own mini-treatment, proposed by Romo as simply participating in the ayahuasca ceremonies without fear ("don't fret, nothing bad is going to happen to you," I was told by many people – members of the S-O family, as well as other people staying in Rao Shobo and even others since before I had gotten to Ucayali), was a breeze.

I was left, however, with a lot of curiosity, and even larger questions – mainly about the practice of plant diets. I had not been aware of the importance of plant diets before that first visit. Yet during that first stay, I rightly noticed they were an imperative component of the world of Shipibo plant healing. As this was towards the end of my first visit, I decided I should come again – and so I did, six months later, to continue my fieldwork, this time also doing a plant diet. I knew that it was not going to be a project where, experientially, I would come to understand first-hand anything or everything there was about these plant diets; but I had the hope that it would at least allow me to come closer to the Shipibo world of plant dieting and plant healing, and not simply have heard about it, but perhaps actually come to understand it better.

Early on during my second visit – and even before I had arrived in Pucallpa or Nueva Betania – I learned first-hand that, due to their power to affect, create and disrupt human lives and relationships, especially during the period of plant diets, we must closely consider the social lives of plants (as actants), in all their intensity, liveliness and agency. I was soon to experience, and also come to understand better, how they exert this agency, affecting other social worlds and beings.

In preparation for my second stay in Nueva Betania, and for our plant diet – which L was also going to do with me – I dropped by the Mercado Número 2 while in Pucallpa, just a few minutes away from foot from where we were staying overnight in the city, and only a block away from Pucallpa's Plaza de Armas, the main plaza. I headed to Vigo's stand with L. Vigo was a natural medicines merchant. I had already bought some products off Vigo before – *aceite de copaiba* (copaiba oil), *sangre de grado* (dragon's blood resin), and some mapacho (wild tobacco). The range of products that Vigo has is extensive but well chosen; his prices are right for the quality, and he is someone you can trust with the quality, I was told. Fake or bad quality natural medicine is not uncommon – but many from the S-O family bought from him when they were in Pucallpa, so they directed me to him. This time I just wanted to get a straw hand fan for the heat from Vigo's, since I remembered he sold those last time and I very much wished I had taken one in to Nueva Betania with me. On the way we also get some rubber boots for L since we got news from Cece that Nueva Betania was partly flooded and in some areas the water was reaching up to knee level. Hiking boots would not cut it. So we got some S/.20 rubber boots near the shoe section of the market, which faced the *mototaxi*[29]-ridden street, and then wove our way through the narrow passageways between stalls to look for Vigo.

Finding him was quick – I told him I wanted the hand fan and, upon further thought, something for the mosquito bites. I was not sure whether we could use aceite de copaiba, since it is a plant resin – and I did not know whether it would interfere with the plant diet. I told Vigo that we were going to Nueva Betania to do a plant diet. "To the

[29] The local variation of a motorized tuc-tuc that performs taxi service, often made out of a soft plastic shell instead of a hard shell.

caserío[30]?" Vigo asked. "Yes, to Nueva Betania," I tell him. Vigo looked somewhat troubled. He tells us to take good care of ourselves, *que nos cuidemos mucho*. "Don't trust anybody too much. You must be like brothers. Take care of each other." So Vigo then offered *us* agua de florida. "Rub it like this, all over, to disinfect the mosquito bites. Your skin is sensitive." Agua de florida is a known disinfectant, most likely because of its alcohol content. But it is also, and perhaps primarily, a sweet-smelling cologne used during ceremonies in Shipibo ritual healing. In ayahuasca ceremonies, the healer may sprinkle agua de florida on themselves to attract, with its sweet smell, good spirits and keep away the bad ones. Similarly, those participating in the rituals are also sprinkled with the agua de florida, having some patted onto the top of their heads by the healer. Perhaps Vigo was giving us the agua de florida to protect ourselves from more than just mosquitos – to help us be spiritually protected. I asked him if I could interview him when we got back from Nueva Betania. He did not give a definitive answer and just kept on looking somewhat concerned, and telling us to take care, with the diets and the mosquitos, that our skins were delicate and that "things happen" during the diet.

At the mention of the diet – and my intention to do it – what line had I crossed with Vigo that changed his demeanor so much? Although I do not rule out the possibility that Vigo was just particularly nervous that day, through other interactions I also came to learn of the social, and anti-social power of plants, plant magic, plant diets, and sorcery. To do a plant diet is to get involved with worlds that one is not necessarily considered a part of before – even when just taking ayahuasca. These are social dynamics that bleed beyond the interaction between you and the plant; they flow into everything else,

[30] Vigo here uses the word *caserío* to refer to Nueva Betania. However, Nueva Betania is not a caserío but a *comunidadn nativa*, a native community. Caseríos house people of mixed origins, while the comunidades nativas house only native people, in this case only Shipibos.

especially relationships with other people that also know, or are to some degree aware of these plant social/antisocial worlds or know about plant diets; they flow since this social-plant world underlies, in a very real fashion, the world of social dynamics between Shipibos themselves and especially those involved in healing or plant medicine, or touched by it.

2.2 The Plant Diet, Proper

Due to the possibly treacherous nature of a plant diet – a liminal period of undefined transitions that will be defined by the dietero and the plant during their delicate relationship over the course of the diet – I was initially wary of doing a plant diet myself, no matter that it would be a "beginner's" diet and not too much of a "strong" one since my intention was not being to become a healer myself or to cure some strong ailment; for these, stricter diets, many of them in succession, are often necessary. Still, my own venturing into these social dynamics – and my observation of others in their throes as well – opened up an attunement to otherwise perhaps invisible (but still felt, still acting) spaces of intimacy, distance, insiderness and outsiderness – spaces that others navigated as people in need of healing; as apprentices; as healers; as anthropologists; as individuals whose personal lives had been touched, or even shaken, by medicine and sorcery; or a combination of these and beyond.

❖ ❖ ❖

Right after arriving at Nueva Betania for this second time, L and I and installed ourselves in the large ceremonial hut (the maloca, rao shobo) that would be our home for

the next week and throughout the duration of the plant diet. All other huts were either occupied by the family, a dietero, or marked off-limits by an overgrown creek that had flooded in the rainy season and closed off the path that led to the rest of the diet huts, built further away from the family grounds to grant them more solitude and space away from human activity. The ceremonial hut was an ample one-room hut – as with all other huts, built on stilts about a meter tall, and with a high slanting roof covered in palm leaves for rather effective waterproofing.

That afternoon, Don P came into our hut; we were to discuss our plan for the week. He told us Cece, as per my previous conversation with her, told him (Don P) that we would be staying for a week and doing a plant diet that fit within that time frame. Cece said there were plants that could be dieted in a week, or less. I meant not to sound in a rush, it was just that that was the time I had off from school, I told her and Don P. It can be done, they said. It was all alright. After all, we were beginners, and we were not taking the plant to become healers ourselves (to learn how to use the plant for healing), or taking it to be cured from some "strong" illness.

We would be given tanti rao for our plant diet, and the diet would consist of four days of fast and taking of the plant on the first three of those nights. On the fourth night, we would have an ayahuasca ceremony, and the night after that, the fifth night, would be our final ceremony where Don P would carry out our *arkana* – a ceremony of closing the diet and fixing the healing patterns onto our bodies, to get us ready to re-enter normal life after the diet. I asked Don P what was tanti rao for. "It's for straightening the mind," he told me; it was for worries, for the sanity and wellbeing of the mind, for clear thoughts. Did I often have racing thoughts? This would help me calm my mind. Tanti rao is not really a taxonomic name for a certain genetically related family of plants; instead, it is a

term used to describe a variety of plants, not necessarily genetically related, that the Shipibo consider act to, as Don P said, straighten the mind. The tanti rao we were to be given, I later found out, consisted of two types of medicinal plants. One had small, rounded leafs, and the other pointy leafs and was quite fragrant. A four-day fast period, and a total of seven days of the process of getting into and exiting the diet, was definitely short in terms of plant diet time; this, coupled with our "intentions" with doing the diet – which did not include becoming healers or getting cured from a "strong" illness – meant that our diet would not be such an intense one. Tanti rao is also regarded as a "beginner's" plant, meaning that it is one of the easier plants to diet, with a shorter diet period and requiring less discipline, so it is often given to first-time dieters. That same afternoon, I also talked to Romo about our plan for the diet, and he told us that fasting meant, of course, having no food, but that we could purchase some coconuts and drink one, two, up to three coconut's worth of coconut water per day during our fast. On the days of the ceremonies – the two last full days at Nueva Betania – we were also to be given some solid food at noon, only once during the day, and not too much, without salt, fat, spice or meat (which meant boiled plantains and some boiled pasta) – since we were no longer taking the plant those nights (that was after our three day's worth of drinking the plant were up). These were to be some of the terms of our plant diet, together with any sort of sexual interaction (also limiting sexual thoughts to a minimum), too much physical contact, and a well-advised warning to not perform any sort of physical activity beyond the bare minimum necessary to get around, due to the lack of energy we would experience. We would also be given plant baths (*baño de plantas*) after the first day, to bathe with. These consisted of water, taken from the river, mixed up with sweet smelling

medicinal plants[31], meant to cleanse us energetically, while also dousing us in sweet odors that would attract good healing spirits.

Our contract with tanti rao, however, had begun to be worked on since before the official meeting with the plant. A week before the plant diet, similar precautions as we were taking during the diet had to be undergone, to prepare our bodies for the plant. We could not engage in sexual activities, eat much meat (with pork being completely prohibited), salt, sugar, or spice. It was also recommended to keep dairy, sugary fruits and too many vegetables in check. That way we would be able to clean our system and let the plant more easily affect us in a benevolent way. Sugar, I was told by a woman *dietera*, sticks to you from the inside, and lets none of the good things into your body. These privations, as well, were meant to convince the plant, and the spirit of the plant, to enter into a social contract with us, and present us with good healing outcomes or at least with some teachings, as we had sacrificed a lot of things of carnal enjoyment, leaving them behind, to show the plant that we were committed to it.

On our first day of the plant diet, Alo came in sometime after 6p.m. into our hut, bringing with him the tanti rao preparation that L and I would take for our diet. "After taking this, you will be with the plant. You can rest; try not to talk too much, then you can go sleep," told us Alo. Alo had a plastic bowl filled with water with him, a smaller plastic cup, and a strainer, in which was a bundle of tanti rao (more specifically, a mixture of the two types of tanti rao). He mixed the tanti rao with the water, picked up the small mass of plants, and strained it. Using the strainer again, he poured the tanti rao-infused water from the bowl into the cup, giving each of us one cup's worth. "You first," he tells

[31] Which ones exactly I do not know – although from asking I got that it included wild basil, among other plants.

me. He gives me the filled cup and I drink. He then does the same with L. After the drinking, Alo gathers in his hands a scoop of the remaining strained plants. Repeating the order – first me, then L – he gives me the small bunch of soaked tanti rao, and tells me to rub it on the area of the upper stomach. He then takes the plant back from me, puts it between his hands, and blows on top of my head through them. For L, Alo himself rubs the plant on L's upper stomach – I gather that he had me do it to myself due to the closeness of the area to my breasts. He rubs the plants on L in a motion resembling the making of a cross, and then in a circle. I take note of this and imitate this motion on the second and third days that we are given the plant. Alo takes back what is left of the plant. "Tomorrow we will do the same, at the same hour. We will repeat this three times," Alo tells us. And so we do, for the second and third day of the plant diet, totaling three drinkings of the tanti rao. "You are now with the plant," he says, before leaving. We are not to talk too much; instead we must meditate, reflect, and then when we are tired, go to sleep.

As I mentioned, ours was a beginner's diet – short in length, not too terribly strict, and considered not too perilous in case that the protocol is not perfectly observed (although, to the best of my knowledge, I followed it as best as possible while still going around talking to members of the S-O family and other people staying with them, as well as observing the on-goings in Nueva Betania, as was my anthropological duty). The "stronger" diets, however, can go on for fifteen days, a month, many months. Sometimes a dietero, especially when doing the plant diet to gain healing prowess, will be in a state of dieting for a year and a half, transitioning from shorter to increasingly longer and tougher diets, with some period of rest in between each diet. Some strict, advanced diets likewise require what Don P described as "a lot of smoke, a lot of tobacco" (dieters will continually

smoke mapacho); and they will also require seclusion, not seeing other humans for the duration of the diet except for the healer that brings them in their plant brew to be drank every evening. This component of seclusion and preventing human contact was taken very seriously.

On our second to last night at Nueva Betania, Ete and Alo came to help me and L clean the ceremonial hut and prepare it for the ayahuasca ceremony to be held that night – which meant bringing in mattresses (one for each person) and large cloths, laying them down around a central area in the ceremonial hut where Don P would place his ceremonial tools. After arranging the ceremonial space, we all sat down, and Ete and Alo told us of the dietero who had been dieting for, up to this night, fifty-two days. Of Belgian origin, he had been at Rao Shobo for a while now, learning to become a healer under the supervision of Don P. Since getting to Nueva Betania, he had apparently grown a very long beard, had lost a lot of weight, and was doing very well in learning how to be a Shipibo healer through plant diets. Because of his resemblance to the widely circulated idea of Jesus, Don P called him that – Jesus. His real name was a different one. "Today is his last night of diet," Alo told us about Jesus. Tomorrow, this man would come back from his hut and receive his first meal (apart from coconut water) in fifty-two days. I wondered – why fifty-two days? Apparently, he wanted to do 52 days; that's how much he felt he needed to do with that plant.[32] We had not seen him once since he came in, I told Ete and Alo. Apparently his diet also included seclusion. "Only my dad [Do P] goes to see him, taking him his plant every day," Ete told us. "I don't go up there; I am afraid that if he sees me, I will kill him."

[32] I could not help but think about how this was more than the forty days of fasting that the biblical Jesus was said to have done in the desert. But then, biblical Jesus did not have coconut water?

Strong diets were taken very seriously; as for this man, life seemed to be on the balance when acting according to the social contract that dieting with that plant requires. Breaking the contract, or being lax about meeting the terms of the diet, could derive in sickness, death, or erroneous learning, making the person not a healer but a sorcerer. During the diet, *pruebas* come along - trials that seem to put to test the dieter and their seriousness towards the plant diet. These may be hunger; a seemingly uncontrollable desire to engage in sexual activity when it is prohibited; and emotional suffering, among others. These are challenges that must be overcome if one is to correctly learn from the plant if trying to become a healer, or to be soundly cured. Falling into these temptations, or breaking the rules of the plant diet social contract, could make the person a sorcerer, as the plant would show them sorcery instead of healing. Sorcery, apparently, was more easily learned than healing; and such it appealed to lazy apprentices unwilling to stick to the terms of the plant diets or easily veered away from the tougher path of positive healing.

Given the very special space of a plant diet, and its own internal rules, the arkana is needed at the end of a plant diet. The arkana, as was briefly mentioned before, is part of a ceremony carried out by a knowledgeable healer; acting on the dieters, to "close" their diet, or declare closed and sealed the period of their diet. The existence and need for an arkana at the end of the plant diet recognizes the shift of socialities and altered, liminal interactions and ways of being in and with the world that occur for the dieters when doing a plant diet. The arkana seals the learnings and newly instated order that the plant helped achieve on the dieter's being and body, also bestowing upon the dietero a protective aura. It fixes on people's bodies the harmonious patterns achieved through the plant diet and the ayahuasca ceremonies. Don P's protection, I was told, was strong. On

my last day in Nueva Betania, before taking the boat back to Pucallpa, I asked Wiso (who constantly travelled between coastal cities in Peru and Pucallpa) whether it was safe to take the mototaxis from the Pucallpa port to the hotel we were staying at in the city; I was afraid L or myself would get robbed, especially since we were carrying rather bulky baggage, had electronics with us, and were clearly not Pucallpa locals. Wiso told me not to worry; I would be protected by Don P and the plants until my final destination back in the United States. I was thinking I would get a response of the form of what I was used to as being "practical advice." After thinking about it for a while, however, this was its own kind of practical advice; as long as I acted prudently, no wrongdoing or unfortunate event would fall upon me due to Don P's protection. This, again, related to the notion of witchcraft as presented by anthropologist Evans-Pritchard. Evans-Pritchard explains how it is that "witchcraft provides […] a natural philosophy by which the relations between men and unfortunate events are explained" (Evans-Pritchard 1976, 18). If I was protected from malicious actions – of the type one could say belong to witchcraft, according to this philosophy – then, thanks to Don P's protection, I would not find myself under a "particular condition in a chain of causation which related [me] to natural happenings in such a way that [I] sustained injury." (Evans-Pritchard 1976, 21) Natural or not – ill effects were supposed to be barred from befalling me specifically.

But plant diets not only modified social relations with plants and with those immediately close to the dietero. In dealing with the S-O family, I learned how plant diets, plant healing, and the act of sorcery – or perhaps just accusations of it – were inextricably tied to what we would perhaps consider, to the untrained eye or uninvolved passer-by, purely human social and emotional relationships. The moment I became involved with plants through my taking of ayahuasca, and most importantly the doing of

the plant diet with the S-O family, I also became involved in these social and antisocial worlds between not only plants and humans, but between families and healers. Beyond staying on good relationship terms with the plant, to do a plant diet with the S-O family – precisely, with Don P – is to also leave myself open to being affected by them, letting them heal me, affect me, and be close to their healing powers. It was as if I had chosen sides. I had contacted another healer, also originally from Nueva Betania but now operating also out of Pucallpa and Lima, to interview them, participate in their ceremonies, and perhaps have them show me around. But after telling them of my stay with the S-O family, and particularly that I was doing a plant diet with them, he wanted nothing to do with me. With caution at first, then opening up to me, he told me how he had been dating a woman that had then been taken away from him and married into the S-O family allegedly through sorcery – this woman was Cece. "They did me a lot of harm," he told me. And so he did not want to get involved with me at all if our relationship included plants; otherwise, it was almost just fine. "If you are around here," he told me, "at least we can say hi."

The plant diets, ultimately, are a form of knowledge-production in the realm of healing. The next portion of the chapter deals with these worlds and systems of knowledge-production related to Shipibo plant diets.

3.3 Communications

The following is an exchange between Bo and me in Nueva Betania, part of a longer conversation. We talk about *plantas maestras* (master plants who teach healers their craft) and *curanderismo* (a name for ritual healing). Many times, Bo explains the Shipibo

way of understanding systems, medicine, and the jungle around us, by drawing comparisons and allegories between Shipibo understandings and what would come to be the Western hegemonic world – what he interprets as my world, Carolina's world.

Bo: "A cell phone – Carolina [referring to me] with her communication. If Carolina loses her cell phone from her hand, Carolina will feel as if she were lost. When the cell phone gets lost from your hand, "wait a second, oof, I am lost!" So with technology it's like we never lose communication. It is like a verbal, spiritual communication. In older times, my grandparents, this is how they lived: this dietero is dieting here [draws with stick on the ground to represent the dietero]. His woman is a *curandera.* This is the curandera [draws with stick on ground, a meter away from the dietero, to represent the curandera]. The communication is here [signals between the curandera and the dietero]. And so it is. These two were in contact. This is the ayahuasca [referring to the communication]. This is the dietero's woman at home. This man takes his ayahuasca, after having left for two, three months – he does not know what is happening here in his home. Then this communication, this machine, is always in communication, here. He is looking at what is happening, as protection, always protecting. And so he stays always in contact. That's how these two curanderos always went together flying like this. But this woman knew what is happening because between both of them there is communication, through the ayahuasca… for a moment he was [in the woman's] home, and then *hua*! He would disappear… and that is how they both communicated."

Carolina: "That is why in one of the ícaros they say 'communication', I think, right?"

Bo: "All ícaros are communication, between plants, with their spirits. A curandera takes her ayahuasca. In five minutes, the ícaros come. So then the curandera thinks, 'why did I

drink [the ayahuasca]?' Like saying, what do you want to see when taking ayahuasca; what do you want to discover? What do you want to look at? So then I take my ayahuasca and I want to see or look for results, then you drink and the ayahuasca takes you. […] My grandfather, I have grown up with my grandfather, with my grandmother. And my grandfather was a curandero. He took his ayahuasca during the day.[33] And they lived so, communicating verbally. […] Others had their *chasquis*[34] to send them see what is going on, what is happening. So they sent the chasquis, sent them travelling … and they went and came, similarly to [ayahuasca communication], they were the messengers, bringing messages: of what was going to happen, of what had happened…"

❖ ❖ ❖

The jungle, often depicted as dark, treacherous, disconnected from the rest of the world – a place to get lost in – was marked, as the Shipibo experienced, by communications. These were invisible communications. "The trees, the plants, the animals, the jungle – they have their Wi-Fi," Bo explained to me. Just like cell-phone signal – you cannot see them, but they are there, waves, invisible – enabling and performing communication between the beings of the jungle. This communication – a communicative force in the Shipibo terminology, as it is all called "communication" – takes on different forms. It is verbal, telepathic, information communication; it is communication to be linked, to be up to date, to understand. If the person is a powerful

[33] As opposed to how ayahuasca is taken nowadays, usually in the nighttime.
[34] Chasquis (a Quechua word) were the professional messengers of the Inca Empire. Historically Shipibo people had had contact with the Incas and borrowed from the Inca tradition.

enough healer, a *Meraya*[35], this can even be perfect communication to become another being or thing, and experience the world as this other being or thing, at will.

Walking through the medicinal tree garden one afternoon, Romo takes me to see a big tree. We have picked some *achiote*[36]. Romo cracks open the pod, and paints my face in Shipibo fashion with kené designs. The screech of an eagle alerts our attention towards the sky – there is one, two eagles that land on the cusp of a huge tree some meters before us. "The eagle is a messenger of worlds, a messenger through time – it is older than men, and has guided the Shipibo through time and space from years yonder," Romo tells me.

There are different types of communication. As with our conversation with Bo, outlined above, Bo's curandero grandparents were in telepathic communication, a communication made through, and allowed by, ayahuasca and plant knowledge – of being a curandero, a dietero, an *Onanya* or even Meraya. The curandero will communicate telepathically with other curanderos – a two-sided actualization, by both sides tapping into this ayahuasca-enabled communication. The curandero will also sometimes transcend space – this telepathic communication making him or her manifest themselves briefly in other places, to be seen by the people in those places, communicate with them, to then disappear. If both are powerful healers – like Bo's two grandparents – they will often travel together, flying across time, space and worlds, exploring, together "telepathically" – that is, in what Colpron calls a "virtual" world (Colpron 2013, 376), since this is not taken to be imagined or metaphorical travel, but as true travel, true flying, true being together – true communication.

---

[35] An *Onanya* is a Shipibo-Conibo healer – a rank of healer, so to say, that has attained spiritual connection with plants and a good level of healing prowess and knowledge. In comparison, Meraya are more powerful healers than Onanya, and Meraya have the ability to shape-shift.

[36] An Amazonian red colored pod of scientific name *Bixa orellana*. It contains seeds coated in a vibrant, creamy red paste used for painting on the body and as food coloring.

Their physical fleetingness, and their perceived ability to transform into animals is one of the pointers that determine the power of a healer. A Shipibo will be recognized as a Meraya – the highest healer rank – when they are able to carry out this telepathic communication across long distances, as well as transform into animals. This transformation is certified by the healer and those around him or her; as Bo told me, in the same conversation about jungle Wi-Fi, how "healers are visible, they are flesh and bone, but then there are moments when they are no longer there where you just saw them." Bo seemed to make the point that healers are human, real tangible people, not an appearance or a disembodied spirit. He told me of how this would happen with his dad, Don P, as well as with Romo (his brother) and even with himself. Bo tells me: "One time I was leaving the house; I can see my dad in the house. I turn around briefly, to go down the steps, and he transforms, disappearing, and then appears back in the house. I then investigated some more, and found out this is what my ancestors used to do. I see the same thing happening with my brother [Romo]. Sometimes he is in the house, but then when I go call him, he is no longer there. And the same happens with me; sometimes people come look for me and I am there, but when they try to see me I am no longer there. This process of transformation is how you get to be a Meraya. So these are men who can transform. You see me: then you see me as an eagle, as a crane, as a little bird. But you see these animals for some moments; and then you see that it is a person."

The component of initial self-doubt – in Bo performing an investigation into his past to know where these powers and techniques come from – was then not only personally but also socially and experientially turned into a truth. It was not Bo himself claiming that he disappeared and could transform into different birds; it was him seeing others do it, and others seeing him do it, that reaffirmed that he possessed the power of

transformation and thus exhibited the powers of a Meraya, or someone in the route to becoming one. There was a physical perceivable act, that was followed by a storied, thick meaning – that seeing someone quickly disappear from view, and in their place manifest an animal, meant that that person had transformed into that animal (now a person-as-animal), and thus in turn exhibited Meraya-level powers.

We can perhaps better understand this event in terms of Lévi-Strauss' idea of "the relationship between normal and pathological thinking."[37] (Lévi-Strauss 1963, 181) Basically, there are two thoughts of world-understanding and significance-making occurring. First, we have "normal thought" (Lévi-Strauss 1963, 181) – which in this case would be the simple, purely physical act of seeing the healer appear and disappear, and another animal appear close by; or being seen by someone disappear. Yet, for this to signify transformation, and the demonstration of Meraya powers, a deeper level of thought occurs – what Lévi-Strauss calls "pathological thought" (Lévi-Strauss 1963, 181). This pathological thought, as compared to normal thought, is full of "emotional interpretations and overtones, in order to supplement an otherwise deficit reality." (Lévi-Strauss 1963, 181) It is a deficit reality since normal thought "continually seeks the meaning of things which refuse to reveal their significance" yet fails to do so as it cannot be "empirically verified" in what I take to be, in Lévi-Strauss' interpretation, through Western scientific methods[38] (Lévi-Strauss 1963, 181). Finally, both come together in the world of "shamanistic curing" (Lévi-Strauss 1963, 181) or ritual healing – referred to as

[37] Although I do not agree with the terminology – since calling a way of thought "normal" versus "pathological" seems very problematic for a myriad of reasons – the theory behind this idea is rather interesting.

[38] I specify Western scientific methods since the Shipibo also claim for their mode of thought to be a science.

the world of curanderismo by the Shipibo[39] – and "a balance is established between these two complementary situations" (Lévi-Strauss 1963, 181). A powerful healer is thus made and confirmed.

Continuing to make the point about communication, Bo refers to my cell-phone usage. He says how I, for example, am in communication with and through technology, with and through my phone. "A cell phone – Carolina [referring to me] with her communication. If Carolina loses her cell phone from her hand, Carolina will feel as if she were lost." My phone taps into invisible cellular signals and I can communicate. The ayahuasca-enabled communication is no less allegorical and no less real than my communication with my friends and loved ones, through Facebook, apps, with the world, through my phone. There is a machine, waves, technology, a way of how things *work* behind both of these modes of communication, and then modes of tapping into communication –Bo is very aware of it. They are both, in the end, very social acts, these two plant or cell-phone enabled communications – a sociality that lets go of a perceived need for physicality for there to be presence, for there to be connection. If for the Shipibo to tap into plant-communication is to explore virtual yet real other-worlds, 'real' communication (even without cell phones) is not tied to flesh-and-bones physical presence. The ayahuasca is their communication machine.

Radio communication, Wi-Fi, cellular signal, jungle Wi-Fi, plant-enabled communication – it is all part of Communication, capital-C, an all-encompassing network. Like Arturo's grandfather, master curandero, says to him in *Icaros: A Vision*,

[39] I make the point of using the word curandersimo here, and in other parts healer, to refer to what may otherwise be called "shamanism" since the word "shaman" is foreign and often misleading, in the context of this study being more closely associated with commercial shamanism oriented towards tourists and the West.

when he sees Arturo wandering around looking for cellphone signal: "Here there is a good signal. Extraterrestrials land here all the time. It's a good place for all telecommunications." (Caraballo and Norzi 2016)

Romo tells me how all of the jungle is connected, in communication. This connectivity cannot be seen in its "waves" without some curandero knowledge or the help of certain medicinal plants (such as ayahuasca or piripiri), but can be understood (just as we understand about radio-waves and 'see' them with the help of radio-signal detectors) and directly experienced at certain points of contact with the visible world.

Romo tells me of how it can be seen even in a "scientific manner," this coordination between the species. There is the butterfly that opens its wings and has on them owl's eyes. There are also the leaf insects, which imitate plants. There is a connection and coordination between everything in nature, and this connection is what we tap into, in various different ways. And within this connection, we can communicate – exert agency, direction of communication, see and learn and give and receive messages, self-actualize, understand. Communication. The jungle Wi-Fi. This is a communication that goes beyond, and not contrary, to evolution; that is, it is an explanation for the particular way that things happened exactly as they happened, beyond chance, instead, explaining for "the particular conditions in a chain of causation which related an individual to natural happenings" (Evans-Pritchard 1976, 21). Thus, things as they happen "can only be explained fully" (Evans-Pritchard 1976, 24) through this agential interspecies, inter-being communication, where species again are actants in the way that they affect those they come into encounters with. A communication that, like cell-phones, like Wi-Fi, confers agency to all parties involved, and perhaps provides a way of self-

actualization for the jungle animals as it does for Shipibos themselves (Colpron 2013, 373).

In talking communication, we can also perceive it as understanding – the relaying of a message, a point of view, from one party to another, from many to one, from one to many. In plant-communication – that is, in tapping into Communication through the use of ayahuasca – curanderos may also transform into certain animals, certain things, and experience worlds as so, creating not only visitations of different worlds (and opening up the possibility of different "virtual worlds" as per Colpron [2013]), but also integrating another iteration of world-knowing in experiencing/exploring these worlds from the point of view and experience of different beings and things (an anaconda, a praying mantis, a boat), perfectly *personifying* them in this process – what Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, as quoted in Colpron, suggests is "the polar opposite of the objectivist epistemology encouraged by Western modernity." (Viveiros de Castro 2009, 25, cited in Colpron 2013, 377) It was a conversation I had a couple of years ago that led me to verbalize something I had been thinking about for a while, yet whose crystalized-thought form had evaded me until the point of this conversation: that, in my belief, to achieve the most, perhaps perfect understanding between two beings (in the Shipibo-Conibo case, even "things"), one would have to live the entire life of the other – experience all their experiences, all their thoughts, their feelings, their *being* – that is, be, or become, the other. This is exactly what the powerful Shipibo healers were doing aided by ayahuasca – becoming others, experiencing and understanding the world as an other-themselves. Could this confer some sort of perfect understanding from being: a perfectly subjective, perfect *experience*?

2.4 Plant-Cultural Ecologies of Knowledge

The concept of plant knowledges, and the techniques of tapping into and creating such knowledges, lies at the centerpiece of Shipibo plant healing. This category of knowledge seems to stretch many of the boundaries a Western mentality has set on the vegetable world – often marked by inanimateness, subservient to human interests, and very much the "natural" counterpart to a social and cultural human being. To have plant teachers, and derive knowledge from engagement with plants in order to learn how to heal, from them and with them, stretches and perhaps overturns, and dissolves, hegemonic perceived boundaries of plants and the non-human world, challenging the very imaginaries with which non-Shipibo, perhaps mainly Western tradition conceive of plants; the perceived limits of ecological, inter-species communications and relationships; of agency and personhood; of what environmental conservation implies; and of the very scientific categories of vertical integration and knowledge-creation or production, the very conceived limits of how knowledge is created, gained and reproduced in the world.

I want to begin with this last point – the challenge that plant knowledges pose for our common Western idea of what knowledge itself is, how it is created, effected, and manifested in the world. Ingold, in his "Stories Against Classification" – part of his work *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (2011) – presents us with an alternative idea of knowledge and knowledge-creation: that of a complex-process metaphor, instead of a complex-structure one (Ingold 2011, 159). With this idea of "storied knowledge" (Ingold 2011, 159), we can begin to democratize knowledge, debasing it from being a mainly human faculty, and finding it, instead, in-between organisms, that is, in their necessarily coming together and becoming-with; we find it in

"a world of movement and becoming, in which any thing - caught at a particular place and moment - enfolds within its constitution the history of relations that have brought it there." (Ingold 2011, 160) Knowledge here is gained through interactions, entanglements, and engagements; "[i]n such a world, we can understand the nature of things only by attending to their relations, or in other words, by telling their stories." (Ingold 2011, 160) Regardless of what Ingold initially intended to apply this alternate mode of conceiving and understanding knowledge to, its description of how knowledge is created between organisms – in this case of Shipibo plant medicine, between medicinal plants and humans – rang uncanny and the best I have conceived and read of it as conceptualized in anthropological terms.

This process of learning from plants, and being-with them and becoming-with them, thereby creating medical knowledge, is the basis for the Shipibo plant diet. Plant diets are emphasized as the only way to truly *learn*. I emphasize learn, because the concept of learning here is also deeply and inextricably entangled with the process of knowledge-creation in the form of the "practice of knowing […] through an ongoing engagement, in perception and action, with the constituents of their environment." (Ingold 2011, 159) Passing information along, vertically, from human mouth to human mouth, even in an intergenerational manner from old wise healers to the younger members of the family, is considered a different type, or quality, of knowledge. Romo tells me, during one of our many conversations about the state of plant-healing knowledge, how "nowadays, with tourism, anyone will say they take ayahuasca. If you go up to somebody's house, they will tell you what ayahuasca is. But they don't live it; they don't truly know. They just know about it because they have heard members of their family talk about it." The process of the plant diet, then, is necessitated to habilitate interspecies communications and create a

relationship through which this particular process of Shipibo knowledge-creation can then take place.

❖ ❖ ❖

On a very surface level, plant diets implicate the taking in of a plant – often through ingestion of a cold-water strained extraction "tea" of a plant, although this varies widely according to the type of plant being dieted and the desired learning result. The dieter has to refrain from a number of activities and processes during the diet; these often include sex, human contact, and eating any other foods, except for the occasional drinking of coconut water. These rules are often to be more strongly or laxly followed depending on the intensity of the diet and the results one wants to achieve – varying between people who are talking "smaller" or milder plants, for good fortune, letting go of worries, and the straightening of the mind such as is tanti rao; or who want to simply be with the plant and gain from it; or those who have more serious physical or psychological illnesses that need a stronger regime for curing; or those who are dieting in order to learn the medicine of that plant, its ícaros, and then be able to use this plant in healing others. In any case, these "privations" are carried out for the period of the plant diet, in order to let the plant get into their system and *estar con la planta*. This last expression is a curious one that seemed to me put through, in its four words, a plethora of implications. Estar con la planta means "to be with the plant". To be cleansed, at least partially alone, and to then take the plant in, is to literally *be with* the plant; the plant is in your bodily system devoid of any other inputs. Other inputs that affect your life and system are cut out, and so entanglements and relationships now focus between the plant and yourself. It also

points towards the fact that everything else that is done or thought about is also partly mediated by the plant and this newly formed relationship.

However, what I found perhaps the most striking was how it implicates a non-verbal yet highly productive interspecies communications; an alternate way of learning-with, learning-with-the-plant – a learning simultaneously in its physical presence; from it; mediated through it; and implicating towards a mutual transformation and process of becoming that transmutes (through physical processes of digestion and incorporation of the plant into the body as well as through the plant's parallel agential presence with-oneself, as in the plant spirits and thus agency being with oneself). Indeed, plant diets are a clear example of being-with and also becoming-with, as with the taking of the plant the human body, devoid of its usual human foods and activities, begins to also look, feel, and smell more plant-like, since the plant confers its properties onto the body of the dietero – one of these properties then beings its plant intelligences and healing knowledge (Belaunde 2009, 36). As Mena (a Peruvian Harvard alum now heavily involved with the Shipibo of Nueva Betania through the NGO she helps run with the locals in the community) said to me about this process: it "changes everything".

Although partly mediated through the body – in the physical aspect of plant intake through the different porous relationships of our body to an external world – this is a beyond-embodied knowledge. The moment we take the plant in, we stop being alone in our bodies. To diet with plants is a learning process that involves multiple bodies, multiple beings and agencies or actants. To say that it is simply embodied knowledge would be to overlook the agency and personhood of the plant itself, of its liveliness, vividness, and capacity to meet us halfway for the creation of storied knowledge.

The agency of the medicinal plant-teachers, especially when taken for the creation and gaining of medical knowledge in the dietero, can be seen again in the fact that it is not an older healer who will teach the healing ícaros or techniques of using medicinal plants for healing to an apprentice. Instead, the apprentice will diet with the plant in order to learn from and with it. Plants, thus, are the teachers of their own medicine; a medical knowledge –manifold, in turn – created in this learning and social relationship between the plant and dietero (if not with other beings) that is the plant diet.

❖ ❖ ❖

From this method of knowledge-making, plants suddenly erupt into view as teachers, and as holders of knowledge. However, as we have seen, this is a storied, process-based knowledge that requires mutual encounters in order to be constituted. The plants are then *sabias*, or wise; but for that wisdom to be translated, and transformed, into some sort of form of knowledge that can be used for healing, the aforementioned storied-knowledge encounter has to take place, with the human and the plant meeting halfway and producing, between each other, through and in each other, the storied medical knowledge then used for healing by the Shipibo. Although it may seem that way, the plants are never an idle component in this relationship. Knowledge is not taken from the plant and transformed into medicine, which can then itself be copied or replicated (to borrow the term from Ingold 2011, 159). The transformation from what we may think of a plant-potential-knowledge into accessible, performable knowledge is a non-extractivist potentiality, but a shared one, as it undergoes a process of *reproduction,* not replication (Ingold 2011, 159), requiring a mutually involved relationship, that are re-enacted and re-established by each individual with the plant, to thus re-produce medicinal plant

knowledge in the Shipibo fashion. In order to learn with and about the medicine of a plant, it is required to maintain an openness to being affected and "learning to listen," as Romo said to me. This listening is necessarily an encounter – a message that will depend on both parties, on their relationship, on their affecting each other – and one that creates a space of mutual entanglements. "For the things of this world are their stories, identified not by fixed attributes but by their paths of movement in an unfolding field of relations. Each is the focus of ongoing activity. Thus in the storied world, […] things do not exist, they occur. Where things meet, occurrences intertwine, as each becomes bound up in the other's story. Every such binding is a place or topic. It is in this binding that knowledge is generated." (Ingold 2011, 160)

However, the process-iveness of this form of "alongly integrated" knowledge (Ingold 2011, 160) in Shipibo plant medicine, through plant diets, also renders it extremely dependent on these social, intimate encounters, for its creation. In the case of learning for healing – in the becoming of an Onanya – plant knowledge must be re-produced, from its very basis, by each healer apprentice-with-the-plant. It thus renders it highly experiential and involved in its process-of-becoming. As Ingold puts it, "precisely because knowledge in this sense is open-ended rather than closed off, because it merges into life in an active process of remembering rather than being set aside as a passive object of memory, *it is not transmitted*. That is to say, it is not passed on as a compendium of information from one generation to the next, but rather subsists in the current of life and consciousness." (Ingold 2011, 161) Plant knowledge and plant healing thus rely on the re-producing of these intimate relationships, one person-plant entanglement at a time, in order to be learned and then used. Due to the nature of the plant healing learning process, and the kind of knowledge created through the plant diet, these learnings or

knowledges cannot be transmitted from person to person. What can be transmitted are the techniques of how to go about seeking and establish these human-plant relationships; but the process-knowledge or learnings themselves cannot be transmitted. Replicas of these knowledges/learnings (as active processes) thus cannot be stored; hopefully at this point it already makes sense why. In an age of commodification, rapid replication, vertically-integrated knowledge, globalization, and the destruction of the environment, this perhaps slower type of learning and knowledge threatens to stop being produced and thus to stop being.

I wonder - is this type of knowledge something that refuses to be commodified? Is it something that cannot be replicated – and has to be made from the beginning? How is each learning process and knowledge "an original", yet still of a socially recognizable form? It is here that the plants as agential beings, as actants with directionality, again become very salient. The type of learning they produce with dieteros and healers, even if intimately created and re-produced in every instance, retains a socially recognizable form and action, perpetuating the ability to perform plant healing as taught by the plants. This fascinating intervention of plants in the creation and re-production of social and cultural forms can also be seen in the making of kené through the "curing" of eyes with piripiri. The designs that are captured and displayed in kené, often made by women, are sometimes copied off other women and certainly some amount of artistic license is allowed; but the original designs are said to come from nature. These designs, most often invisible to the naked eye, become visible to the person in whose eyes are placed drops of pirirpiri[40], after which they can see the designs covering the surfaces of the natural bodies

[40] Scientific studies of the composition of piripiri indicate that a great majority of piripiri is infected with the *Balansia cyperi* fungus, which contains ergot alkaloids (Plowman et al. 1990, 452–462). Ergot fungus use in

around them. Thus piripiri mediates and perpetuates a personal, social, and ultimately cultural understanding of kené and where these designs are found and come from; and further creates and understanding of why other bodies, covered by paintings of kené, themselves acquire the harmony of nature. We encounter a plant-cultural ecology of knowledge.

As with my conversation with Romo, previously outlined, in the Shipibo tradition the only way to truly learn to heal, and understand the world of plants and plant spirits (which in turn allows the healer to harness the spirit's powers and use them to heal) is through plant diets. Everything can be told – but ultimately it will not be usable, harness-able knowledge for spiritual healing beyond what a common herbalist (called a *raomi*) could carry out. Thus this knowledge is also directly attached to a practice, and perhaps cannot be separated from it (Cadena 2015, Preface) – in the case of the Shipibo healers, for the carrying out of the plant diet and the ritual healings. Some take this knowledge-practice link rather seriously. As Don P put it, when people ask him to tell them about how he harnesses plant spirits, how he does plant medicine, he replies to them: "If you're not going to use it, why do you want to know?" This response also hints at the secrecy of older practitioners of plant medicine – a secrecy that has decreased with newer generations of healers such as the one Romo and Bo belong to. Romo says that he is not so secretive in talking about healing and plant medicine, as his father Don P often is,

---

other cultures and societies has been used to treat many of the ailments for which piripiri is used by Shipibos (Plowman et al. 1990, 452), and in addition, ergot alkaloids can also induce psychotropic effects. For this reason, I prospect that it is not just piripiri proper, but an unseen pairing of piripiri with the ergot fungus and the ergot alkaloids that produce this effect of being able to see kené patterns in the natural world. This very much goes in hand with the way that ayahuasca also allows for the seeing of kené patterns. Moreover, both ayahuasca and piripiri are closely associated with *Ronin*, the primordial cosmic anaconda or serpent (Belaunde 2009, 18). This would be an instance of a relatively uncharted, invisible intimacy between piripiri, the ergot fungus, and the Shipibo; an example that shows how Western science and traditional knowledge can work together.

given that he understands the importance of non-practitioners – among them non-Shipibos, such as myself – knowing about this practice (even if not knowing how to carry it out). But this is, understandably, a simple knowing-about, since, as previously discussed, it is not enough to have a person-to-person transmission of the plant medicine to be able to practice it. These knowledges/learnings will not be kept alive and practicable by people simply by writing about them, by anthropologists studying and understanding what is done and how (although this might contribute to understanding the need for a systemic change towards the preservation of this knowledge-making/learning); but by the conservation of the plants themselves, the ecosystems they and other lively beings inhabit (human and other-than-human), and the practice of Shipibo plant diets. Plant medicine thus subsists in the continued relationships between plants and healer humans; and relies in that these relationships are able to continue to happen. But for this, both and all parties must be able to be present.

In our conversation about plant diets and learning, Romo tells me the story his own powerful healer grandfather told him about the creation of the ayahuasca brew – that was the story of Oni and of Cáhua, the person-plants that make up the brew. He tells me that "there are many concepts, many stories that you can hear about ayahuasca, but my grandfather told me about this particular story, and why it was so. He gave me an understanding […]." Oni and Cáhua had been man and woman, who in turn had a number of children. When Oni died, he asked his children to bury him, under the earth, in a clay pot, and so the children did. After some time, the woman, Cáhua, died; and she was also buried, alongside Oni. After many years, when the children returned to the burial site of their parents, they saw two plants: an ayahuasca, or oni vine, that had sprung from the body of Oni, their dad, and now grew on the surface; and from their

mother, Cáhua, sprung the cáhua or chakruna tree. Combined, thus, they would produce the powerful ayahuasca brew. Romo still wanted to know more from his grandfather. "I used to ask, always; I had great curiosity with my grandfather. And so I asked: why man, why woman? And my grandfather told me, see, one day you will have a girl by your side. What are you going to bring into the world? It is the light! So it is the same, this oni. From the two things that come together, there comes into being a light, a world. That is why it is knowledge; that is why it is rao and why it is oni. And why it is *shinan*[41], in Shipibo." This had come after my further inquiry to a previous statement he had made – about what Romo explained as being shinan. "So it is like two coming-togethers of life, between the woman and the man. Both come together, and now they are one, shinan, one thought, one flesh: one. So then it is now shinan: a knowledge. That is what we take with us, in the Shipibo group."

Romo's story, and explanation, made me pause in awe. In it we also see concepts of production and reproduction; of knowledge being produced and reproduced in the contact and coming together of bodies, in their being and thinking and developing together. This was ultimately replicated in the simultaneous sexual and social reproduction of humans as well; it was, likewise, regarded as the creation of light, of a mind, of a new body and new knowledge. Thus, knowledge, embodiment, reproduction and creation of knowledge were all inextricably interrelated, interwoven, creating and supporting each other in a tightly enmeshed web of significances, and in the very possibility of existence as Shipibos. This was person, knowledge and world-creation through entanglements, through becoming together and becoming-with – creating

[41] Shinan is translated as *mente* (mind) or *pensamiento* (thought) in the Shipibo-Spanish dictionary (Wise n.d., 388).

something new and more between those who participate and entangle each other: a world, a knowledge, beyond the sum of its parts. But as with the story Romo's grandfather told him about Oni and Cáhua, this world and knowledge creation is only possible in a reality that involves both plants and humans, communicating, creating each other and creating *more*.

The carrying on and carrying out of Shipibo plant medicine, thus, rests on the ability to connect with plants, be with them, and create knowledge with them. This is a mode of knowledge-making that, even to neophytes in the Shipibo healing world, seems often ungraspable until it is experienced and knowledge, together with a simultaneous understanding, is created. Romo was telling me how "if one wants to learn about this [plant medicine], and learn to learn about this, it takes a bit of time, but one learns. It is as if, ah, it is not a thing one can just get to understand [easily, or without immersing oneself in it]. It is boring, and sacrifice, for me, because the diet is a bit strong [challenging]. But you get there! You get to learn! You say I am crazy, doing this, going hungry for this [because of the diets]. But you will realize that there are certain things that will change you, and you get to a moment where 'ah! This is what I meant, what the spiritual world is.' I got there, but I also say this: even if I have always been Shipibo, it has not been easy for me." Being born Shipibo and growing up Shipibo is thus not simply enough to understand and perform ritual healing; one has to gain that knowledge from the plants themselves to become a Shipibo healer.

As mentioned, it is also a rather divergent mode of thought, becoming and knowledge-creation than the vertically integrated modes of knowledge-creation that we usually find in the Western tradition. With the different modes of knowledge-creation – and simultaneously due to how these modes operate – come also the different modes of

"storing", relaying and reproducing such knowledges. Romo, having been curious about plant medicine since a young age, had asked for his grandfather's guidance. "My grandfather is who inculcated me down this path, and then he died. He said to me, when I asked: 'grandfather, I want to be a doctor!' So what does my grandfather say to me? 'Then if you want to be a doctor, learn to diet!' So then I also told him: 'grandfather, and I want to be Meraya.' It is the highest level of this practice. And I said to him: 'I want to be Meraya.' And he told me: 'If you want to be Meraya, learn to listen!' Nothing more. With those words he gave me courage since the beginning." Romo's grandfather could guide him in setting him on the right path for learning, but it would be ultimately Romo-with-the-plants that would create the medicinal knowledge he would then be able to use as a healer. This comes in contrast to what we may think of as more typical Western ways of inscribing and relaying information – such as writing and the creation of written documents. For Romo in a Shipibo medical context, these two pieces of guidance – to diet and to learn to listen – were all the pieces of advice he needed to then get to what would be formally considered medicinal plant knowledge, and the rest was between him and the plants. People, other Shipibos even, often asked Romo about his grandfather's teachings– whether he left him any of his knowledge, anything to learn from, or how his grandfather taught him about medicine. "They often ask me, and hey, I cannot find a single writing, a single drawing from my grandfather. But I have been able to see my grandfather's pipe, and from his practice, his medicine. Nothing else. And his plants that he left. Nothing more. And what he told me: to learn to diet and to listen. And these were the things that got me to understand about all that this [the plant medicine] is."

❖ ❖ ❖

Plant healers are separated into *niveles*, or levels. Beyond what processes have to be undergone to become each, the different between them lies in the level of closeness and entanglements between human and plant, and the spiritual and existential realms that the healer can readily access. Romo explained to me the differences between these levels, of which there are three, in increasing level: Raomi, Onanya, and Meraya.

Raomi is the lowest level of plant healer. Raomis know about the healing properties of certain plants – and can be extremely knowledgeable about these – but they do not have a spiritual connection to the plants and the plant-world, as do the Onanya and Meraya. We could say that the Raomi has gained a vertically integrated, transmittable knowledge more in line with, perhaps, the hegemonic Western idea of the properties of pharmaceuticals or medicinal plants. Raomis cure using the physical plant itself, but cannot invoke at will the plant spirits or heal through ícaros, as these are learned through plant diets and spiritual connections with the plants. The Onanya, in comparison, will have a spiritual connection with the plant, and know its ícaros. The Onanya's knowledge has been gained through plant diets.

The highest level of a healer, Meraya, is one that, in the literature I have found, has been scarcely mentioned. Merayas are said to exist extremely sparsely. Their powers surpass those of an Onanya. Romo's grandfather, he tells me, was a Meraya. Meraya are so deeply connected with the spiritual world that they not only become with it, but can become it, at will; the line that separates beings is either erased or crossed, and as such the Meraya can embody different other-than-human beings at will, physically gaining their shape, travelling through the jungle as them; and as such will also embody the feelings of those beings inhabiting the world around him. Bo told me, on my last day of my first visit

to Nueva Betania, how Don P (his father), Romo and himself exhibit Meraya traits – or at least traits of almost becoming one. He told me how sometimes he would walk by Romo's hut and Romo would be there; and then he kept on walking and then turn around to call to Romo, and Romo would have disappeared. He told me the same happened to himself; sometimes he would be in his hut and then people would look for him and he would be invisible to them; and in his place, there would be a crane, an eagle, or a small bird that he would have morphed into. I ask Romo about his own level. Romo tells me: "I am at an Onanya level. I am just a small step away from being a Meraya. The levels of healers, it is like graduating from university. You can achieve a technician level, you can be a nurse, and so on, until you are a doctor or get your doctorate degree. […] When you get to the Meraya level … I know I can get there, it can be done, I know what is the process I need to undergo to get there. But it is a bit … it is not difficult, no, but in the modern day, what it means to be Meraya has changed a lot. If I become Meraya, with how much of a burden will that come? I am good with being Onanya. Before, being Meraya meant transformation; but in the modern day, it would entail so much sadness and sorrow for me, sadness for the world itself. You can see it around here, even in the trees. These are not old trees, these are trees that, *ya fuiiii*, they are not the *forest* forest[42]. In times past, we used to live with the actual trees, and it would be easier to connect with them; but of those there are no more here. There are some to be found but you have to walk five hours, six hours to see a *forest* forest. It has changed a lot, even in the native communities themselves. But there are still Meraya; I have an uncle with that level. But I see that he always carries that sadness of the world. He carries so much sorrow. He is a person whose spiritual side suffers because of the state of the world nowadays, because of his connection

[42] Meaning that they are not primary forest.

to nature and the world and everything that makes it up." Romo did not want to be Meraya because of the connection that it would entail with a dying world – a connection that would make him feel all the pain of the dying environment.

It was also interesting to see the levels of plant knowledge and healing techniques being compared to university levels – reifying plant medicine and plant dieting as a parallel way of creating and gaining knowledge, comparable to more Western methods of learning as understood by the Shipibos themselves. To me, in the end the differences in levels of Shipibo plant healer portray differences in conceptions of "knowing" – a word which, perhaps in the Western English tradition and language, is much more monolithic and thus requires props and explanations in order to create from it a plethora of conceptions about different types of knowledge. These differences in modes of knowing can be perhaps split mostly along two lines – between being shown and knowing of or about, and on the other hand, knowing-with – the latter gained through what is described as a spiritual connection to the plant and the spirit-world. I believe that the Western tradition is much more accustomed to the first type of knowing, or knowing of/about - and so I find it worthwhile to remind ourselves that "other" types of knowing – such as knowing-with – are not "alter" by nature but made to be so because of power histories, which rendered Western modes of knowing about the world as the hegemonic way of knowing, against which everything else is to be compared to determine its legitimacy, its right to be considered. I find that we can compare if we want to do translational work, to help a mind and body used to Western thought grasp other ways of thought; not simply for justification of the validity of another's way of thinking and knowledge-creation. We can then create space for complementary ways of understanding and experiencing the world, attuning ourselves to this kind of being-with and becoming-with, which is very

much present (albeit largely unacknowledged) in the Western life. From there we can perhaps help cultivate mutually affirming relationships that do not asphyxiate other possibilities of how to relate to the world.

2.5 Classification, Knowledge, Subjugation

For all the importance of storied knowledge and horizontal becoming-with processes, entanglements, in the Shipibo cosmology, Western scientific classificatory schemes are vertically ordered – as Ingold points out, "the genealogical model implies a transmission of vertically integrated, classificatory knowledge" (Ingold 2011, 158). "I am especially interested in delving into how projects of [classificatory taxonomy, genealogy, botany, and zoology] – in the name of Western science – help advance colonial projects and instate a [Eurocentric] Western re-ordering and re-understanding of the world" (Salazar 2018), all while cloaked in the seemingly objective project of Western science. This is of special concern in view of how Shipibo plant knowledge for ritual healing is created, due to the importance of storied knowledge and interspecies communications and entanglements – horizontal modes of interaction, knowledge-making and entanglements which the vertical classificatory scheme severs and renders invisible. This is not to say that genealogy and taxonomy perform important functions in zoological and botanical knowledge-creation, but that it is problematic to understand them as the default or only way to impart order on the natural[43] world.

[43] As we will see with other more horizontal forms of classification existing in the Shipibo classification of plants, the natural and human world are identified as much more entangled and affecting classification schemes; the natural and the human world cannot be easily pried apart.

The embodiment of such classificatory schemes can be seen clearly in the early menageries and zoos of 1800's England. Harriet Ritvo, in her book *The Animal Estate*, tells us of how in these institutions, "as was the case in Regent's Park beginning in 1840, animals were arranged taxonomically, the exhibits showed nature not only confined and restrained, but interpreted and ordered." (Ritvo 1987, 218) Species, plucked away from their habitats, landscapes, and world, are re-ordered according to a vertical taxonomic scheme; an order imposed by the Western powers lifting these animals away from their webs of significance and reinscribing a separate order in them – one easily replicated in books, museums, zoos, menageries, and these same books, museums, zoos, menageries, and the vertical knowledge in them, in turn easily replicated.

We can see the trouble, however, with reinscribing relationships in this way; for they render invisible all the lateral relationships that make these beings and allow them to co-create others, and create storied knowledge, become-with, and be worldly. The vertical taxonomic quest is not only colonial but Panoptical – instituting a new kind of carceral reality for the beings in these new books, museums, and zoos – rendering them prisoners in solitude, anti-social, un-lively by taking away modes of exercising agency and co-creation. Foucault, in describing the Panoptical carceral machine, tells of how for an individual incarcerated in this system "the side walls prevent him from coming into contact with his companion. He is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication. The arrangement of his room […] impl[ies] a lateral invisibility. And this invisibility is a guarantee of order." (Foucault 1995, 200) The vertical integration and horizontal isolation is quite literal, with no possibility of lateral, meshed, storied understanding, relationships and classifications. In this way, quite truly "the Panopticon also does the work of a naturalist. It makes it

possible to draw up differences: […] to map attitudes, to assess characters, to draw up rigorous classifications" (Foucault 1995, 203). The subject is now made an object of study, controlled through the ordering of its body – but in such a process, also rendered inert, having taken away its modes of creating storied knowledge. What was a lively being is now an object[44] without possibility to co-create as an actant, become-lively-with-others, and thus unable to look back – a quality that was perhaps presupposed in (and fuelled) the Western imaginaries of a wild, first-contact animate nature – but which was engineered out of the subject in the quest for a tame vertical order.

Foucault's Panopticon, although closely related to the structure of prisons,

> had already been constituted outside the legal apparatus when, throughout the social body, procedures were being elaborated for distributing individuals, fixing them in space, classifying them, extracting from them the maximum in time and forces, training their bodies coding their continuous behavior, maintaining them in perfect visibility, forming around them an apparatus of observation, registration and recording, constituting on them a body of knowledge that is accumulated and centralized. The general form of an apparatus intended to render individuals docile and useful, by means of precise work upon their bodies. (Foucault 1995, 231)

The idea of carceral modernity can thus be applied to the vertical classification of Amazon species – when their lively beings come into being through horizontal relationships – and found not necessarily in a formalized prison of such species, but in the social body and socioculturally mediated scheme that created the vertical taxonomical classification. In the end, the schemes of the panoptical prison and the vertical classification are one and the same: "coercive individualization, by the termination of any

[44] Others authors, such as Jane Bennett in her book *Vibrant Matter* (2010) have written extensively on how objects can be lively; thus here I use the work object to refer to an inert object, in comparison to the lively beings that these other-than-human beings we encounter in Shipibo worlds (which can be animals, plants, things, geologies, spirits, etc.)

relation that is not supervised by authority or arranged according to hierarchy." (Foucault 1995, 239)

The way of knowledge-gaining of the Shipibo, I find to be much more akin to Haraway's (2008) concept of becoming-with (see also: Biehl and Locke, 2010). Individuality does not translate into separation for scrutiny without chance of looking back, without chance of interaction; individuality is not weaponized for the control of the body. Instead, Haraway suggests that "[t]o be one is always to *become with* many" (Haraway 2008, 4). The importance of entanglements and interactions – which we can understand to be horizontal one in the case of Shipibo knowledge-making on medicinal plants – are highlighted, not only in the creation of lively and functional systems (as in the importance of an individual within a systemic or ecological role), but for understanding what is means to be "one" – which in this case, is strongly shaped by what we may usually consider "others" and our inherent interactions with them, in "material-semiotic nodes or knots in which diverse bodies and meanings coshape one another." (Haraway 2008, 4) In isolating individuals, and thinking we will learn all about them from this isolation – as in Foucault's Panopticon, or its representation in zoos and botanical gardens – we are perhaps promptly limiting what we can learn while giving ourselves the impression that the body is laid bare for scrutiny. This is perhaps a bare "scientific" body; but I think that something from that body – its being-in-the world, and being-with-the world – are very much missing when viewed only this way. As Haraway puts it, "those who are to be in the world are constituted in intra- and interaction. The partners do not precede the meeting; the species of all kinds, living and not, are consequent on a subject- and object-shaping dance of encounters." (Haraway 2008, 4) Perhaps we can say that a human analyzing another being in the Panopticon – an animal, a plant, another human being –

is one type of encounter. But is a human analyzing a body in the Panopticon an encounter, at least in the sense that Haraway uses this term, in the sense of mutually creating partners-in-encounter? Can it ever be an encounter – if that other being/body does not look back, cannot look back, cannot form interactions, having been engineered into a position of being alone – rendering it powerless to become a partner and constitute itself as anything else than a strictly biological body? Again, this one-way encounter with a biological body is perhaps in its own terms a type of encounter. But I would argue we are missing a large part of the picture.

Shipibo ritual healing practices, especially instances during healer apprenticeships (plant diets) and during plant healing ceremonies (like those involving the use of ayahuasca) are an example of partners made in the meeting. Master plants are made actors in knowledge-gaining through their interaction, during plant diets, with the dieter, through which they confer their knowledge to the to-be healer; a person is in turn then made a healer, and oriented towards a certain form of thought and knowledge, through this encounter with the plants and the plant-spirits. During the healing ceremonies, plants, animals and different jungle spirits are made into helpful, knowledgeable and healing beings when invoked by the healer to help him perform a physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual 'surgery' ("Plant Spirit Healing" 2015) depending on the nature of the ailment for which a cure is being sought) upon the person needing curing.

Thus the Western vertical classificatory project can be seen as a colonial undoing of lively ecosystems and of social modes of becoming-with. The zoos, botanical houses, museums and books that ensued, "would serve both as a treasure house of exotic animals [and plants] and an illustration of the techniques of management and organization that enabled the agents of British government [and other colonial powers] and, more

abstractly, science to dominate vast territories." (Ritvo 1987, 210) In relation to hierarchies again, this classification finally ensures Western man's perceived position of power above the Oriental, exotic, Amazonian and non-human; a reorganization of the world in Western scientific terms for coercion (Foucault 1995, 231) and domination. This not only leads to a changing perception of these beings, and the re-inscription of their relationships which in turn changes their meaning and place in the world – but leads, finally, to the ghosting of those entanglements which make Shipibo human and other-than-human beings so lively, agential, and knowledgeable; and to the forgetting of the possibility – perhaps the very making of an impossibility – for such processes of meaning and knowledge-making in the world.

This is in turn a making of an impossibility on various existential and time frames. It makes it hard, if not impossible, for the general population of a Western mind to conceive of other ways of being-in-the-world and of knowledge-creation. In turn, it lends itself to extractivist views and the impossibility of regarding beings of what we call "nature" as nothing but objects, to be used and exploited – an exploitation and inconsiderate use that destroys lively individuals, landscapes, ecologies, then making their agency and personhood (and thus knowledge and meaning-making) an impossibility since they cease to exist.

The imposition of verticality has perhaps other repercussions as well. Ingold presents us with the idea that classificatory (vertical) knowledge is "copied, ready-made, into the mind in advance of its encounter with the world" (Ingold 2001, 159). This faculty – of classificatory knowledge being replicated (versus reproduced in-interaction) (Ingold 2011, 159) – perhaps allows for the creation, and the lasting existence, of imaginaries of nature; imaginaries of those beings, human and other-than-human, that inhabited the

tropics in a worldly manner but have now been panopticized. Vertical configurations in the Western hegemonic mindset may be making us pre-know nature – with colonial classificatory understandings of it, together with its intangible but very present colonial history and attached imaginaries – and to pass it in-telling, or in-text, or in-zoo or botanical garden, from generation to generation without any storied knowledge being created in a similar fashion to what made that being lively in its place of origin; or being necessary for this Western way of knowing and classifying, understanding and controlling the world, to be replicated. It is perhaps then possible that Western, and hegemonic imaginaries of nature, are both made and facilitated in their expansion through the colonial model of vertical arrangement and relationships.

2.6 Hierarchies

The concept of plant diets, and the process-based learning scheme for Shipibo plant healing, overturns the hegemonic, Western hierarchical relationship of humans manipulating a seemingly much less lively, much more inert plant kingdom – one that, through Marxist rhetoric (see: Marx and Elster 1986; Engels and Hunt 2010), has often been instrumentalized as a resource and presented as that which is to be used for production of commodities by humans, in the process elevating the human and placing them outside of nature, pretty much curtailing any other chance of a form of relationship beyond an extractive one between human-onto-plant. In a playing field of affecting and being affected, Western hegemonic ideas about plants and nature render them rather inanimate; perhaps the least agential, least dynamic form of macro-life (visible to the naked eye). In the Shipibo cosmology, however, and especially when entering plant diets,

plants become agential, and highly social. There is perhaps, within the dietero, a greater attunement to being affected by the plants they are dieting; but then there is also the more violently agential side of the diet, where if contracts are not kept, illness, sorcery, and death will be brought upon the dietero by the plant. As such, in-interaction this forms a much more horizontal power dynamic between the dieter and the plants. The Shipibo, as well, highly depend on the knowledge conferred to them by plants – and which they can use through ingestion of the plants – for their daily living activities. As such, their lives are mediated and allowed to be through many of these plants. This does not transform into a desire to become extractivist; it becomes instead a recognition of the importance that these plants keep on living for the own livelihood of the Shipibo and humans at large. Plants are thus placed even above human beings, such that, directly and systemically, they are necessary for human livelihoods, providing an environment that supports humans but also gives them some sort of tool to figure out this very same environment when they encounter each other. Under this framework, it is not too wild to conceive of nature itself conferring to humans its knowledge (as the Shipibo already understand it to be through the diets) – a sort of agential, sentient mega-being; the possibility that "there are entities in the world, like forests, that are fully capable of inserting themselves into our processes of thought" (Ghosh 2017, 31).

Indubitably, human and plant lives are extremely tied together, wherever on the globe one may be situated and whatever the type of life one may lead. These, however, are often systemic and ecological ties – 'invisible' to the eye yet acting continuously. In ingesting plants, perhaps these systemic ties become much more closely physical and thus more easily imaginable. Social ties, between humans and nature, humans and other beings, humans and humans, become much more tangible, as these become the tendrils

and ropes of the fabric through which plants can act. For example, during the diet of Jesus (the *dietero* at Nueva Betania going on a 52-day diet), Ete did not want to cross over the creek that separated the hut where Jesus was staying from the general living spaces of the S-O family, fearing that Jesus might be killed by the plant if he saw Ete, another human being who was not Don P (the healer leading Jesus through the diet), thus making him breach his social contract with the plant. As Cadena puts it, people seem to have "obligations" to these other-than-human beings (2015, Preface) that others see as "mere" plants, in the most inanimate sense of the word. I would, however, put a spin on Cadena's notion that this "ethical know-how [...] travelled awkwardly because not many people beyond [the local non-human-being's reach, in this case the medicinal plants] can understand that humans have obligations to what they see as [plants]." (Cadena 2015, Preface) I would say that this notion does not travel awkwardly but instead transforms; from a physical presence and sense of obligation, to a systemic presence. Perhaps in the later plants are slower to act, slower to retaliate; but if we breach our social contract with them, at a more global level, even with all the knowledge we have about how environmental systems work and the role of plants within it, we might as well be digging our own graves, breaching our plant diets, being sent illness and killed by our own breaking of social contracts to these plants. In the end, biologically speaking, we are much more in need of plants – and need to *be with* plants in order to *be* – than they need us.

3.

La Medicina

3.1 The Body as Place of Encounter

This notion of storied knowledge and becoming-with, as well as the previously explained traditional notions of how plant diets change the human body, necessarily makes the body a place of encounters: a place that, if prepared adequately, enables and mediates this inter-species, inter-existences knowledge production. Although body and mind are sometimes talked about separately, Shipibo plant medicine often addresses the individual as enmeshed, worldly, and interiorly complex – never just a mechanical individual, separate from the factors and forces operating around them and within which they operate; and never just a body or just a mind. When I talk about the body, then, I will be talking about this worldly, enmeshed, never simple and never just-itself body, unless I specifically allude to this interpretation of the body.

Due to our physicality, the body and its surfaces, membranes and senses mediate our interactions with those things around and within us. To say the body and to think of it solely as "ourselves," a unit, a solitary, is most likely extremely misleading. The creation of the myth of the individual – not as special in their individuality, which they might be, but as a sole unitary body – oversees the multiplicity of other bodies, forces and entanglements affecting even that which we may think is most ourselves – including, what we may think of as "our" physical body. In this I recall Donna Haraway (2008). "I love the fact that human genomes can be found in only about 10 percent of all the cells that occupy the mundane space I call my body; the other 90 percent of the cells are filled with genomes of bacteria, fungi, protists, and such, some of which play in a symphony necessary to my being alive at all, and some of which are hitching a ride and doing the rest of me, of us, no harm." (Haraway 2008, 3-4) To be this way, however, is not to *not* be

oneself – perhaps a *many*-self – but this is what makes us, us. We are who and what we are because of these interactions, and we are *with* them, in the same vein of storied becoming of gaining knowledge and being with in the world. "I become an adult human being in company with these tiny messmates." (Haraway 2008, 4) We *are* not *in spite of* them but *because of*, *with* them. "To be one is always to *become with* many." (Haraway 2008, 4)

The body, even from the most basic biological of viewpoints, is thus a place of encounters – it would not be itself were this not this way. It does not then necessarily hinder perception, the gaining of knowledge[45], but is one of Haraway's "contact zones": a "material semiotic [node] or [knot] in which diverse bodies and meanings coshape each other." (Haraway 2008, 4)

We saw this notion of co-shaping in the process of knowledge creation through plant diets and being with plants. A similar notion of the body as place of encounters guides the therapeutic aspect and action of Shipibo medicine and medical tools. The body as an entanglement of complex systems beyond becoming-with in plant diets is pointed to in the purgative use of the ayahuasca brew. I ask Romo whether ayahuasca is used to learn, and to cure. As he tells me, ayahuasca does not really cure by itself[46], or is a plant to learn; it is a plant that, to the sick person, helps detoxify, and to the healer, helps show them, see what is causing the illness, such that other plants and spirits[47]. "[Ayahuasca] is not a vitamin drink, it doesn't have anything that might be [in other healing plants], it is a wise plant that absorbs all the toxins that derive from emotional,

[45] This same point applies to the making and writing of anthropology. The body does not inhibit our interaction with 'the world', but mediates it, and helps us connect with others, with the world, and create knowledge and understanding.

[46] Here there is a distinction between making-better and curing. The ayahuasca may help someone as part of their process of curing an illness, but itself is not culturally regarded as the sole actant for curing.

[47] Here again we see the distinction between learning and just knowing-about. The ayahuasca shows the healer what is happening; but the technique of how to heal that ailment that the ayahuasca has made visible, must be learned from other plants through plant diets.

spiritual, psychological, other sources. And it absorbs them from the stomach. And this is what ends up coming out [when one vomits], relieving oneself of it, detoxifying oneself from it," Romo explains. What is in part psychological and emotional, then, can be accessed and modified partly through the physical; in this case, a physical purging of the effects of the other "lives" of our bodies (psychological, emotional). What we may call the physical body – the stomach, more particularly here – is thus a place of encounters of the faculties of being that can all partake in illness and create such "toxicity." We may then see the stomach, in turn within the body, as the physical contact point through which the coming together of the toxicities is manifested and then expelled – a physical expelling which carries with it, in its content and entanglements of how it came to be materialized, the products of emotional and psychological lives – that is, the beyond-physical. The vomit, the bodily product, it itself then a very real, tangible manifestation and coming-together of all these other toxicities – which are then expelled through the very physical means of vomiting, thus exiting the material plane of our bodies and with it being rendered 'outside' of what constitutes and makes up 'us' – cleaning us, through a physical congealing and vomiting that creates an away-ness, from all sorts of physical and other-than-physical ailments.

In this sense, the body as place of encounters is rendered necessarily porous as well. Different porosities on different planes and levels of existence determine the ways that the body can be accessed, affected, and exited. As in the case of the ayahuasca and vomiting, this happens through the stomach's and digestive tract's both physical (biological) and figurative porosity; in turn also suggesting a porosity, and thus connection and flow, between this organ system and other important systems making up the human or individual, such as is their psychological and emotional lives. We assume a position of

openness and porosity in letting the ayahuasca in, in the act of taking it into our bodies by drinking the brew, through the mouth and eventually into our system. This porosity, however, also has to be duplicated in what we may call our minds, or our "intention". Romo explains to me how "intuition and your goal are very important, as well as trusting ourselves and the plant. And to know why you are drinking. That is very important. And down that path the liana [the ayahuasca] will guide you." One has to let the ayahuasca into the body but also into the mind, and work with it towards a common goal; to not resist its medicine, but let it flow in and with us, and alert all of our systems towards the goal of receiving and working with the medicine. It increases porosity in manifesting such porosities in our body – what we may call a holistic conception of being or of the body – but also by introducing itself into our beings as an agent that necessitates a synergistic working of all of these systems in order to get rid of their accumulated, and interacting, toxicities. It works on a holistic body, and through its helping effects, makes us realize of the entanglements of our being. These entanglements, however, go beyond going "deep" into our "own self." In the simple act of taking in an agent, and letting it act on us, we are also attuned to our being-in-the-world and, quite literally, our becoming and transformation through and with those things we would regularly consider to be not part of us-as-individual – that our own selves are not barriers impervious to the agencies, flows and affects and effects that act beyond the limits of our bodies, and that, at times, come to act very intimately within us and with us, and quite literally *through* us.[48]

The ayahuasca's medicine then acts as a congealer, a facilitator in bringing these systems (psychological, physical, emotional) together; it enhances, in a figurative and literal sense, the porosity and interconnectedness of the body's systems, making toxins of

[48] Traversing us.

negative psychological and emotional lives into a physical substance that can be gathered in the stomach and expelled through vomiting, exploiting the body's own mechanisms of getting-rid-of, of creating an away, of taking that which used to make it up and expel it from making-it-up and becoming-with anymore.

3.2 Therapeutics in-encounter: Pharmakon

"The whole plant kingdom is subdivided by the Shipibo-Conibo into *rao* and *raoma* (*ma* is the suffix of negation): plants with power and plants without power." (Caruso 2005, 162; my translation) Rao means medicine in Shipibo. In turn, the power that rao plants, (medicinal plants) have can "manifest itself on a physical level as medicine or as poison." (Caruso 2005, 162; my translation) Medicinal plants are thus very much a pharmakon – both medicine and poison (see: Derrida 1981, 61-172) As Valenzuela also points out regarding rao plants that are both medicine and poison, "[s]uperficially, these meanings seem to be contradictory; however, they are not so if we take into account human interests, needs, and purposes." (2000, 26) As such, plants hold medicine and agency; yet this medicine, or pharmakon, must be socially and culturally mediated in-encounter in order to make it a benign cure or a poison, a substance that can hurt. With this in mind, we begin to see how curing involves a holistic view of all factors involved – plant, human, context – that cannot truly be pried apart in the making of plant medicine and in carrying out a successful curing. Medicine and its action is very much mediated and made in-encounter with the plant itself. Therefore, we can see the importance of the *intención*, the intention and desire of the person taking the plant – as they are an important factor on the outcome of the curing, interacting through the person's body with a plant that will

cure, create illness, or have a number of other effects depending on the interaction. Valenzuela writes on how "[c]ategories such as the generic *waste* [piripiri] challenge the belief that human intervention in 'natural' taxonomies is limited to the restrictions imposed by our perceptual system or by genetic endowment in general. As it happens, there is no alternative system parallel to that provided by *waste*; therefore, it is impossible to categorize the corresponding discontinuities in nature without taking into account Shipibo needs, values, beliefs, and worldview." (2000, 26) In this manner, Shipibo plant medicine challenges yet again the modes of Western scientific categorization (see Chapter 2) not only of types of plants but of components for medicinal action and therapeutic value, which are seen as usually resting purely within chemical components, and the intention of the human becomes a hindrance instead of a maker of medicine in-encounter. The plant-as-medicine is instead made in-encounter with the person, and becomes-with the person, at the same time as the person becomes-with the plant. It is perhaps an ultimate expression of being-with others.

With this knowledge, we can perhaps expand Lévi-Strauss' notion of "pathological thinking" versus "normal thought" – such that "pathological thought" not only "overflows with emotional interpretations and overtones, in order to supplement an otherwise deficit reality" (Lévi-Strauss 1963, 181), while "normal thought continually seeks the meaning of things which refuse to reveal their significance" (Lévi-Strauss 1963, 181) but creates its own reality through the relationships and encounters with medicinal plants, which in turn create ritual healing – a very tangible outcome mediated by perhaps more intangible sociocultural and individual encounters with plants, with the meaning of these encounters and ways that one is with the plant determines how one becomes with it:

cured, or poisoned, encountering good luck, separating from a significant other; often very much depending on the physical use of the plant and the intención behind its use.

3.3 Curing vs. Soothing

I had heard Bo, during another conversation, saying that when he is called to heal a patient, beyond getting some background on them (in a sort of consultation), he asks them one primordial question: do they want to be soothed, or do they want to be cured? I inquired into why and how he came about this question, and what follows is Bo's explanation.

"The ayahuasca is a medicinal plant, like a medicine. It is also a pharmaceutical world, the root [or source] of the pharmacy, from whence are born pills, from whence come other medicines. So a healer is like a medicine, like a healing pill. One day, someone who is physically or psychologically ill can cone to a healer, looking to be cured. So then comes the consultation: I must first ask them [about what is happening to them]. And when I ask them, they have to tell me, clearly, the problems they have been through. [I also ask,] do you want to cure, or do you want to soothe [your ailment]? That is the question that I ask, the most basic and key question. If I come to a doctor, I must state clearly, whether I want to be soothed or whether I want to be cured. If the patient has come to be soothed, we soothe. If they want to be cured, we cure. There are no more words between those two in curanderismo [ritual healing]. Starting from there, then, the healer knows. The jungle is their pharmacy. The same things one can find in a pharmacy in pill form, but in the case of the pharmacy it is just to soothe. If my body is in pain, I can take a pill, and I will be soothed. When pain comes back again, I need to get another

pill and take it, and so I continue to do so for the rest of my life. But it does not cure [the pharmacy pills]. I will only lived soothed. The plant is something else. That you take and it will cure you. It does not soothe you, it cures you instead. That is why they say that the ayahuasca is something sacred – its sacredness came because of its utility."

3.4 Pharma Flows

Western medical establishments are often found in areas regarded as more "Western" such as larger cities like Pucallpa. The larger populations also assure a steady inflow of people to these medical establishments. In smaller towns like Nueva Betania, not considered urban epicenters, traditional medicine still holds. But then traditional medicine filters in to the larger towns and cities. Sometimes, it filters in with people - people who already carried it out, often as a first or their only line of defense wherever it was that they lived. Given, some of this is regarded as pseudo-medicine or urban myths on how to cure certain ailments – but other times these are well-established modes of healing, such as is Shipibo plant medicine. For example, people coming from Nueva Betania might bring it in to Pucallpa.

In Lima, I have seen something else happening, growing the demand for ritual healing and CAM. Lima is demanding more traditional medicine, CAM, and ritual healing, not only from those who previously used it as a first line of defense, or in their smaller home-towns, but demanded by people of high socioeconomic resources who are now themselves looking for therapy and treatment that offers something beyond or besides that which Western medicine has given them. They often seek the holism of traditional medicine - a medicine that acts on the biological level but also makes sense of

its patient as a holistic, complex body, Ritual healing such as that carried out in ayahuasca ceremonies embeds them in complex relationships, addressing patient, body, mind, spirit, and providing cures not only in the flesh but in the form of cosmological understanding, understanding of the self in the much-anthropological webs of significance that weave up the world we live in (McKenna and McKenna 1993, 16). As seen in the Introduction, ayahuasca healing is making headways into the realm of biomedicine and pharmacology, with its claims to cure many of those ailments that biomedicine struggles with – those that Western medicine, in its webs of positivism and capitalism, has often over-medicated, disregarded as lesser-level psychosomatic or purely psychological ailments, or still struggles to understand and medicate. It always seemed ironic to me that in Western medicine we have an opioid crisis, overmedication of amphetamines, painkillers, and other prescription drugs - a nation of addiction to the synthetic, of medicine-pushing, of creating customers and consumers to pharmaceutical products. An ailment will make you a sick person, and then a consumer of medicine. In many cases, if the desire is to create a market, the longer you stay a consumer, the better for the suppliers. It is a broken system of unidirectionals; medicine flows one way, and money flows the other.

But the expansion of ritual healing unto cities, and into high urban socioeconomic strata, also seems to create a phenomenon of gentrification of ayahuasca ceremonies and Shipibo ritual healing that has manifested as a particular sort of price-discrimination. With foreigners and international or trans-local markets, as discussed in Chapter 1 with Romo, some centers establish themselves as oriented to the foreigner: participation in these "ayahuasca retreats" can be highly costly. On the other hand, plant medicine and

ritual healing practices are still offered locally (or at least not exclusively for tourists or foreigners), as Don P does within Nueva Betania.

3.5 Piripiri and Ayahuasca as Life

Piripiri, or *waste*, is a term denoting a "wide variety of herbs, most with special 'magic' powers that are beneficial for the human beings using them." (Valenzuela 2000, 26) Interestingly, "with only one exception, all of the species properly designated by it that have been identified scientifically belong to the family *Cyperaceae* and, in most cases, to the subgroup Cyperus sp." (Arévalo 1994; Tournon, Raynal-Roques, and Zambettakis 1986, cited in Valenzuela 2000, 26). Piripiri is an extremely important category of medicinal plant, and the different types of piripiri help Shipibos keep healthy, thrive, and keep on living in the Amazon, in a variety of ways. "In the piripiri there are many kinds of strong medicine," Romo tells me as I inquire about this type of medicinal plant, which I had heard being mentioned again and again. "There are many varieties of piripiri. In them are all the secrets of medicine. There are all kinds of piripiri: for *jergón*[49] bites, viper bites. There are piripiris for when you are going to face a rival. Formerly, in the jungle we would face other Amazon groups, from different cultures – not because we were all from the Amazon meant that we knew each other and got along perfectly. So formerly we used piripiri when we were about to face some other group in battle." Piripiri had allowed Shipibo to face their enemies at the time. "Similarly," continued Romo, "when Shipibos would go hunt a very dangerous animal, we would use piripiri. Before setting off, you can eat a little bit of it, chew it, and rub it all over your body. Even when you're standing right

[49] A type of pit viper, *Bothrops atrox.*

there," Romo points to a spot some meters off where we were sitting, "no one will be able to see you. That was the secret. And then other piripiris would allow them to have strong reactions, to have temper in the moment [of confrontation]. You become like an animal spirit." The ritual medicine powers of piripiri thus allowed the Shipibo to be successful warriors and hunters, allowing them to continue living successfully in the jungle.[50]

According to Romo, the power of medicinal plants was especially necessary for living due to the smaller congregations that Shipibos used to live in – per family instead of per community – and as such they did not have as many people to support each other and were often more exposed to the other beings of the jungle, with no other humans beyond their family to often receive help, support and aid from. In this role, ayahuasca (alongside piripiri) was the plant that perhaps above all others allowed for the Shipibo to live in the jungle. Romo described ayahuasca, or oni as he called it in Shipibo[51], as "our life." "Oni is our life. It is our connection. Formerly we would use it to be able to understand nature and live with nature. That is why the liana, oni, is knowledge. Because through it we could communicate and get to, even live, with the animals. This was very important, as it has not been easy to live in the jungle. There were big things, in the jungle, in the river [presumably big dangerous animals]. That is why people were very focused on connection. Then a wise healer would be able to make a jaguar stay away and prevent it from attacking their home. Some plants would also be spread around the house so that no one could come in. You could try, but you would not be able to get in, neither you nor the animals." Plant knowledge, and knowledge of the natural world attained

[50] As mentioned in an earlier sections, it is thought that many of the effects of piripiri come not only from the plant, proper, but from the fungus that piripiri is often infected with, *Balansia cyperi* (Plowman et al. 1990, 452–62)

[51] Romo, as well as the other members of the S-O family, would alternate seemingly at random between using the Shipibo name "oni" and the Quechua term "ayahuasca".

through the connection made possible by ayahuasca, made it possible to be *with* nature, and in turn be able to survive. Ayahuasca thus jumps forward as an immensely important plant for Shipibo livelihoods since former times, allowing for figuring out of ways to be with non-human beings and not be attacked by them (or even by other harm-meaning humans), learn from them, and then influence them (often through the use of other medicinal plants revealed by ayahuasca) to not attack Shipibos. Being with the jungle, and being with plants, quite literally made the Shipibo life and socionatural space livable. To say that oni was knowledge and that oni was thus life, was by no means a hyperbolic, allusive, or immaterial claim.

As we will go on to see in Chapter 4, the ways in which ritual healing, Shipibo plant medicine, and the traditional Shipibo lifestyle make spaces livable, becomes even more highlighted, noticeable and important when communities such as Nueva Betania are confronted with neocolonialist, neoliberal forces, and the effects of climate change in the Anthropocene, a time and current full of its own type of challenges.

3.6 Mantid Intimacies

Sitting on a log in one of the common areas with Wiso, I once spotted a tiny praying mantis – I presume of the same type that lived in the medicinal plants. I picked it up, excitedly pointing out my finding to Wiso: *look, it's a praying mantis!* I had used to keep one as a 'pet' in Lima – at least, I kept it domestically – after F gave it to me as one of his surplus subjects for one of his sustainable pest control studies. I knew how to handle them, and so I almost immediately picked up this diminutive Amazonian praying mantis that had appeared almost invisible against the log we were sitting at, perfectly camouflaged

had it not been for its quick movements that gave away its insect-ness against the motionless backdrop. Mottled skin, it held up its torso and the end of its tail proudly. Perched on the tip of my finger, it would turn its head, its compound eyes creating the illusion of an attentive pupil that would follow my gaze. It is called *mabán*, Wiso told me; that is the Shipibo name for the mantis. The mabán was an animal of great knowledge in the Shipibo tradition. Due to its rhythmic rocking movements on its nimble legs, Wiso would refer to it as a *gran bailarín del ayahuasca* – a great dancer of the ayahuasca. If you ask the mabán where Pucallpa is, they will point you to it, Wiso told me, as he eyed the mabán. *Where is Pucallpa?* Wiso asked the mabán directly. The mabán swiveled its head and jumped onto Wiso.

Romo would also tell me about the story of the mabán. During my first visit, in the night before my first and second ayahuasca ceremony, Romo and I walked down to the port at about 11 p.m., flashlights in our hands. Since sundown had happened around 6 p.m., it had already been dark for a while. It was quite surprising how quickly my body had adapted to a lack of electrical light; I would often be tired and surprised to learn it was only 8 or 9 p.m. 11 p.m. thus felt far into the night; a time between wakefulness and sleep when dreams seem to tumble onto the landscape, finding new life between the mind and the shadows as they roam, all too real, around this world. There was no electricity on that night; the community was pitch dark except for our two dots of flashlights. Romo came down into my hut, and offered to walk with me down to the river to talk and watch the night sky. As we made our way from the S-O family grounds closer to the port, the tree cover opened, and above us the river of stars that made up the streak of the Milky Way exploded across the dark sky. The splash stretched from one dark horizon down to

the other, seeming to start down by the Brazilian border and fade into the low electrical glow of Pucallpa.

I told Romo of my encounter with the mabán. Romo then began telling me the Shipibo story about the mabán. As with many other of his stories or explanations, he seemed to always wind back, in a narrative sense; his stories would always begin a step back, a story starting before the precise moment of encounter, historicizing. So there was this man, Romo told me, who once got lost in the jungle. He was incredibly desperate to go home, but would continue walking in circles, completely lost. Upon walking some more through the jungle, this man would encounter a mabán. The man then asked the mabán, an animal of great knowledge and intelligence, where home was; and the mabán, with one of their arms, pointed the man in the direction of his home. The mabán were thus understood to always know where home is; all that was needed was to ask. Plants, animals, they have their medicine, Romo told me. During the ceremony, you can ask them to show you their medicine, and then you can meditate on them, so that you have an intention during the ceremony, he said to me. And then the ayahuasca will show you.

And so I did. The next night, we would have our second ayahuasca ceremony of that visit. Already somewhat more informed of how a ceremony took place, having participated in one before, I felt more calm and free to meditate. Encouraged by my previous physical encounter with the mabán, and by Wiso and Romo's story about the mabán and its significance to the Shipibo culture, as I drank the ayahuasca, I focused intensely on the mabán, and like a mantra, repeated loudly but calmly in my head: *mabán, muéstrame tu medicina*; mabán, show me your medicine.

It was a praying mantis, a mabán, who would appear to me during my *mareación*, the time of visuals and strongest psychotropic activity of the ayahuasca brew. Lying down on

my back, I would continue to focus on the mabán and their medicine. My ayahuasca-enabled encounter with the mabán would go as follows.

I began to see some patterns, arranged along a diagonal axis; these would flow up and down this axis, like shapes carried along by a muddy river. There shapes would become more vivid and kaleidoscopic; triangles were the most dominant shape. Without any transition I can remember, this vision suddenly disappeared.

Into my view then exploded a dome made of an infinite amount of intensely brilliant and colorful pieces of crystal; it was the seemingly bejeweled interior of a turtle shell. Oscillating between a first and third person view, I could look around, and saw, to my left and above me, mushrooms and other fallen leaves towering above me. I understood that it was not that the mushrooms and the turtle shell were enormous, by human comparison; instead, I was rather tiny; I was a recently born mabán. Scurrying out from below fallen leaves, I made my way across the inside of the mosaic turtle.

Soon, I had stumbled into what was a wasp hive. Honey dripping all around, it was a brilliantly golden, gooey environment[52]. But the wasps were menacing; with their stingers they threatened me, their red eyes looking at me. I understood – as mabán and as Carolina – that I had to exit that place, as it would bring no good outcomes, and so I made my way out of the wasp nest.

What continued was the life cycle of a mantis, the story of a mabán who tried to learn from flowers. At the beginning, multiple flowers would come to me, offering to teach me their ways. With their blood-red pointy petals and yellow gaping middles, they would reach out to me, calling me. But I understood they were ill-meaning plants; they would

[52] Only a few species of wasp make honey: for example, the Mexican honey wasp (Schattenberg 2013).

smother me, perhaps kill me if I went to them. They were fake teachers. As I ignored them, they would become more menacing, reaching out to me more desperately, with petals like claws. Knowing this was no good sign, I willed them to go away, performing a mental action of sweeping them away. And they were swept away.

At last I found my flower teacher; a pink orchid. It was not too large, but large enough for me as mabán. I would perch on its petals, looking into it, learning from it, imitating its movements as it swung in the light breeze. Facing the flower, I would raise up my mabán arms and dance with the flower, gently and rhythmically, and I would learn from it.

As the flower spilled its knowledge onto me, as I learned, my mabán body started to change; it started to become like the flower, starting by the front, and soon I was an orchid mantis, pink like my orchid, textured in its likeness with small dots and protuberances. I had learned from the flower and I was extremely happy; I had fallen in love with it.

Soon after, however, my shorter mabán life would come to an end. While the orchid was still alive, I dwindled and, in the blink of an eye, curled up and died. The earth swallowed me up.

I thought that would be the end; as someone who is not religious, I did not believe in an afterlife, and so I was surprised I was being presented with a vision of death as something beyond a complete lights-out[53]. As soon as I had entered the earth, the world

[53] This is, indeed, one of the curious things about ayahuasca visions; that although one may be under the influence of the brew, one remains strangely lucid. As engulfing as the ayahuasca dreams, journeys or encounters may seem, it is still very easy to maintain a grasp on one's physical surroundings, and the fact that I was lying on a mattress in the ceremonial maloca never really escaped me. Due to this I was able to do quite a bit of in-the-moment reflexive thinking regarding the stories I was being shown. This vision has not necessarily changed my idea of what happens after we die, in the sense of what the experience is like; I

shifted upside down, such that the belowground was up, and the aboveground was down. I was encased in a delicate membrane, glowing a ghostly yet soothing blue. Around me, many other bodies were also encased in this womb-like membrane, also glowing blue; we seemed to form a universe of peaceful bodies, in the realm of the dead, of the underground. Looking above me, I could see trees; slightly translucent, they were ghostly figures also made out of the same material that encased the bodies of the deceased. From this perspective, I could see their roots and into their trunks. It was a ghost world, the other side of life. At that point I also opened my human eyes, to see, against the darkness of the maloca, the outlines of these trees hovering barely visible in front of my eyes; the vision would become much more vivid when I closed my eyes again.

It was during that peaceful death that I cried. I cried because I was inconsolable, so immeasurably sad that I had died; not because of my own death, as it was no state of horror or inherent suffering, but because I had left my flower behind in life. I cried in the vision and in person. After some time of crying, Romo, who was sitting beside me during the ceremony, asked whether I was doing ok. In the dark, I nodded yes, and mumbled that I was just sad because of what had happened in my vision.

Continuing, I would gather strength; I could not stay dead if I wanted to be again with my flower. And so I came back from under the earth, and would reunite with it. I guess that truly animals live double lives; as individuals, and as the archetypal Animal; as a mantis, and as The Mantis (Berger 2007, 253). Romo would then tell me that spirits can never die; they will always be reborn. This gave me consolation.

---

still expect some sort of complete lights out. However, I do believe that this ayahuasca ceremony helped me ease my anxiety regarding the way that I approach the idea of death.

Newly alive – or at least some form of alive – I would dance some more with my flower.

I then found myself looking at some sort of wooden panel, overgrown with plants. Over it, slithered two snakes, which I understood to be anacondas. One was pink, and the other, a mossy-green, the typical color for an anaconda. Initially drawn towards the pink anaconda, I ultimately decided to go with the green one. Still a mabán, I ran up onto its back. The anaconda took a look back at me, so as to make sure I was there with them, and then began to slither. Soon we were swimming through the cosmos, through the open universe, stars all around us. The anaconda would show off, growing larger as it sprouted a multi-colored plumage, swirling and dancing in the vacuum, flying effortlessly through it.

After the mareación subsided, my body, as though through embodied knowledge, told me it was time to throw up. I did not feel particularly sick; something I cannot say for the ceremonies we would do during my second stay, which would make my stomach intensely upset, the stomach bodily feeling being a mix of indigestion, intense heartburn, and the worst hangover ever. So I sat up, and, clutching the bucket that had been preemptively placed by my feet, threw up into it. The feeling of relief was immediate. By this time, Don P, Doña A, Romo, Bo, and another woman from the community who had come to participate in the ceremony, were all singing ícaros. The sense of peace and wellbeing was absolute.

I would then have to make several trips to the bathroom, as the ayahuasca brew had a pretty strong effect on my bowels. Even after having vomited, some of the bodily effects lingered, especially the ones on my digestive system. I experienced immensely painful stomach and what I thought could also be uterine cramps, breaking out into a cold sweat

as I lay on my side clutching my stomach. Focusing on the ícaros seemed to drown the pain a little.

As the mareación subsided almost completely, and the ícaros went quiet, people would begin to fall asleep; first in the maloca, and after, they would gather whatever belongings they had brought and take them back with themselves to their own houses, to continue to sleep if so desired or go on with their day. After emptying out my bucket, throwing out the contents behind the maloca, I felt tired, mostly due to the night of sleeplessness, but also extensively relaxed and at ease. The intimate encounter with the mabán, and of myself-as-mabán, would stay with me. Even until now, it is a very intimate and emotive experience to bring back to mind. I had been allowed an ultimate intimate relationship with another being – living out its own life, its own feelings, its own joys, loves, frustrations, sadness, hopes and aspirations. The question of what had 'truly' happened did not really bother me; this was by itself a real lived experience. The medicine of the mabán was a practice, a teaching, and an infinitely empathic experience up to the point of becoming the other.

There was strong medicine in mantid intimacies.

4.

La Actualidad

4.1 Anachronistic Space, Anachronistic Practices

Romo was a great talker. A very knowledgeable one, for that, so I reveled in our long talks, where I would always find myself learning more and more, understanding more and more – about Romo, about Nueva Betania, about medicinal plants, and all the situations around the practice of Shipibo plant medicine. As a practice that bridged so many parts of Shipibo culture, and drew from the material environment, the topics that fell within conversations on "plant medicine" were astoundingly varied. Yet there was something that our conversations seemed extremely often to veer towards; a note in which Romo would end many of our conversations. It was about loss: about the loss of Shipibo traditions, customs, and practices. This loss manifested itself as the loss of traditional dress, the Shipibo language, and medicine: three pillars recognized as important factions of traditional Shipibo life for Romo. It was a loss of knowledge, loss of intellectual property, and loss of practice and know-how. As with everything else, this decline, however, was rooted in startlingly material losses and structures of political economies, official power and knowledge, which all colluded to make it harder to keep on practicing Shipibo traditions. Below is one such conversation with Romo.

Romo: "The medicine, we are losing so much of it in the native communities, yes we are losing the medicine."

Carolina: "And why do you think that is?"

Romo: "Because … you could say that it is because we see it [ritual healing, traditional medicine], from our own point of view in our culture, as something from the past. Nowadays [*en la actualidad*] the young generations or children have become adapted to the

modern world. They are always interacting with technology, with science. So then, when they see this [plant medicine], for them it is no longer a thing of the present; it is, *oof*, far gone. So I think bad things have happened, but with the present state of things we must embrace the medicine. Because all the others [who used to embrace the medicine] already left. I did a small investigation to see what is going on in the communities with *la actualidad*. Nowadays in the communities, we are losing the majority of [traditional] clothing so rapidly. And it is the same for the medicine. Only because of tourism everyone will say that they know of medicine. But they don't; it is just a hallucination of the medicine."

Romo kept using a phrase to refer to the modern day, the present, the nowadays: *la actualidad*. Although under other circumstances perhaps easily translatable, the way that it was used by Romo denoted more than simply a period in time, or the present period in time. Mention of la actualidad always came up in contexts of dealing with Western hegemonic practices. La actualidad was not a time period void of moral resonance. La actualidad was, more precisely, an ideological current. Bo also used the term "la actualidad" in our conversation about communication and plant medicine, in the moment where he started comparing Western medicine to Shipibo plant medicine. La actualidad had a source, direction, form, and culture attached to it: it was a Eurocentric, Western hegemonic neo-colonial force. With this force affecting their community, the S-O family was caught in a time of negotiating what it means to be Shipibo. How to work towards creating a modernity where Shipibo traditions can thrive, instrumentalizing the benefits that technological and Western scientific advancements can bring without stomping out the practice of Shipibo traditions, was the obstacle that la actualidad

brought to the S-O family, Nueva Betania, and other Shipibo and native communities in the Amazon at large.

I want to highlight, however, that this is by no means the first time that the Shipibo face cross-cultural encounters, or have had to navigate problems of significant dimensions with potentially dire consequences. Modes of self-actualization and the role of communication in Shipibo modes of understanding and knowledge-creation alert us to the formative role of contact and encounter – across groups, species, and beings. What may seem paradoxical, in language, is a Shipibo reality through which contact with what may appear as Others is transformed into modes of what Colpron calls "actualizing reality" (2013, 373) – with these modes of self-actualization being part of the Shipibo tradition. Not only have the Shipibo created knowledge with other-than-human beings such as plants, but their history is marked by highly productive encounters with other cultures and social groups, most notably the Incas. From them the Shipibo get cotton, and the figure of the Inca itself is an important part of Shipibo cosmology (Colpron 2013, 375). These are modes of self-actualization that have proven to be productive for the Shipibo, allowing them to maintain dynamicity, update their practices with that which encounter newly endows them with, in turn allowing the Shipibo community to endure. The Shipibo themselves conceive of past encounters with the Incas as productive, having had "good relationships," as Romo told me, with the Incas who would come down the Ucayali river.

We must thus think of the modern effect of the encounter of the Shipibo with a Western tradition not as some form of 'first contact.' Yet, this in turn does not diminish the magnitude of the problem that the Shipibo face nowadays with la actualidad. It is, moreover, a call to commend their dynamicity and adaptive prowess. But these have all

come at extremely high costs, and their traditional lifestyles have been uprooted time and time again; lives have been lost by the thousand; and ghosts of suffering still linger in physical and social structures surrounding the Shipibos. To these are now being added a dying environment, growing extractive markets, an overbearing official Eurocentric education that, even when mediocre at best in its quality[54], displaces traditional knowledge that has been for generations key to surviving in the Peruvian Amazon; along with many others. For all the flexibility, dynamicity and resilience that a community might have in the world, I am afraid, together with Romo, Don P, Bo, and so many others, that the point at which it is all too much is all too near.

❖ ❖ ❖

Romo's observations about the effects of la actualidad carry with them a strong awareness of the process through which Nueva Betania has become an anachronistic space. The notion of anachronistic space is one that permeated imaginaries of nature in the Amazon for the first white explorers, settlers and *caucheros* (rubber barons) of this region. "According to the colonial version of this trope, imperial progress across the space of empire is figured as a journey backward in time to an anachronistic moment of prehistory." (McClintock 1995, 40) This is such that "[g]eographical difference across *space* is figured as a historical difference across *time*." (McClintock 1995, 40) As such it is a vision that comes from somewhere else, appropriates and judges. A vision that we saw at the very beginning, even with the Pucallpa woman on the airplane. Nueva Betania was a far away, and together with that, an anachronistic space.

In the discussion with Romo, however, the changes he sees happening in the

[54] Peru is notorious for its bad public education system (see: "PISA 2015: Peru." 2015).

current day with la actualidad are now also ingrained in the new cultural developments of the new generations within the Shipibo themselves, right there in Nueva Betania. The creation of anachronistic space and the creation of anachronistic practices is no longer an imaginary coming from outside, from a cultural "other"; as Romo explains, it is now performed by the newer generations of Shipibos themselves, who disregard plant medicine practices as something that belongs in the past – an anachronistic practice.

From this I realized the importance of the term *shipibizar* (anglicised into "shipibize"), or to make more Shipibo-like. Perhaps cultural relevance, and the carrying-out of traditional practices can no longer rely on cultural significance through blood ties to Shipibo native communities, or simply by virtue of people being of a native Shipibo lineage; but must now rely on techniques, knowledges and symbols – practices – that mark them as Shipibo. In a socionatural and geographic space where many Shipibos by blood have left behind their own traditional practices, it is these practices that come to determine how Shipibo someone or something is. The interesting thing with this is that people not born into Shipibo families by blood can still become very shipibized – and therefore considered even more Shipibo than those born into originally Shipibo families but that reject traditional practices, ways of living, and ways of knowing – among which an important part is plant medicine. Thus, learning plant medicine is a way to become shipibized, as is knowing or the learning of how to do kené designs. To learn the Shipibo language is also to become shipibized, as is learning about their food, ways of dressing, social interactions, and within plant medicine, healing, knowing about plants, and knowing ícaros.

The very dangerous irony in this idea of anachronistic space – be it from within or in the view of someone not original to the community – is that economic and social

inequality in what is considered these remote, economically poor zones, shows first and perhaps strongest than in those more developed countries that are the major forces in globalization, capitalism and neoliberal projects, as well as in colonialist views that create this very idea of the remote and of the anachronistic. It is, however, these spaces judged to be geographically anachronistic – such as Nueva Betania – that are often the first to be negatively affected and displaced by the effects of such globalization. As Nixon explains,

> In our age of expanding and accelerating globalization, this particular imaginative difficulty has been cast primarily in spatial terms, as exemplified by John Berger's pronouncement, famously cited in Edward Soja's *Postmodern Geographies*: 'Prophecy now involves a geographical rather than a historical projection; it is space and not time that hides consequences from us. To prophesy today it is only necessary to know men [and women] as they are throughout the world in all their inequality.' (Soja 1989, 22, cited in Nixon 2013, 45)

For all the backwards displacement in time, places like Nueva Betania are perhaps at the future front of the impacts of modernity or la actualidad; a flipped anachronistic space, a reversed flow of time and effects down the gradient of economic and social inequality (in the globalized economy). This is a storyline that is eerily common to the global south.

4.2 Mapping Diagnostics

53% of Peru's surface is covered by jungle ("*bosque húmedo amazónico*"); between 2001 and 2016, 1,974,209 hectares of jungle were lost, representing a jungle cover loss of 2% (Ministerio del Ambiente 2017b). From 2001 onwards, jungle loss has been increasing. (Ministerio del Ambiente 2017b).

Between 2001 and 2016, Ucayali lost 328,578 hectares (ha) of jungle, amounting to 16.6% of Peru's forest loss (Ministerio del Ambiente 2017b.). 20.4% of Peru's forest loss occurred in the department of San Martín, to the Northwest of Ucayali, while 19.5% of Peru's forest loss occurred in Loreto, the largest department of Peru, in turn located to the North of Ucayali, (Ministerio del Ambiente 2017b).

As of 2016, 89% of Ucayali is covered in jungle, yet it has seen a loss of 3% of its jungle cover from 2001 to 2016, and deforestation has been steadily rising since 2001, having had specially high deforestation years in 2013, reaching 36,793ha destroyed; this is almost three times as much as the 2001 deforestation numbers (Ministerio del Ambiente 2017a.). After 2014, deforestation has decreased slightly to 29,715ha in 2015 and 29,611 in 2016 although this is still much higher than pre-2013 years (Ministerio del Ambiente 2017a.).

Pucallpa and Nueva Betania are located, within Ucayali, in the province of Coronel Portillo. Located towards the North of Ucayali, close to Loreto, the province of Coronel Portillo saw 34.7% of Ucayali's deforestation; the second largest amount, behind the province of Padre Abad, located to the East, which saw 44% of Ucayali's forest loss (Ministerio del Ambiente 2017a.).

In the Coronel Portillo province, most deforestation, according to maps provided (Ministerio del Ambiente 2017a), seems to be occurring along the banks of the Ucayali River and its tributaries, such as the Abujao river, which leads into Brazil – it can be assumed this is due to the accessibility that the rivers provide. Being a traditionally riverside community, we can see how the Shipibo are seeing themselves strongly affected by these deforestation patterns.

In the report titled "EVALUACIÓN AMBIENTAL Y SOCIAL ESTRATEGICA: PLANT DE FESTION AMBIENTAL Y SOCIAL" (Carrasco Valdivieso et al. 2017), large scale plantations and cattle-raising activities were identified as a driver for deforestation and a threat to biodiversity, as a cause of soil erosion, as well as decreasing water quantity and quality through water use for irrigation, runoff from agrochemical compounds (Carrasco Valdivieso et al. 2017, 76). Forest concessions for timber extraction are also identified as an activity driving deforestation, biodiversity loss, decreasing water quality, and contributing to greenhouse gas emissions (from loss of forest cover and carbon release into the atmosphere); it is accompanied by illegal logging (which tends to target valuable tree species and cause harm to the biodiversity that live in them); palm oil extraction, which causes massive biodiversity loss as well as water pollution and water scarcity due to agroindustrial water use and runoff; the building of highways which facilitate access for all other activities; illegal mining, which causes "severe deforestation," "drastic loss of biodiversity (communities, habitats and species)", water scarcity and decrease in water quality due to mercury pollution – among many other activities, (Carrasco Valdivieso et al. 2017, 76-77). The ones that I have highlighted are the ones that most closely affect the area around Nueva Betania as experienced by my interlocutors.

In the case of large-scale illegal agriculture, the patterns are easily identifiable as compared to small-scale (usually subsistence) agriculture due to the long perfectly straight lines carved into the forest by machinery, easily identifiable through satellite monitoring, such as the ones seen on MAAP:69 (López 2017). Patterns like these have been recently found, sprouting in the span of only 4 months (between June 2017 and September 2017); and this "deforestation is only 2km away from the Imíria Regional Conservation Area"

(Novoa and Finer 2017), which in turn is located about 15km south of the Masisea district and some 38km South from Nueva Betania (my own measurements on Google Maps).

The MAAP (Monitoring of the Andean Amazon Project) has also identified the expansion of large-scale Oil Palm plantations (Finer and Novoa 2015; Finer, Cruz, and Novoa 2016). In Ucayali, Oil Palm projects to the West of Pucallpa "began in late 2011 and, as of April 2015, now cover over 12,200 hectares (ha)"; out of these, "9,400ha came at the expense of primary forest and 2,350 ha from secondary forest." (Finer and Novoa 2015) These oil palm projects were operated by the company Plantaciones de Pucallpa (Finer, Cruz, and Novoa 2016).

Many of the areas around Nueva Betania, towards the border with Brazil, are occupied by Forestry Concessions, and then by the Sierra del Divisor (now a National Reserve) (Novoa and Finer 2015) As of 2014, illegal gold mining, illegal logging, and presumed illegal coca plantations – all driving deforestation – were taking place within the area of the Sierra del Divisor, North of Pucallpa and Nueva Betania (Novoa and Finer 2015).

4.3 Neo-colonial Myths, Environmental Justice: Making and un-Making of the Liveable

One of the reasons that Western imperialist, colonialist and neo-colonialist forces often go unnoticed is their passing as some sort of objective reality or worldly truth, a hegemonic system that understands the world and validates, or not, other sociocultural systems and understandings of the world according to how they stack up to its own. In its self-portraiture as an objective science, Western world-making hides its own underlying

infrastructure: the history of subjugation that brought it to become hegemonic; and its own system of world-making and world-understanding: its own imaginaries of the world. As Ghosh puts it, "[t]he 'everyday political philosophy of the nineteenth century' is, as Keynes understood very well, an enchantment just as powerful as any dythrambic mythology. And it is perhaps even harder to disavow because it comes disguised as a truthful description of the world; as fact, not fantasy." (2017, 138)

The West is thus but another system of experiencing and understanding the world, albeit one that presents itself as the ultimate, perhaps only valid system, through the framework outlined above; in addition to which it enforced its superiority through militarized and often violent struggle. With Western expansion, empire and colonialism – and now neo-colonialism – rests also the myth of the Western golden standard lifestyle. I say it is a myth because it is something presented as desirable *for all*, to be strived towards *by all* – when this not only causes struggles for many (while these struggles are disguised as poverty by people striving towards a better life seemingly simply out of their own volition to escape their poverty [brought on by whom – themselves? Sometimes it is simply accepted as, somehow, having always been there – or becoming a reality for these people as they escape their lives in provincial, or Peruvian provinces, and come to live in Pucallpa or Lima, where they must Westernize – a reality which almost everyone sees on the daily but very few question the mechanisms behind]) but is actually perhaps, when presented as something to be desired by all and for all, a recipe for disaster. What happens when we begin to consider that, as it seems more likely than not in the conditions of the Anthropocene, "the universalist premise of industrial civilization was a hoax; that a consumerist mode of existence, if adopted by a sufficient number of people, would quickly become unsustainable and would lead, literally, to the devouring of the

planet" (Ghosh 2017, 111-112)? This is not to take away the possibility of "development" from the Shipibo (in the case of the Eurocentric golden-standard lifestyle, of carbon-hungry development) to imitate the structure of Western societies (presumably to attain a similar amount of material wealth), if so desired by them. But it does make us reconsider the often unquestioned or seemingly implied desirability of a Westernized, industrialized society modeled after the European industrialization model. Especially in the Anthropocene, where the geological record itself already shows the marks of unfettered extractivism and a carbon economy, it is time to re-think modernity and realize that there are many other ways to be modern – ones that have existed all along but have been mainly ghosted in the hegemonic discourse. Such is the case of the Shipibos; and what is more, this is not some sort of punitive, sacrificial other-modernity for many of these people, but would be a final recognition of the systems of being with the world that they have been advocating for a long time. It is time for the rest of the world to re-learn what modernity actually looks like.

The need to re-think hegemonic notions of modernity and so-called development (with the notion that it carries some sort of social benefit with it) are not purely theoretical or residing within discourse. For the Shipibo community, the impact of neo-colonialism has affected their very material resources – the natural resources that surround them – as well as the fabric of their sociocultural makeup and their personal lives, aspects which come to be almost inseparable for the Shipibo. Logging companies deplete the forest, together with large-scale monocropping activities. If not illegal activities, lands are often bought off communities for such activities, as happened a number of years back in Nueva Betania, towards the earlier days of the community, where a logging company paid the community members to be allowed to perform logging activities, leaving a deep scar in

the middle of the community (Sinuiri 2011), and also making it harder for the community to now live off the natural resources, further thrusting them into industrialization and market economies as they are forced to migrate to fringe communities or cities such as Pucallpa and Lima to look for work[55] ("Our Alliance" n.d.). As Shipibo territories become less productive and their Shipibo lifestyle cannot be properly supported by the lack of material resources caused by extractivist activities (either in-situ such as logging, or flowing activities such as mining), a "mindset of scarcity and individuality - in contrast to 'la economia de la abundancia' (the 'economy of abundance')" sets in ("Our Alliance" n.d.) The reality is one where extractivist neocolonial "modernity" (la actualidad) asserts itself as some sort of socioeconomic material progress, when it actually creates spaces of inseparable material and cultural loss for the Shipibo. All the while, the Shipibo are simply framed as a static cultural group, protectors of the forest ("Shipibo Konibo (Peru): Historia, avances y perspectivas hacia el futuro del pueblo indígena Shipibo Konibo" 2003) – even primitive due to imaginaries of indigeneity and the aforementioned impossibility of the hegemonic mind to conceive of another type of modernity and dynamicity – and their lifestyle and cultural loss are made to be simply an externality to the activities of logging and mining companies operating in the Amazon, greatly oversimplifying the deeply structurally violent mechanisms at work. This is a reality that many Shipibo themselves understand, and so they fight for the greater hegemonic political and sociocultural sphere to understand not simply the possibility of a different modernity, but their own desire for it and the greater need for it. It is prejudices, and Western hegemonic imaginaries of indigeneity that do not allow us to see the value in this

[55] "These urban settlements are rife with challenges such as child sexual abuse, predation, and exploitation, drug abuse, gangs and violence, pollution, illness, discrimination, and accelerated degradation of cultural identity." ("Our Alliance" n.d.)

modernity. We need to decolonize possibilities of modernity, especially when they promise sustainable biological and cultural life, and are local and desired by the people who will be living this life. Modernity for the Shipibo does not have to look like la actualidad.

4.4 Non-Binary Modernities: Knowing More, not Knowing Better[56].

To thrive as a Shipibo in Nueva Betania – or more generally, to thrive as a Shipibo anywhere – asks to move beyond a binary vision of systems of living, knowing, and doing in the world. With la actualidad, Shipibos seek not to turn away the access to more knowledge, technology, life-saving medicine, access to hygienic resources, etc., that the West might provide, but instead seek to negotiate how they fit within a still very Shipibo lifestyle, in order to revitalize their culture. To live in the jungle sustainably, however, and to carry on their Shipibo practices, they need traditional knowledge. This knowledge in turn needs to be transmitted to younger generations: in the case of plant medicine, teaching the younger generations how to carry out plant diets so that they themselves can keep on creating traditional medicinal knowledge.

Peru is a country notoriously lacking in its educational system, and its education outcomes show this reality ("PISA 2015: Peru" 2015). Peru spent only 3.979% of its GDP on education in 2015, up from 2.664% in 2011 ("Government Expenditure on Education, Total (% of GDP)" 2018), and, moreover, most schools lack bilingual education (only teaching in Spanish). Shipibo is not taught in schools, which contributes to the loss of the Shipibo language. Learning about the Shipibo community is not pushed,

[56] I have borrowed this phrase from Cadena (2015, Preface.)

as the education is purely 'official,' not tailored to their specific region. We begin to see how,

> Since the time of the republic, traditional education has been subordinated to official education, whose programs do not correspond to the sociocultural characteristics of the Shipibo […]. The negative results of this system are evident. To them are then summed the economic exploitation and social discrimination that we indigenous people suffer in hegemonic societies, where we are considered inferior, and where, at some point, we were considered an obstacle for national development by hegemonic ideologies. ("Shipibo Konibo (Peru): Historia, avances y perspectivas hacia el futuro del pueblo indígena Shipibo" 2003; my own translation)

The colonial nature of Peruvian society pervades, with official Spanish education being the norm, pushing national agendas that, as the above quote explains, are not attuned to the local cultural systems. Beyond making education less effective, it causes the Shipibo language to be forgotten, and traditional lifestyles and techniques to be relegated to a secondary status, disavowing them not only theoretically but practically as they are not included in school curricula and as such, much less likely to be learned about and practiced on the daily by Shipibos. The neo-colonial rings heavy in this educational system; Shipibo knowledge is disavowed and de-legitimized, and this de-legitimization is then embodied often as sociocultural racism and discrimination against Shipibo people themselves and the type of knowledge they produce and live with. Effectively, to not keep on teaching Shipibo traditional knowledge (which, as we have seen, is always dynamic in its history and practice) is to in fact bring about a self-fulfilling prophecy, where a colonial and neo-colonial imaginary of Shipibo as backwards and not belonging within an official education (and thus its non-inclusion in school programs) stops these practices from being practiced by the younger generations, truly rendering them into the realm of older

generations. This ends up creating out of Shipibo tradition an anachronistic practice, while never truly grasping what is being lost in this process of Western "modernization."

While the official education system is for sure partly to blame, the younger generations themselves are often alluded to – portrayed as the ones no longer practicing traditional lifestyles, being quick to adopt Western technologies and quick to forget their Shipibo language and traditions. However, more than anguish towards them, from Bo, Romo and Don P I felt grief and a sense of loss; they understood that the present situation was a form of structural and slow violence[57]. It was la actualidad as a system and ideological current that they seemed always angry and sad at, not the young ones themselves. Even if on the surface an intergenerational issue, Don P thought it wiser than to simply blame younger generations; that the older generations must not harbor animosity towards the younger ones, but help them out in their endeavors (Sinuiri 2011) reconnecting older and younger generations to hopefully keep a sense of community going and generating a spark of interest in the younger people towards what the older Shipibos practice and live like.

And sparks of hope, from within communities and through tactful alliances and programs, seem to be flying; there is a growing movement, from within the Shipibo community and also supported by other cultural alliances (such as Alianza Arkana), to expose these systems of structural and slow violence, and support a thankfully "growing youth movement to revitalize cultural identity." ("Our Alliance" n.d.)

A revitalization movement within the Shipibo does not run contrary to either adoption of technology, Western medical techniques, or continuance of Shipibo tradition;

[57] Official education not tailored towards Shipibo communities was a problem; so was the destruction of the environment, which in turn made it even harder to live off nature and to connect with it as older generations were able to do; this vicious cycle will be explained later in the chapter.

instead, it seeks to negotiate the place of both traditional Shipibo knowledge together with Western technologies in Shipibo culture so as to made the Shipibo lifestyle in communities such as Nueva Betania a more productive and healthier one, as viewed by the Shipibos themselves. This positionality of Western technologies, when correctly integrated and used, being helpful to the Shipibo instead of detrimental to it (so basically used in non-colonial or non-imperialist ways) already has some history within the sphere of healing and medicine within not only the Shipibo, but other traditional healers across Peru. Romo and Don P knew that, above all, they had to be responsible healers. I asked Romo what would happen if somebody, say, broke an arm or had an emergency that Don P, himself or Bo could not heal. Romo told me that with bones, they could do something about it, often as a first measure of intervention. But if people had emergencies they could not cure, or that needed other kind of attention, then people would of course be sent to the hospital in Pucallpa. Romo and Bo knew about Western medicine; Bo had actually worked at medical posts for some years, led to that position through his interest in medicine more widely, even if presently he dedicated himself more to traditional Shipibo plant medicine. As such they had not only learned about the differences between Western medicine and traditional Shipibo plant medicine, but also knew when one or the other could or could not help. As Cadena tells in her story with Nazario Turpo, a shaman from Cusco:

> Nazario was aware (indeed!) that, depending on the circumstances, many knowledges, things, and practices were more effective than what he knew and did. Once I asked him why he was not able to cure José Hernán, his grandson, who was suffering from stomachaches. He looked at me, and with a you've-got-to-be-kidding-me smile said, because up here I do not have antibiotics. But learning, in this case about antibiotics, did not replace Nazario's healing practices; rather, it extended his knowledge: knowing about antibiotics meant to know more, not to know better. (Cadena 2015, Preface)

As with Nazario, Romo, Bo, and Don P's plant healing knowledge did not diminish with their awareness of and knowledge about Western medicine, but indeed complemented it so that they could refer to it whenever it was necessary. Romo very well understood that to know more about the non-Shipibo world did not hinder his knowledge, understanding and appreciation of Shipibo plant medicine, but instead made him "know more, not know better." (Cadena 2015, Preface) Western and Shipibo medical knowledge may not entirely overlap, but they were not exclusive from each other. Their coexistence did not relegate Shipibo medicine to a secondary status; to continue this believe is to perpetuate a colonial imaginary where native healing is some sort of primitive type of science or medicine, not its own system and science designed to tackle its own set of problems. As we saw, this traditional healing knowledge also encompasses not only being able to maintain a body healthy; but is part of a system of keeping a socionatural place, such as is Nueva Betania, livable to the Shipibos and to the other non-human beings that make up the nature of the Amazon jungle.

4.5 Radical Displacement

Notions of displacement are common for the Global South – and it has become increasingly so due to environmental destruction. This environmental destruction not only affects at the site where such destruction could be pinpointed as being initially enacted – such as would be deforestation of areas of the Amazon by illegal loggers or corporations, perhaps within native communities' territories - but has wide-ranging, perhaps global effects. As previously mentioned, however, these effects are of most

severity often in areas of vulnerable populations – the economically less powerful, the socially and politically ghosted. We often associate environmental destruction, and "environmental refugees" with movement from one place to a different one – environmental displacement. Although such lateral displacement – moving from one area to a different one – is very well present in the history of the Shipibo, for example having moved from Ucayali to Native Communities further into the jungle as is Nueva Betania due to industrialization of the city, or leaving their family units to form native communities after genocidal Rubber Boom operations, the displacement that Shipibo residents of Nueva Betania experience today, and most especially those who practice ritual healing derived from plant knowledges, is perhaps most similar to the idea of displacement that Rob Nixon proposes in his book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2013). In his work, Nixon proposes, "a more radical notion of displacement, one that, instead of referring solely to the movement of people from their places of belonging, refers rather to the loss of the land and resources beneath them, a loss that leaves communities stranded in a place stripped of the very characteristics that made it inhabitable." (2013, 19)

As Romo mentioned, within the world of traditional Shipibo practices, and focusing on Shipibo plant medicine, this form of displacement runs strong, slowly violent[58], and ever-increasing. What this displacement looks like in the case of the Shipibo, and Shipibo plant medicine, is varied.

Degraded land due to monocropping yields less; and erratic flooding and dry seasons makes it harder to have a reliable source of food, such as plantains, which easily rot during intense floods in the rainy season, an occurrence that threatened Nueva

[58] In reference to Nixon's (2013) concept of "slow violence."

Betania back in 2011. Deforestation and logging also clear the jungle – and even though, to the outsider's eye, trees are still to be seen, this is not the dense jungle it used to be before logging operations took place in the area. As Romo and Don P told me, you now have to walk about 5 or 6 hours into the jungle in order to get quality palm leaves and wood for making Shipibo houses, and similarly if hunters wish to find prey to hunt for meat. The river, more polluted and disturbed (although not to the same extent as the Amazon river near Iquitos, according to Romo), still has fish, but never to the same extent that it used to. Men still focus on fishing, but the yields are lower; thus, coupled with the difficulty of finding species to hunt for food, meat consumption has declined in Nueva Betania (Laurent 2008). "[A]bsorption into the market economy" has also meant the availability of "inexpensive" yet "low quality, processed foods" instead of Shipibo staples, leading to "inadequate nutrition and consequent poor health." ("Our Alliance" n.d.) Shipibos, suffering this loss of natural resources previously available to them, seek better lives and move to cities such as Pucallpa or even Lima, on the coast, where they in turn suffer from poverty, racism, and discrimination ("Our Alliance" n.d.).

To destroy the jungle, its ecologies, life forms, geological and physical processes – through deforestation, pollution, and the general hyperobject of environmental destruction and climate change – is to kill an animate jungle, and with it, a spirit world. It is to kill persons; perhaps we could call it homicide. To lose the jungle is also to lose medicinal plants. This entails a physical inability to use plants as medicine, as well as an inability to come together with them in order to keep on producing healing knowledge, as in the plant diets. Particularly for the Shipibo, to kill off other vegetation, animals and what we call geographical features (such as through pollution of rivers) is to make do with where spirits are found, so that they cannot be called in by Onanya and Meraya when

they need them to operate on patients and heal. Displacement thus occurs at a spiritual level, as the spirit world is made inaccessible (by the destruction of the physical world) or at the very least driven away to places less impacted by environmental destruction. Culturally, the modes of Shipibo knowledge-making are no longer possible due to the loss of plants needed for plant diets and healing – and the missing spiritual world that guides traditional plant healing. Without a sound environment, without these plants and their knowledge-making processes in unity with the people that practice diets and plant healing with them – a way of life and socionatural space itself becomes uninhabitable. This "threat of displacement without moving" is very literally "a threat that entails being simultaneously immobilized and moved out of one's living knowledge as one's place loses its life-sustaining features." (Nixon 2013, 19)

The threat of environmental destruction is also spread across large distances, with long-range effects. The physical destruction of a local jungle is not necessary for the effects of perhaps slower, less immediate forms of environmental destruction to be felt. As an artisan Shipibo woman in Lima told me: deforestation and pollution angers the anaconda (the river and rains spirit), so the anaconda takes the rain and fish with them somewhere else. This is quite literally, displacement of the type that Nixon (2013, 19) talks about. As the anaconda takes fish and rain elsewhere, that river is made un-inhabited, and as such, its water and banks become uninhabitable by communities and other beings that rely on fish for their own life-sustaining processes.

Extractivist activities and environmental destruction make the socionatural landscape of Nueva Betania unlivable. The lack of continuation of traditional knowledge is not 'simply' a desire to keep a culture going as an object, as if frozen in time and space. This traditional knowledge speaks of relationships with the natural world and thus how to

live a productive life off these natural resources yet doing so sustainably, which the Shipibo have managed to do for hundreds of years since their settling in Ucayali (and this un-livability does not really have to do with growing numbers, as the Shipibo are now less than before the Rubber Boom and do not own the companies that carry out the logging, mining, monocropping, etc.). To lose traditional knowledge is thus a vicious cycle of decline, where neo-colonial and neoliberal forces both degrade traditional knowledge and the environment, and this cultural knowledge degradation in turn leads to degradation of the environment (as techniques for sustainable living are lost), which in turn makes it less likely that Shipibos practice traditional living techniques that rely on the physical existence of a jungle, and so on. More and more Shipibos, beyond those benefiting from tourism or managing to make a living in still not entirely degraded communities such as Nueva Betania, are thrust into market economies and impoverished (as was previously explained to happen). Sadly, at the same time, hegemonic histories and power structures – the same ones committing these simultaneous, inseparable social and environmental injustices, erase the underlying infrastructure of social injustice that acts upon the Shipibo and the Peruvian Amazon.

4.6 Uprooted: Zombie Ayahuasca

Ayahuasca seems to be gaining an afterlife in its globalized flows, as the brew becomes better known and more sought-after for various reasons, most of them decided by those who seek it. But it is perhaps an uprooted afterlife. It is often its liquid product that flows – in multiple ways, drinkable into bodies and across channels of commerce – and not the plant itself, leaving behind significances and consumerist extractivism in its

growing grounds. These flows are of an already consumable product, often labeled as hair dye to ride market flows that would be otherwise hostile to its hallucinogenic and therapeutic components, and often given by people labeling themselves shamans not because they have a spiritual connection and understanding of the plant world, but because they have learned to exploit the plants, brew, and commercial channels being created in the quickening globalization of ayahuasca.

It is perhaps a name that also flows in the taking of ayahuasca – a name not local to the places where most of this brew, and its inseparable plants oni and cáhua grow and live and are used to prepare the ayahuasca. The local name is oni, but it will most never be heard called oni instead of ayahuasca in the global sphere; this is overwritten by the need to identify a product that has been turned the same, commodified, uprooted and replicated without meaning, by its globalizing consumption and both preemptive and following imaginations. It is ayahuasca The Commodity. Not oni, which has knowledge and knowledge-creating capabilities, and in turn is knowledge itself; but a Zombie Ayahuasca, born out of the environmentalism of the poor, "frequently catalyzed by resource imperialism inflicted on the global South to maintain the unsustainable consumer appetites of rich-country citizens and, increasingly of the urban middle class in the global South itself." (Nixon 2013, 22) To me, Zombie Ayahuasca exudes deadliness. It smells of extractivism and death in those places it originates and is imperative for sustaining a culture, lifestyle and life itself. It works together with deforestation and the practices of colonialism. In its preparation by under-trained healers – or those without training at all – the brew can also prove deadly to whoever happens to drink it. To be clear, I am not against the growing notoriety of ayahuasca and plant healing; I actually find it very notorious, and positive, that such healing methods are being recognized for

their effectiveness across national and international borders. However, the way that it is often used in global markets – and the techniques behind it, from its preparation, to the intention of its taking, to the environmental management practices behind how it is extracted and why – make all the difference. Zombie Ayahuasca, like Romo said, is but a commodity, a fake image with no basis: "a hallucination of the medicine."

Conclusion

A Garden for the Wealthy

Coming back to Lima, after my stay in Nueva Betania, to the upper-class neighborhood of San Isidro, I saw all around me a garden "exotically exempt from human need… […] it belongs […] to the wealthy, to those at liberty to treat the earth as an aesthetic canvas." (Dangarembga1988, 58, cited in Nixon 2013, 27-28) In Lima, originally a desert (except more closely to the Rimac River, the original construction site of the city), plants tell a story of economic affluence. Beyond their more universal status as a symbol of wellbeing – purity, cleanliness, and vitality – in Lima they symbolize access to economic resources, access to water, and luxury.

I knew this was an exercise in comparison – or a view brought into being by having recently been in "con la planta" (with the plant) in Amazonian Nueva Betania. I allowed myself the observation and the insights that followed. Plants in the city, especially in wealthier areas, are merely decorative, chosen primarily for their aesthetic effects. In Rao Shobo they were chosen for their usefulness. In upper-class Lima houses, plants would often be lush and require a great deal of water, a resource that not all have abundant access to. On the streets, the more limited government budget (compared to private budgets) meant that the municipality would have to choose those that could live without so many resources. Flowers in the parks of San Isidro and Miraflores are changed every couple of weeks or months, maintaining an illusion of vibrancy, of modernity. I do not know where the withered flowers go to die.

Our connection to these urban flowers is just like the name of the district they adorn[59]: our gaze lands upon them, often quickly, asking for a certain beauty, a flash of immediate color out of them. These flowers are trends, they are easily replaceable; they

[59] Miraflores, a name in Spanish, can be roughly translated into English as "looking at flowers."

are the need of a unidimensional green gentrification. I doubt that many people are in dialogue with them; their flash-lives, their continuous turnaround the moment they stop fulfilling their purely aesthetic duty, may make this even harder. We have fallen in love with the idea of plants and flowers but have little idea of the systems underneath. An easy life and a promise of replaceability perhaps make us less likely to inquire about them.

Keeping Doors Open

"There are some of us who understand," Bo tells me, towards the end of an hour-long conversation. "But for the other Shipibos, it's like saying that this knowledge does not even exist. It is as if they only had state education." Bo found this simpler official, non-Shipibo education to be lacking. You could also then go to *la oniversidad* – a portmanteau of oni (ayahuasca, knowledge) and *universidad* (university). He spoke of an education beyond, with the plants, giving his people a greater understanding of the world they lived in.

"This generation thinks that Shipibos are born Shipibo and that's the end of it. They don't know the deeper parts of Shipibo life – how did they use to live? Where did they come from? Where were they born, out of what?," Bo continues. "Today, Shipibos think that I am born Shipibo and that is enough. So then when we want to understand ourselves, we suddenly find that we don't know how. If I die, the children will never know, they will never have understanding. From here into 2020, 2021, 2022… I don't know what will be left from the Shipibos." He paused. "There might be results for others." Bo's sense of loss is something immediate; it is not in the far future. It is happening – and the future is creeping in fast. As I write this we are in the year 2018; and

2020, 2021, or even 2022 seem very close. For Bo and other Shipibo, the environmental, human, and cultural crisis has collapsed geological time; in Shipibo environmentalism, slow violence, environmental violence, and systemic violence, are all direct, sharp and immediate. With plants, they live at the forefront of our times.

"Ayahuasca is like a door," Bo states as he draws with a stick on the dry earth. It is a door, a portal to a world of plants, healing, and medicine. From there Shipibos can see how things were, how they are now, what they may be, within oneself and somewhere else. From the plant they gleam answers. If there is no ayahuasca, how were they going to access the world of medicinal plants? How were they going to communicate with the other beings in the jungle, and build a future?

❖ ❖ ❖



Figure 9: Cross-section of a harvested ayahuasca vine, before it was used to make the ayahuasca brew.

LD, a Society & Environment PhD candidate at UC Berkley, and MC, PhD candidate for Ethnobotany at the University of Hawaii, are carrying out field research in Ucayali, systematically documenting the growth of ayahuasca in the wild, near Shipibo communities that depend on it. They have been doing this for two years now. Although still ongoing, their research suggests that the ayahuasca vine proliferates in the forest quite easily if strings of the vine are replanted into the soil after harvesting. Some of them, falling to the ground after part of the vine is cut off, spring into a life of their own, propagating. I mentioned this to Romo while at Nueva Betania and asked if the family harvested ayahuasca responsibly. He said yes; they understood its importance too well to do otherwise. However, ayahuasca tourism was changing the panorama; people who offered ayahuasca ceremonies for tourists at a large scale, simply as a lucrative activity, would harvest ayahuasca without any concern for replanting. The S-O family replanted the twigs and strings of the vine that did not end up getting used, yet for many others this responsible practice had not even crossed their mind. As such, plant medicine, availability of plant spirits, and materials to live off the jungle, are increasingly threatened by habitat destruction. Ayahuasca itself seems to be in peril due to tourist-led extractivism and the lack of education about its sustainable use.

❖ ❖ ❖

Some years back, Doña A, Bo's mother, had suffered an accident and tragically broken her back. In the hospital, Doña A, already an elderly woman, laid almost lifeless for days and days. Miraculously, Doña A recovered. For Bo, Doña A had come back from the dead. Her back still suffered, making it hard for her to walk around uneven

ground. So, during the worst parts of the rainy season, she had to leave Nueva Betania and live with extended family in Pucallpa.

Looking beyond me, up towards the trees behind, Bo tells me: "After my mother's death, I heard a voice." Bo sang, imitating the voice he had heard. "It was a voice from heaven. I did not see a god, but I heard a godly voice, like thunder. There is no death, no illness in heaven; there is only life. The eternal fire is inside of us, not in heaven or hell like other religions say. Our negative things are not filling up hell; they are filling up this world. Those are the eternal fires." In these times of a boiling Earth, Bo's words stand eerily prophetic.

Environmental Justice, Social Justice

As we saw throughout this thesis, for all the spirited and immaterial side to Shipibo plant healing, Shipibo ritual healing and lifestyles are inseparably bound to the material world; and as such, they are highly vulnerable to effects of environmental degradation and extractivism. The Shipibo are strongly aware of humanity's material constraints. These are constraints that bind us to the "natural" world – and even if we may not see it as immediately in other societies or cultures (like Europe or the West, or even in Lima) as we do among the Shipibo, this binding to the natural world is inescapable. Yet imaginaries of a human that has escaped nature, overcome it, threaten to make us forget our ties to the natural and material world. Indeed,

> Over the last few decades, the arc of the Great Acceleration […] has also reinforced the mind-body dualism to the point of producing the illusion, so powerfully propagated in cyberspace, that human beings have freed themselves from their material circumstances to the point where they have become floating personalities 'decoupled from a body.' The cumulative effect is the extinction of exactly those forms of traditional knowledge,

> material skills, art, and ties of community that might provide succor to vast numbers of people around the world – and especially to those who are still bound to the land – as the impacts intensify. (Ghosh 2017, 161)

If a Eurocentric modernity is not the way to go for all – and we must accept that, for the best, it may as well not be (and many Shipibos have expressed that they do not desire to take this Western lifestyle as currently imposed on them) – we must understand the importance of keeping human-nonhuman local knowledge alive, especially, as Ghosh mentions, for those "still bound to the land" (2017, 161), as the Shipibo are, by culture and by choice in looking not for a dystopian version of prosperity.

Ultimately, social wellbeing for the Shipibo cannot be decoupled from environmental wellbeing. I dare say that for many communities in Peru and around the Global South environmental justice cannot be decoupled from social justice. My native country should know this intimately. The effects of El Niño in recent years have laid bare the structures of environmental and social violence that endanger the poor, the indigenous, those who most depend on the land and still live closest to it. 2017 was an especially intense El Niño in Peru, generating 222 *huaicos* that affected mostly the regions of Lima, Áncash, La Libertad, Ica, and Huancavelica ("COEN: provincias de Lima registraron 222 huaicos de un total de 362 en Perú" 2017) In the coast alone, 106 people died because of El Niño in 2017; and the figure escalates up to 961,113 affected, within which 156,420 are non-mortal victims; 210,859 are the number of homes affected or destroyed (EC Redacción 2017) It is always the poorest that are affected first; those who live close to the rivers for the growing of crops, those who establish their households in geographically unsafe areas no one else would claim, those whose houses will collapse under the rain and the rushing waters, whose cows will be washed away, and whose

means of life, already vulnerable, become ephemeral at the mercy of this localized dumping of global warming effects. Under our current political economic system and in the face of global warming, inequality gaps in environmental safety seem to be the next significant delineation between the extremely rich and the poorest.

In many places in the Global South, politics often breach the subjects of social wellbeing and social development. Poverty is often sought to be reduced through plans of economic development and industrialization, anchored on the imaginaries of a trickle-down economy. Although this might work for certain areas and certain people – as we have already mentioned, a Western lifestyle ideal is very much not the answer for all. In political talks that couple social wellbeing simply with economic advancement, what is generally overlooked is the fact that poverty is created and often perpetuated through the systematic environmental effects that accompany carbon-hungry development. As William Finnegan writes, "[e]ven economic growth, which is regarded nearly universally as an overall social good, is not necessarily so. There is growth so unequal that it heightens social conflict and increases repression. There is growth so environmentally destructive that it detracts, in sum, from a community's quality of life." (2003, 48) Environmental issues, especially in their intersection with social issues, cannot be of secondary concern. Time and time again, environmental hazards have proven that this is so: *huaicos*[60] in Peru; rising sea levels in the Maldives (Nixon 2013, 263-267); floods in Mumbai, tornadoes in Delhi (Ghosh 2017, 11-84). They can no longer be ghosted.

[60] Mudslides caused by torrential rains in the mountains.

On Extinction, Systems, and Individuals

Throughout this thesis, I have commented extensively on the systemic importance of those other-than-human beings we might describe as belonging to nature. Part of their importance lies in the function they carry out: in the case of the Shipibos, allowing them, in a manifold manner, to live in the jungle (building houses, healing, hunting, protecting from animals, protecting from narcos, etc.).

An idea that surfaced in looking towards the creation of a new future in the face of climate change and environmental destruction, inspired by Stewart Brand's "Rethinking Extinction," (2015), was that of creating functional analogues for species that were dying out. Brand argues that it is the ecological and systemic function that species carry out which in turn gives them their value as species (2015). Could the creation of functional analogues, animals or machines that take the place of those dwindling species, be the answer to ecological chaos? Bees are dying out: could RoboBees, "autonomous flying microbots" ("Autonomous Flying Microrobots (RoboBees)" 2016), begin to replace them?

Although I was initially spirited by this advancement – and still believe that functional analogues could be of great use in certain cases – I realized that much was left unconsidered in this approach. For sure, we have to consider the systemic and ecological importance of species, yet we cannot also lose sight of the significance of individual species, especially when these are "feeling beings" (as Bo calls them) that coexist with humans. Perhaps we might initially see species as performing purely biological, ecological roles; but this is again an answer that does not consider the voice of the Shipibo, or of the very living agents and actants of the forest whom we are looking to replace with robots or species from far off who, beyond a Western biological look, act, feel, and think nothing

like those who we seek them to replace. With this in mind, there may be some species, like ayahuasca, which may have no functional analogues. The importance of certain types of beings in the world – what we may call biodiversity – is thus huge when approached through an understanding emanating from the Shipibos and their ecologies of knowledge.

Decolonizing the Future: New Modernities in the Anthropocene

From the Shipibos I learned the need to decolonize environmental thought and environmental action. Of prime importance is to shed a Western idea of "modernity" – la actualidad is taking too many people and beings nowhere good. People and beings like the Shipibo and the jungle of Nueva Betania do not lie in any sort of past system of existence or livelihood. They are now at the forefront of the effects of anthropogenic change. It is perhaps the rest of the world that needs to update their imaginaries of the now.

We need to understand also Western processes of being and becoming; that it is not the case that they simply *are*. The illusion of an objective, un-contextualized fact haunts our systems. If we think we are floating in a void, it may be hard to look for a floor to shake off from under our feet. The West has its own invisible landscapes. It cannot keep ghosting the systems that uphold it. In further flip of positions, it is places and their stories, such as Nueva Betania, that start to create its own machine for bringing back into sight those forces of hegemonic history, place, and knowledge-making.

In questioning la actualidad, we decenter this idea of a single modernity. It is ironic that working as we always have, through the exact same systems, is the only valid response to the environmental challenge, when these same systems have led to much of

the degradation of the natural world we see now. Technological solutions are valid and valuable, but they are not the whole solution, nor are they the only one that there should be.

This requires an updating of hegemonic imaginaries of nature and breaking away from a binary system or framework couched on human vs. nature. The Shipibo have been calling for this integrated view of the world for some time now: for a "regime that integrates and considers our human-nature relationship as a whole." ("Shipibo Konibo (Peru): Historia, avances y perspectivas hacia el futuro del pueblo indígena Shipibo Konibo" 2003)

❖ ❖ ❖

As mentioned earlier, the material circumstances of the world are of extreme importance for the Global South and, specifically as we have seen throughout this work, even more the so for groups like the Shipibo. For them, "the cumulative effect [of environmental degradation] is the extinction of exactly those forms of traditional knowledge, material skills, art, and ties of community that might provide succor to vast numbers of people around the world – and especially to those who are still bound to the land – as the impacts intensify." (Ghosh 2017, 161) This is a land important to the world, and also to the Shipibo even more so: it is land but it is also person, actant, partner in making of lives, of the self, and of a community.

The Shipibo, needless to say, do not have it all figured out. I wish not to romanticize their way of life. But technologies that make their lives better – Western interventions – do not have to be colonial or render the Shipibo anachronistic. The Shipibo wish to build a dynamic future, using technologies, better sanitation, healthcare,

among factors, in a way that —understood from an emic perspective— helps revitalize their lives and their culture, setting up productive and lively horizontal relationships with the global flows they have been integrated into. These can be negotiations of life and livelihoods in what was always already understood to be a shared world.

Younger Shipibos are now also getting involved in such revitalization projects, and NGOs like Alianza Arkana that take an emic perspective to Shipibo livelihood and need have been born. Globally and locally, in South America, people and organizations have come to understand that native territories, managed by native people, are often good ways of protecting the rainforest (Veríssimo 2018).

❖ ❖ ❖

I would argue that until now we have failed – the hegemonic we, the Euro-American-centric Western we – to imagine a radically different future. All 'radical' futures – even those that at first sight seem so radically different, so unlikely - are simply apocalyptic, victims to nuclear or environmental Armageddon; or we suddenly find humans abandoning Earth and inhabiting another planet. I would argue that, as the hegemonic 'now' goes, these are in fact simple extensions of the now, by no means radical, by no means different. Perhaps that is why a new system of large-scale being-with-plants, a now or a future of other modes of knowledge and understanding and recognition (and political integration) of those we are with, is more unthinkable (to the modern Western mind) than these landscapes of destruction. We have been rendered unable to comprehend the possibility, viability, and reality of other modes of being. A future of being with plants, a future of a next-system, a future of no apocalypse or nuclear

or environmental meltdown – thus still becomes the truly radical[61] one. A radical future that allows for lively becomings, and with it, new life.

Becomings: Lives Beyond

I hope that, by this point, we can understand the perceived away-ness of Nueva Betania as being an imaginary – as it is of great importance that we do, especially in the Anthropocene, with its uncanny ability to flip and overturn time and space relationships. We start to run into problems when a place is out of mind: when a place seems unreachable, inexistent to the imagination, while other forces (that of pollution, political economies, an expanding market, extractivism) flow into it bafflingly easily. The Anthropocene has dissolved distances while our imaginaries have not kept pace.

Shipibo healers – Onanya, and to a greater extent Meraya – have an incredible closeness to nature and the other-than-human beings that make it up. The way that Shipibos are with plants (more the so within ecologies of ritual healing) makes what is usually the elongated time of environmental degradation not only into an immediate reality. In pushing away places like Nueva Betania we ignore what is already being lived. We cannot keep on stretching geological time that we do not have; we cannot stretch distances that are not there. In the Anthropocene, with its flows of people, markets, pollutions, and now hopefully answers, these distances have all but collapsed. Nueva Betania is full of post-dialectic[62] relationships: a seemingly enchanted land of spirited non-humans that is intensely rooted in what we may call the physical world; a community

[61] With the radical being the unthinkable.
[62] My own term. I want to allude to how the components of these relationships, which could usually be thought of as opposites, are no longer contrary.

imagined as far away but being the first to realize the effects of destruction and suffering at the hands of neo-colonialism, globalizing neoliberalist forces, and the Anthropocene. The Shipibos of Nueva Betania make the un-thinkable, thinkable. In fact, they live it: it was always already a reality.

At the node of these entanglements, was Shipibo plant medicine. It made all the other effects visible, tangible, and brought them into relief. A world constituted in-interaction, the world of Shipibo ritual healing and plant medicine always pointed to something else beyond itself – social humans, other-than-human beings, a thriving or dying nature, economic or market forces, struggles of a modern world in Nueva Betania and beyond it. Around ritual healing was woven an ecology of knowledge, practice, and being-with-plants, where human and other-than-human beings shape and make each other in a sometimes dying, sometimes thriving, yet always present meshwork of lives.

❖ ❖ ❖

I wanted to learn anew. As I understand it, this is also learning from but most importantly learning *with* those other-than-human jungle beings; a view I was delighted overlapped between a new ethnographic and old (yet ongoing) Shipibo tradition. This is a mode of becoming-with that will hopefully reorient the way we understand, and thus interact, with other humans and also other-than-human beings, whose agencies our current hegemonic system of world-viewing has little space for considering, but that exist, in very real terms, beyond the boundaries of Western imaginaries nature. This was perhaps also an unearthing of the hidden (or made to be un-imaginable, un-considerable) biopolitics of the human *and* the other-than-human in the Peruvian Amazon.

From here we can start thinking about what I would like to call the territory of plant biopolitics: a beyond-human biopolitics in an anthropology of becoming. In understanding processes of being with and becoming with plants, we can continue to make "public a nuanced understanding of these fields – always at risk of disappearing" (Biehl and Locke 2010, 317). Within them, anthropologists have an important role, as they "allow for larger structural and institutional processes to become visible and their true effects known." (Biehl and Locke 2010, 317). Plant biopolitics, or other-than-human biopolitics, thus go beyond the simply aesthetic, and can come to affect and disrupt political and hegemonic systems.

❖ ❖ ❖

As I write this thesis, in a historical turn Colombia has designated its Amazon rainforest with the legal status of a person:

> In its ruling, the court recognized Colombia's Amazon as an 'entity subject of rights', which means that the rainforest has been granted the same legal rights as a human being. […] 'The ruling states the importance of protecting the rights of future generations, and even declares the Amazon a subject of rights,' Bustos told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. (Moloney 2018)

I was struck with joy and with hope at this practical and symbolic win. A forest as a person; an idea old and new and creating space for itself in the greater political spheres of a country. Although the larger effects of this political decision are yet to be seen – since the government at "both at the local and national level - along with the environment and agriculture ministries and environmental authorities" still have four months to "come up with action plans […] to combat deforestation in the Amazon" (Moloney 2018) – we are perhaps taking a great step into imagining and enacting a radically different, lively future.

It is possible that we are also seeing the embodiment of a growing need for different types of answers in the increased interest in Shipibo ritual healing. This implies yet another flipping of the anachronistic socionatural space that the Shipibo inhabit in the hegemonic imaginary; their conceptions of nature stand now at the forefront as a model for crafting sustainable relationships with a natural world.

❖ ❖ ❖

This thesis advocates for lives-beyond; lives that exist, yet most often do so beyond the hegemonic systems that cannot fathom to incorporate them into a discourse that decides the fate for all[63]. Lives whose roles, voices and importance might have been ghosted, but which in a twist those same endangering flows and ecologies of the Anthropocene have brought into undeniable view as of undeniable importance.

Shrouded in the cries of a green-tinged dissent are the voices of a benevolent timeless future; a future that is endangered, but, if we listen to it, promises it can be. Being and becoming with plants, we can imagine and create a system both ancient and new (Ghosh 2017, 162); one in which to "grow both young and old […] at once." (Deleuze 1995, 170; 2001, cited in Biehl and Locke 2010, 317).

If we are with the plants, if we become with the plants – what futures could await? It is a world full of persons – human and other-than-human. Hope will be lost only when man becomes truly alone. We must keep on becoming and becoming-with. The story of being with plants, thankfully, remains yet unfinished.

[63] Thankfully decisions like the one in Colombia may start to change this!

Bibliography

"ANI XEATI FILM FESTIVAL." n.d. Shipiboconibo. Accessed April 13, 2018. http://www.shipiboconibo.org/ani-xeati-film-festival.

"Autonomous Flying Microrobots (RoboBees)." 2016. Wyss Institute. August 5, 2016. https://wyss.harvard.edu/technology/autonomous-flying-microrobots-robobees/.

Belaunde, Luisa Elvira. 2009. *Kené: Arte, Ciencia y Tradición En Diseño*. 1. ed. Lima, Perú: Instituto Nacional de Cultura.

Bennett, Jane. 2010. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Kindle Edition. Durham: Duke University Press.

Berger, John. 2007. "Why Look at Animals?" In *The Animals Reader: The Essential Classic and Contemporary Writings*, edited by Linda Kalof and Amy J. Fitzgerald. 251-261. Oxford; New York: Berg.

Biehl, João, and Peter Locke. 2010. "Deleuze and the Anthropology of Becoming." *Current Anthropology* 51 (3): 317–51. https://doi.org/10.1086/651466.

51. https://doi.org/10.1086/651466.

Brand, Stewart. 2015. "Rethinking Extinction." Aeon. April 21, 2015. https://aeon.co/essays/we-are-not-edging-up-to-a-mass-extinction.

Cadena, Marisol de la. 2015. *Earth Beings: Ecologies of Practice across Andean Worlds*. Kindle Edition. The Lewis Henry Morgan Lectures 2011. Durham: Duke University Press.

Caraballo, Leonor, and Matteo Norzi. 2016. *Icaros: A Vision*.

Carrasco Valdivieso, Alfredo, Hans Buttgenback, Michael Kent, Fátima García, Marco Isminio, and Omar Salazar. 2017. "EVALUACIÓN AMBIENTAL Y SOCIAL ESTRATEGICA: PLANT DE FESTION AMBIENTAL Y SOCIAL." Programa de Inversiones en Bosques (PE-L1232 / PE-G1003). Lima, Perú: Ministerio del Ambiente, Inter-American Development Bank.

Caruso, Giuseppe. 2005. *Onanya Shipibo-Conibo*. Ediciones Abyala-Yala. Quito, Ecuador. https://books.google.com/books?id=8VsO22zabTsC&pg=PA3&dq=tanti+rao+planta&source=gbs_selected_pages&cad=3#v=onepage&q=tanti%20rao%20planta&f=false.

Castree, Noel, and Bruce Braun, eds. 2001. *Social Nature: Theory, Practice, and Politics*. Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers.

"COEN: provincias de Lima registraron 222 huaicos de un total de 362 en Perú." 2017. América Noticias. June 1, 2017. http://www.americatv.com.pe/noticias/actualidad/coen-provincias-lima-registraron-222-huaicos-total-362-peru-n278702.

Colpron, Anne-Marie. 2013. "Contact Crisis: Shamanic Explorations of Virtual and Possible Worlds." *Anthropologica* 55 (2): 373–83.

Derrida, Jacques. 1981. "Plato's Pharmacy." In , translated by Barbara Johnson, 61–172. London: The Athlone Press.

EC Redacción. 2017. "COEN: 106 personas han muerto por causa de lluvias y huaicos." El Comercio. April 4, 2017. https://elcomercio.pe/peru/coen-106-personas-han-muerto-causa-lluvias-huaicos-1-412496.

Engels, Friedrich, and Tristram Hunt. 2010. *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*. London; New York: Penguin Classics.

Evans-Pritchard, E.E. 1976. "The Notion of Withcraft Explains Unfortunate Events." In *Withcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande*, 18–32. Oxford University Press.
Finer, M, C Cruz, and S Novoa. 2016. "Confirming Deforestation for Oil Palm by the Company Plantations of Pucallpa. MAAP: 41." MAAP: 41. Monitoring of the Andean Amazon Project. http://maaproject.org/2016/plantations-pucallpa/.
Finer, M, and S Novoa. 2015. "Large-Scale Oil Palm Causes Deforestation of Primary Forest in the Peruvian Amazon (Part 1: Nueva Requena)." MAAP: Image #4. Monitoring of the Andean Amazon Project. http://maaproject.org/2015/image-4-oil-palm-projects-cause-deforestation-of-primary-forest-in-the-peruvian-amazon-part-1-nueva-requena/.
Finnegan, William. 2003. "The Economics of Empire: Notes on the Washington Consensus." *Harper's Magazine*, May 2003.
Foucault, Michel. 1995. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. 2nd Vintage Books ed. New York: Vintage Books.
Frecska, Ede, Petra Bokor, and Michael Winkelman. 2016. "The Therapeutic Potentials of Ayahuasca: Possible Effects against Various Diseases of Civilization." *Frontiers in Pharmacology* 7: 35. https://doi.org/10.3389/fphar.2016.00035.
García, Jaime. 2013. "2013: La situación del narcotráfico en la región Ucayali." Amenazas a la seguridad: El narcotráfico, 13.
Ghosh, Amitav. 2017. *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*.
Greene, Shane. 1998. "The Shaman's Needle: Development, Shamanic Agency, and Intermedicality in Aguaruna Lands, Peru." *American Ethnologist* 25 (4): 634–58.
Haraway, Donna Jeanne. 2008. *When Species Meet*. Posthumanities 3. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
Ingold, Tim. 2011. "Stories Against Classification." In *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*, 156–64. London ; New York: Routledge.
Laurent, Alfred. 2008. "Comida." *Los Shipibos de Betania* (blog). October 26, 2008. https://betaniaperu.wordpress.com/la-comida/.
Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1963. "The Sorcerer and His Magic." In *Structural Anthropology*. New York: Basic Books.
López, Milton. 2017. "Perú: registran nuevos patrones de deforestación en bosques de la Amazonía centro." Mongabay Environmental News. September 27, 2017. https://es.mongabay.com/2017/09/peru-nuevos-patrones-deforestacion-bosques-amazonia-centro/.
Mapbox. n.d. "Map of Peru and Major Cities." https://www.mapbox.com/.
———. n.d. "Map of Pucallpa in Relation to Nueva Betania, along the Ucayali River." Accessed April 14, 2018b. https://www.mapbox.com/.
Marx, Karl, and Jon Elster. 1986. *Karl Marx: A Reader*. Cambridge [Cambridgeshire] ; New York, NY: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge.
McClintock, Anne. 1995. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. New York: Routledge.
McKenna, Dennis J., J.C. Callaway, and Charles S. Grob. 1998. "The Scientific Investigation of Ayahuasca: A Review of Past and Current Research." *The Heffter Review of Psychedelic Research* Volume 1.
McKenna, Terence K., and Dennis J. McKenna. 1993. *The Invisible Landscape: Mind, Hallucinogens, and the I Ching*. 1st HarperCollins ed. San Francisco, Calif.: HarperSanFrancisco.

Ministerio de Cultura, and Viceministro de Interculturalidad. 2017. "BASE DE DATOS DE CENTROS POBLADOS UBICADOS DENTRO DEL ÁMBITO DE LOCALIDADES PERTENECIENTES A PUEBLOS INDÍGENAS DE LA AMAZONÍA Y DE LOS ANDES." Base de Datos de 2017. http://bdpi.cultura.gob.pe/node/103#main-content.

Ministerio del Ambiente. 2017a. "Ucayali Cobertura de Bosques 2016." Programa Nacional de Conservación de Bosques Para La Mirigación Del Cambio Climático. Ministerio del Ambiente.

———. 2017b. "Perú Cobertura de Bosques 2016." Programa Nacional de Conservación de Bosques Para La Mirigación Del Cambio Climático. Ministerio del Ambiente.

Moloney, Anastasia. 2018. "The Amazon Rainforest Now Has the Same Legal Rights as You." World Economic Forum. April 10, 2018. https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/04/colombias-top-court-orders-government-to-protect-amazon-forest-in-landmark-case/.

Nixon, Rob. 2013. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. 1. Harvard Univ. Press paperback ed. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press.

Novoa, S, and M Finer. 2015. "Sierra Del Divisor: Growing Threats Highlight Importance of Creating National Park." MAAP: Image #7. Monitoring of the Andean Amazon Project. http://maaproject.org/2015/06/image-7-sierra-del-divisor/.

———. 2017. "New Alarming Deforestation Patterns in the Central Peruvian Amazon. MAAP: 69." MAAP: 69. http://maaproject.org/2017/alarming-patterns/.

Osório, Flávia de L., Rafael F. Sanches, Ligia R. Macedo, Rafael G. dos Santos, João P. Maia-de-Oliveira, Lauro Wichert-Ana, Draulio B. de Araujo, Jordi Riba, José A. Crippa, and Jaime E. Hallak. 2015. "Antidepressant Effects of a Single Dose of Ayahuasca in Patients with Recurrent Depression: A Preliminary Report." *Revista Brasileira De Psiquiatria (Sao Paulo, Brazil: 1999)* 37 (1): 13–20. https://doi.org/10.1590/1516-4446-2014-1496.

"Our Alliance." n.d. Alianza Arkana. n.d. http://alianzaarkana.org/our-alliance.

"Peru Tourist Arrivals | 1980-2018 | Data | Chart | Calendar | Forecast." 2018. 2018. https://tradingeconomics.com/peru/tourist-arrivals.

"PISA 2015: Peru." 2015. Compare Your Country. 2015. //www.compareyourcountry.org/pisa?lg=en.

"Plant Spirit Healing." 2015. Temple of the Way of Light. May 28, 2015. https://templeofthewayoflight.org/shamanism-ayahuasca/plant-spirit-healing/.

Plowman, Timothy G., Adrian Leuchtmann, Carol Blaney, and Keith Clay. 1990. "Significance of the Fungus Balansia Cyperi Infecting Medicinal Species of Cyperus (Cyperaceae) from Amazonia." *Economic Botany* 44 (4): 452–62. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02859780.

Raffles, Hugh. 2002. *In Amazonia: A Natural History*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.

"Rao Shobo." n.d. http://www.shipiboamazonia.org/.

Ritvo, Harriet. 1987. *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Salazar, Carolina. 2018. "Carolina Salazar Blog 3." Blog Post Entry for ENV357 - Empire of The Ark: The Animal Question in Film, Photography and Popular Culture Class. Princeton University.

Salazar, Carolina A. 2017. "The Commodification of Alternative Medicine, Entheogens and Spirituality in Modern Urban Centers." Junior Independent Work, Princeton, N.J: Princeton University.

Schattenberg, Paul. 2013. "We're Not Bees, If You Please..." *AgriLife Today*, April. https://today.agrilife.org/2013/04/25/not-bees-honey-wasps/.
SERNANP. n.d. "Sierra Del Divisor." Servicion Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas Por El Estado (SERNANP Perú). n.d. http://www.sernanp.gob.pe/sierra-del-divisor.
"Shipibo Konibo (Peru): Historia, avances y perspectivas hacia el futuro del pueblo indígena Shipibo Konibo." 2003. Associazione Peri Popoli Minacciati. http://www.gfbv.it/3dossier/ind-voelker/konibo-es.html.
Sinuiri, Rómulo. 2011. *Rao Jonibo - Hombres Medicina*. https://vimeo.com/30292153.
"Takiwasi." 2018. [Old Takiwasi Webpage]. http://ex.takiwasi.com/.
Taussig, Michael. 1984. "Culture of Terror-Space of Death. Roger Casement's Putumayo Report and the Explanation of Torture." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* Vol. 26, No. 3 (July): 467–97.
———. 2004. *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing*. Nachdr. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.
"Tourism." n.d. Peru Reports. https://perureports.com/tourism/.
Tully, John, ed. 2011. "The Amazon Rubber Boom." In *The Devils Milk*, 65–76. A Social History of Rubber. NYU Press. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qfjqp.9.
Valenzuela, Pilar. 2000. "Major Categories in Shipibo Ethnobiological Taxonomy." *Anthropological Linguistics* 42 (1): 1–36.
Veríssimo, Beto. 2018. "Amazonia Today: Challenges and Opportunities for Conservation and Development." Lecture, Presented by Princeton's Brazil LAB, Co-Aponsored by the Princeton Environmental Institute, the Program in the Latin American Studies, the Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies (PIIRS), the Department of Spanish and Portuguese and the Department of Anthropology. Princeton, N,J, March 29.
"We're Not Bees, If You Please…." 2013. AgriLife Today. April 25, 2013. https://today.agrilife.org/2013/04/25/not-bees-honey-wasps/.
Wise, Mary Ruth, ed. 1993. *Diccionario Shipibo-Castellano*. Serie Lingüística Peruana No.31. Perú.
World Travel and Tourism Council. 2017. "Travel & Tourism: Economic Impact 2017 Peru." World Travel and Tourism Council: Travel & Tourism Economic Impact 2017 - March 2017.

I pledge my honor that this thesis represents my own work in accordance with Princeton University regulations.

Carolina A. Salazar