

**Being Healed:
An Ethnography of Ayahuasca and the Self
at the Temple of the Way of Light, Iquitos, Peru**

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STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

I hereby certify that the work embodied in the thesis is my own work, conducted under normal supervision.

The thesis contains no material which has been accepted, or is being examined, for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University's Digital Repository, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968 and any approved embargo.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the experiences, articulations and meaning-making of a group of people referred to as *pasajeros*: middle class Westerners and people living in Western-style cultures from around the globe, who travel to the Temple of the Way of Light ('the Temple') in the Peruvian Amazon, to explore consciousness and seek healing through ceremonies with Shipibo 'shamans' and the plant medicine, ayahuasca.

In the thesis, I explore the health belief systems of *pasajeros*, examining the syncretic space of the Temple in which Western and Eastern, New Age, biomedical, and shamanic discourses meet and intertwine to create novel sets of health beliefs, practices, and perceptions of the Self. Conceptualised in terms of rites of passage from states of dis-ease to (potentially) optimal wellness, this exploration occurs in the liminal phases of transformation where reimaginings of the Self and the world are hyper-mobilised.

The title of the thesis, *Being Healed*, refers to a series of complex processes that constitute the focus herein. I present experiences from *pasajeros* as they navigate their unique journeys through the process of 'being healed' with ayahuasca and the plant medicines; explore the notions they present of how they ultimately recognise 'being healed' in terms of an endpoint or goal achieved; and present my findings on the remarkably consistent representations of what many *pasajeros* came to understand as the 'true' Self—the embodied experience of their own (human) being, in what they perceive as a healed state: their Being, healed.

The thesis explores the Self as the central locus of experience and meaning-making in an increasingly globalised environment where the boundaries of cultural understandings intertwine with ambiguous boundaries of selfhood to create unprecedented, but surprisingly coherent, representations of health, healing, wellness, and the essential nature of the Self.

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TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1:	The Temple's main <i>maloka</i> and lagoon, Centre 1	16
Figure 2:	Hand-woven <i>chitonti</i> and beaded belt	21
Figure 3:	<i>Maestros</i> dressed for group photo. <i>Maestro</i> Jorge wears a <i>cushma</i>	21
Figure 4:	<i>Maestra</i> Anita on a jungle walk with her pipe, bag & tobacco pouch	23
Figure 5:	<i>Maestro</i> Jorge prepares and ayahuasca brew	25
Figure 6:	Personalising the <i>tambo</i>	34
Figure 7:	Welcome to the Temple of the Way of Light	46
Figure 8:	<i>Motocarros</i> on the streets of Iquitos	47
Figure 9:	Remedies for sale at Iquitos' local marketplace in Belen	49
Figure 10:	<i>Cargueros</i>	52
Figure 11:	A focus on females provided a significant point of difference for the Temple. <i>Maestras</i> Rosa, Maria & Juanita prepared for group photos	55
Figure 12:	Typical lunch at the Temple	74
Figure 13:	Hand-woven and drawn <i>kené</i> patterns, Shipibo markets, Main <i>maloka</i>	80
Figure 14:	A gift to <i>pasajeros</i> : <i>Maestras</i> <i>soplar</i> pieces of ayahuasca with tobacco (<i>mapacho</i>) smoke	82
Figure 15:	<i>Maloka</i> 1 prepared for ceremony	86
Figure 16:	<i>Maestro's</i> ayahuasca, purge bucket and rolls of <i>mapacho</i> cigarettes	87
Figure 17:	<i>Maestras</i> ready to provide floral baths	93
Figure 18:	<i>Maestras</i> and group facilitator prepare <i>vomitivo</i>	94
Figure 19:	Ingredients for a steam bath	95
Figure 20:	<i>Maestra</i> Rosa ready to dispense plant medicines	95
Figure 21:	<i>Maestra</i> applies tar from the stem of her pipe to a skin laceration	96

GLOSSARY

Note: The abbreviations ‘Span.’ and ‘Sh.’ (in brackets), utilised throughout the thesis, indicate translation to or from Spanish or Shipibo, respectively.

- Brujo* (Span.) a practitioner of *brujeria* or ‘witchcraft’.
- Chupar* (Span.) meaning ‘to suck’. A technique used by ayahuasca healers to remove blockages from the patient (see p.83)
- Dieta* (Span.) refers to the food, drink and social restrictions associated with ayahuasca ceremonies as well as the practices undertaken by the Shipibo *oni* as part of their apprenticeship (see pp. 70-6).
- Maestra/o/@* (Span.) meaning ‘master’ or ‘teacher’. This is how the Shipibo healers are referred to at the Temple of the Way of Light. Note: In Spanish, an ‘a’ at the end of a word denotes the feminine version while and ‘o’ denotes the masculine. Where reference is to both females and males, the default is to use ‘o’ for the collective. Because the availability of female healers was relevant to many participants in this research, I have found it necessary to discern at times between the female, male and collective group of healers. I have therefore chosen to use the ending @ when referring to the collective consisting of both sexes: *maestr@s*.
- Maloka* (Span.; also *maloca*). Structure somewhat like a yurt in its footprint; a roundhouse of sorts. Defined in the Merriam-Webster dictionary as ‘a large communal dwelling of some South American Indian peoples.’ It has traditionally been used in some villages as a communal dwelling space and has also been utilised historically as a communal ritual space. At the Temple (and in many other centres where Westerners are now participating in ayahuasca ceremonies), the *maloka* is the ritual space that is used for the purpose of conducting ayahuasca ceremonies. In this context, it is usually raised off the ground and consists of a timber floor and often, but not always, a central pole which supports and elaborate structure of beams in the ceiling over which palm leaves are used for the roof. Where there are walls, they are constructed of timber and may extend from floor to ceiling in sections. Most often, however, they stand

only a short height from the floor with open areas screened with nylon netting. In some cases, the entire space from floor to ceiling is screened (see p. 84 for specific description of how the *maloka* is set up and used for ceremony at the Temple).

- Onanya* (Sh.) meaning ‘one who has knowledge’. Refers to the healers/shamans.
- Onanya Ainbobo* (Sh.) meaning ‘woman with knowledge’ or ‘wise woman’ (I did not hear the masculine alternative used).
- Oni* (Sh.; pron. Ooni) meaning ‘knowledge’. The Shipibo name for ayahuasca.
Oni kobin means ‘cooked/prepared knowledge’ and is an alternate name (although rarely used in the field).
- Soplar* (Span.) meaning ‘to blow’. Used by ayahuasca healers to ‘infuse’ additional medicine into the patient and/or to protect the medicine they have applied (see p. 82).
- Tambo* (Span.) Usually constructed from similar materials to the *maloka*, the *tambo* is a simple sleeping hut, consisting, at the Temple, of one room, an ensuite, and often a small deck.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY	I
ABSTRACT	II
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	III
TABLE OF FIGURES	V
GLOSSARY	VIII
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
Some Notes on Terminology	3
Health Belief Systems & Meaning-Making	4
Exploring the Navigation of Liminality	6
The Changing Face of Resistance & Healing	8
Reformulating the Meaning of Health & Responsibility in the ‘New Age’	11
The Temple of the Way of Light: An Introduction	14
The Shipibo: A Cultural Overview	17
Ayahuasca: A Cultural Construction	24
Dichotomised Western Discourses: The Birth of Ambivalence	27
Indigenous Discourses: Ayahuasca and the Plant Spirits	29
Experiencing Ayahuasca	31
Ayahuasca and Anthropology: Positioning the Thesis	32
Background and Research Methods	33
Data Collection	37
Data Analysis	40
A Phenomenological Focus on the Body, Mind, and Spirit	41
The Researcher: Coming to Terms with Myself as a Location	43
Outline of The Thesis	44
CHAPTER 2:	
FIELDSITE: A TEMPLE IN A JUNGLE NEAR A FRONTIER TOWN	46
Location: Iquitos, Peru	47
Fieldsite: Temple of the Way of Light	50

Origins and Staffing	51
The Dark Side of Amazonian Curandismo and ‘Doing Business’ in Iquitos	53
The Move Toward Shipibo Shamanism	55
The Name	57
The Vision	57
The Non-Government Organisations (NGOs)	61
Alianza Arkana	62
Chaikuni Permaculture Institute	63
In Continuing Development	64
CHAPTER 3:	
<u>WORKING WITH PLANT MEDICINES AT THE TEMPLE</u>	66
<hr/>	
The Ontology of the Shipibo	66
The Plant Dieta	70
Nature’s University	70
Other Applications of the Dieta	74
Techniques of Healing	76
Ikaros	76
Kené	79
Soplar	82
Chupar	83
Ayahuasca at the Temple	84
Description of a Temple Ceremony	84
Complementary Practices & Medicines	93
Floral Bath	93
Vomitivo	94
Steam Bath	95
Massage	95
Consultations and Remedies	95
Mapacho: Jungle Tobacco	96
Introducing a Psychological Focus to Ayahuasca Shamanism	97
Conclusion	99

CHAPTER 4: LIVING THE (WESTERN) SELF	101
Individualising the Western Self	102
Embodying a Self	104
The Body-Mind and Spirit Complex & Ayahuasca	106
Healing the Body and the Body-Mind	108
Boundaries and Barriers of the Self	116
Traversing the Edges of Consciousness	117
The Boundary and the Barrier	119
When Push Comes to Obliteration	123
A Recalcitrant Barrier: The Victim	127
Conclusion	130
CHAPTER 5: LIVING THROUGH THE SELF	133
Our Culture is Broken	133
Dividuality, Partibility, Permeability, Essence	136
Through the Realms of Maestr@s	138
Permeating the ‘Cultured’ Self	141
Clairvoyance	142
Purging For Others	145
Connection with Spirits	151
A Symbiotic Relationship: Nature as a Constituent of Self	157
The Nature of (Human) Nature: The Essential Self	159
Conclusion	163
CHAPTER 6: LIVING HEALED, BEING WELL	166
Transcending Ordinary Consciousness: The Peak Experience	166
Authenticity	170
The Authentic Self in Essence	174
Flow	175
The Body Barrier	177
The Mind Barrier	180
Flow and the Essential Self	184
Gratitude	186
Awe	188
Love	189

Seeking Healing; Looking for Love	190
Living Love with Ayahuasca	191
Love and God	194
Love as Medicine	196
The Loving Healer	198
Conclusion	200
CHAPTER 7: MAKING MEANING OF BEING HEALED	203
Biomedical/Psychological Discourse	204
Shipibo Discourse	205
Western-Eastern Philosophy Discourse	206
‘New Age’ Quantum Physics Discourse	210
New Age, Holistic, Body-Mind Discourses	216
Case Studies: Syncretising Cultures in the New Age of Neo-Shamanism	221
Case Study 1: Seth	221
Case Study 2: Big Matt	225
Case Study 3: Liana	228
Multiplicities and Similarities	231
Conclusion	234
CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION	235
REFERENCES	246
APPENDIX 1: TYPICAL WORKSHOP SCHEDULE	287
APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEWEES	291
APPENDIX 3: MAESTR@S	293