

**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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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.

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