“Los Caminos de la Medicina”: The life of medicinal plants from the forest of Amazonia to the urban markets.

Hernando Alberto Echeverri-Sanchez
UCL
PhD Anthropology

I, Hernando Alberto Echeverri Sanchez confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis

Abstract

This dissertation is a multispecies exploration of the trade of medicinal plants in the Andean-Amazonian region of southern Colombia. It seeks to highlight the complex multi-layered meshworks of relationships that make up folk medicine in the country by following the medicinal plants as main ethnographic subjects. It explores the roles each medicinal plant plays as it is grown, harvested, transformed, exchanged and used by different people. It also highlights a crucial axis in this region, the lowland highland dynamic, since their trade connects lowland indigenous communities to highland Andean healers and markets, facilitating not only a space for material transformation but also spaces of cultural exchange. This study has focused on six representative species: Elaeagia pastoensis L.E. Mora, Maytenus laevis, Brugmansia Sp, Cyperus Sp., Banisteropsis caapi and Ethryxolyum sp. All these plants have essential roles in these trade networks being active agents in the way people perceive their health,the environment, their relationships with others, and their own identity. By using material culture methodology, this study explors the techniques in making, using and exchanging these medicines following the cultural rationales, thinking processes, and cosmological understandings that make them possible. This methodology also facilitates an analysis of the ways that the medicines are continually reimagined and reinterpreted by different people as they travel through the commodity chains, being incorporated into different ways of understanding health and the world.

Impact Statement

This study is an exploration of the trade routes that connect lowland Amazonia with the highland cities of Colombia. It was focused on the trade of medicinal plants and in particular of the plants used by shamans and healers of the Ayahuasca tradition. This study was conducted with a distinct methodological approach that offered a new perspective on this trade. By exploring the movement of these plants through the region and through different cultural concepts of health, ecology and alterity, this dissertation analyses how people perceive difference, how they negotiate the world and build new ideas and notions about disease, medicine and the body. By using this approach this thesis opens the door to a new perspective on this type of trade, allowing for further in-depth analysis of the complex cultural negotiations that happen in folk medicine. This is especially relevant when considering the threats that these medicines are facing as the ecosystems they inhabit are rapidly disappearing. There is an urgency to understand how these medicines are traded, harvested and grown. Not only to show the deeply intertwined relationship between health and the environment but also possible adaptations to the changing landscape.

I believe that this study will be beneficial for my career as it opens the doors to a whole set of practices and methods that will be used in future research. It is only the beginning of a much larger project that not only includes plants but other forms of folk medicine such as zootherapy. This study allows us to understand the overall backdrop of this medicinal practice as well as the interconnected world of folk medicine that unities indigenous people with other groups from all over the world.

For the local community, I believe that this study will allow for further recognition of the implications of ecological degradation, as it highlights the deep interconnectivity between the forest and health. It legitimises indigenous knowledge and foments the use of these ritualised practices in politics and on policymaking. At the same time, it is important to highlight that this dissertation will be continued and is proposed as a much longer commitment with local communities. It will build a network of people who wish to not only

share knowledge but also protect the standing forest of the area and the medicines that grow in them.

As part of Colombian anthropology, this dissertation adds to the growing understanding of overlapping ontological analysis. However, its unique approach facilitates a new perspective on the medicinal markets that has not been taken before, in which we observe not only the particularities of some of the medicines but also the general overview of how these different ways of health relate to each other. This unique approach will be beneficial to understand not only the region where this study was carried out but also other areas and territories in the country.

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Glossary

Colono: A colonial category in lowland Amazonia of white communities from the highlands who have migrated in search for land.
Mestizo: A colonial racial category, built on the national ideology of racial hybrids. Used as a category to describe people who do not define themselves as Indigenous or AfroColombian.
Afrocolombian: Communities who identify themselves as descendants of sub-Saharan African slaves. Mostly found in the Pacific and Carribean coast. Many are descendants of escaped slaves who established small autonomous towns.
Indigena: Communities who identify themselves as Native American. They often have their language and tradition.
Blanco: A colonial racial category to call people who have paler skin and are descendants of European migrants.
Medicina poplar: Folk, vernacular or traditional medicine of Colombia
Taita: In Quechua this is the word for father. In Putumayo, it is used for Ayahuasca shamans.
Hierbatero: Healer who has profound knowledge on medicinal plants
Yage: Ayahuasca. A Psychedelic brew made from *B. caapi* and *D. cabrerana or. P. viridis*
Mambe: Amazonian word for Coca powder
Ambil: Tobacco paste
Borrachero: Vernacular name for plants from the *Brugmansia* and *Datura* genera.
Chuchuwaza: Quechua name for Maytenus laevis
Chondur: Vernacular name for sedges of the Cyperus genus
Yoco: Local name for *Paullinia yoco*
Mopa Mopa: Vernacular name for *Elaeagia pastoensis*
Waira Sachi: Quechua words for Wind plant not identified
Siete esencias: A common essential oil and perfume sold in folk markets
New Age: An agglomeration of different world beliefs a by-product of 20th-century globalism
Neoshamanism: Communities who use shamanic practices from a wide set of traditions, in particular groups who adopt American Shamanism.

Master Plants: Plants used by indigenous and Neoshamanic groups who consider them to have a complex personhood.

Acknowledgement

This dissertation would not be possible without the help of many people. There is no doubt I am extremely grateful with all of them. Firstly, of course, I wish to thank the Taitas, apprentices, patients, healers and merchants who let me tag along while they worked, putting up with all my questions. I am especially thankful to Doña Lola, Taita Jaime Flores, Taita Lucho Flores, Taita Martin Diaz, the Queta family, the Agreda family, Doña Mercedes, Doña Jesusa, Taita Juan, my friends Santiago, Jose and Taita Ramon, all of whom were kind enough to let me learn from them the mysteries of shamanism in the region of Putumayo. Also Don German, who was extremely welcoming in the markets of Pasto, Doña Maria in Bogota and all of the merchants who were happy to give me some of their time for dialogue and conversation. My close friend, Neyda, who was always ready to teach me about the plants, and whose knowledge of gardening and plant medicine first introduced me to this world.

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Besides these people, I wish to thank my family which has been very supportive. My father who has been an inspiration in my life and my mother who has supported all of my quests

and adventures. I also want to thank Ulrike Neuendorf who has stood by me during all this process, and whose beautiful art adds the life that these plants should have. My sisters, Veronica who opened her house to me and has been an invaluable support during this process and Natalia who has shown me the way of proper academic work.

Introduction

Image 1. The market stall in Mocoa Putumayo.

In the middle of the Mocoa market, there is a stall that is packed to the brim with medicinal plants, images of saints, charms and shamanic tools. They sold everything that related to the healing arts there. Stalls like this are common in the Andean foothills, from Colombia to Peru. Their mystical and mysterious character is intriguing, in which one can appreciate the sheer diversity of medicinal plants that grow in this territory.

However, they also are a visual tour of centuries of cultural exchanges, a map of the historical interactions, syncretic transactions and cultural negotiations. The sheer number of products is overwhelming, colourful bottles, soapboxes, images of organs and plants, plant essences, religious items, beaded necklaces, rattles and other instruments. We can also find deer antlers, saint statues, a Maneki-Neko Cat, a variety of rosaries, books on magic, tarot

cards, tiger balm, jaguar fat, and much more. Each one is offering a glimpse into the complex social relationships produced by trade and years of colonial interaction.

Some items found in this particular stall reflect these relationships even more poignantly. Ingrained in them are the historical realities that produced the multiplicity of medicinal practices we see today. Objects like images of Catholic saints that have been adopted by Afro-Colombian spiritualism placed next to indigenous textiles with images of Bengali tigers, and other paraphernalia, charms and medicinal plants.

This stall demonstrates the diversity of popular medicine in Colombia. Even though local communities still depend on their traditional network of shamans and healers for their daily needs, new types of medicines are always being negotiated and added to the multiple interpretations of health that make up folk medicine here. They are the product of multiple notions of the body, health and nature that have come together. This is the result of a long hybridisation process, that produced many of the syncretic belief systems which coexist in urban areas of Amazonia.

In the case of Colombia, indigenous shamanism, especially of some Putumayo ethnic groups indigenous has spread far beyond the region. It has establishing itself as one of the key pillars of Colombian folk medicine (Caicedo-Fernandez, 2015). As a result, many of the medicines that we find in the local forest around Putumayo are being used throughout the country. Shamans and healers from Putumayo have gained notoriety in the world of folk healing, establishing themselves as direct representatives of indigenous medicine in the popular imagination of the country. This role has made them, as well as their practices, tools and medicines invaluable for folk healing in Colombia. This type of shamanism has reinforced the notion of the Amazon as a source of health, which for centuries have defined the relationship between highlands and lowlands in the eastern sloaps of the Andes (Pinzón, Suárez and Garay, 2004).

Due in part to this, a steady flow of medicinal plants, from the lowland forests of the Amazon to the highland cities in the Andes, have reinvigorated ancient trading routes. The harvest

and cultivations of these plants have become a vital source of income for some local families, and a constant movement and exchange of these products have created and transformed the interethnic relationships throughout the region. This process has accelerated the process of hybridisation, as trading partners not only exchange goods but also knowledge and ways of seeing the world. While indigenous medicine is being incorporated into the more extensive folk healing practices of Colombia, local groups are also negotiating and translating notions and knowledge to fit their own needs and practices.

For this dissertation, I spent most of my time with the medicinal stalls deep in the markets of Colombia. They represent centuries of cultural and biodiversity exchange, pushed into existence by the coming together of the colonial world. These markets are the embodiment of the great American exchange, often carrying plants from exotic lands, from the Indian Sub-Continent, Africa, Europe and throughout South America. In general the great American exchange is usually understood to be the process by which many of the food crops became globalised. Many medicinal plants also became a global crop during this time.

In Colombia, traditional herbal markets represent the coming together of three continents, Europe, America and Africa. We can trace the colonial history of the country by the plants sold in these stalls. Herbal medicines that once grew in southern European farms can be found next to plants that travelled across the Atlantic through slaving ships as well as those that were of spiritual significance for local indigenous trade systems (Losonzcy, 1993; R Voeks, P Goldblatt, 1995; Voeks, 2009: Alexiades and Peluso, 2009). Today it is difficult to pinpoint the exact origin of many of these plants; they have come together to make up the complex pharmacopoeia found in the country.

From the street stalls of Santa Marta in the Caribbean, the large herbal market in Bogota, to the indigenous plant markets of Mocoa; each poses a different degree of hybridity. This is due to the particular historical processes of each region and a direct result of the colonial project. They supply medicines to a diversity of different approaches to health, which coexist in the urban centres of the country. Some with well-defined structures and ritual practices, others closely linked to individual preferences.

Markets here are spaces of interethnic and intercultural exchange where people construct ways of understanding health: reinforcing their beliefs or building something new. At the same time, medicinal plants are the focal point of this negotiation. These medicines are objects that are continuously restructured and redefined, negotiated between different alterities. They become the means by which people understand the complex relationships that make up health and body. Therefore, as the plants move through the trading network, they move as moderators of alterity.

This mixing and restructuring of alterity is what makes markets and medicinal plant trade so fascinating. As these plants travel through these trade networks, they are constantly transformed, establishing new webs of relationships, changing shape and symbolic characteristics, while consolidating the power relationships of colonial rule. In the case of Colombia, these markets have helped the process of *mestizaje*. Yet, mestizaje here is not a political postcolonial state building project but a place where "different racial and ethnic values coexist" (Wade, 2005; 246).

For the indigenous people in and around Putumayo, healing is deeply linked with the ceremonial use of Ayahuasca. This hallucinogenic brew, a compound of two plants, *Banisteriopsis caapi* and either *Diplopterys cabrerana or Psychotria viridis*, has become the key element in the cultural worldview of these people. Known here as Yage, it plays a vital role in the diagnostics, healing and treatment of patients. The specialised practitioners of this type of medicine are known as *Taitas*. However, the plants that make up Yage/Ayahuasca are not the only plants that are used to heal. This territory is a complex, multilayered landscape of healers and specialists who actively engage each other, where Ayahuasca/Yage is a vital pillar, but other medicinal plants play an equally important role (Lanearts, 2006).

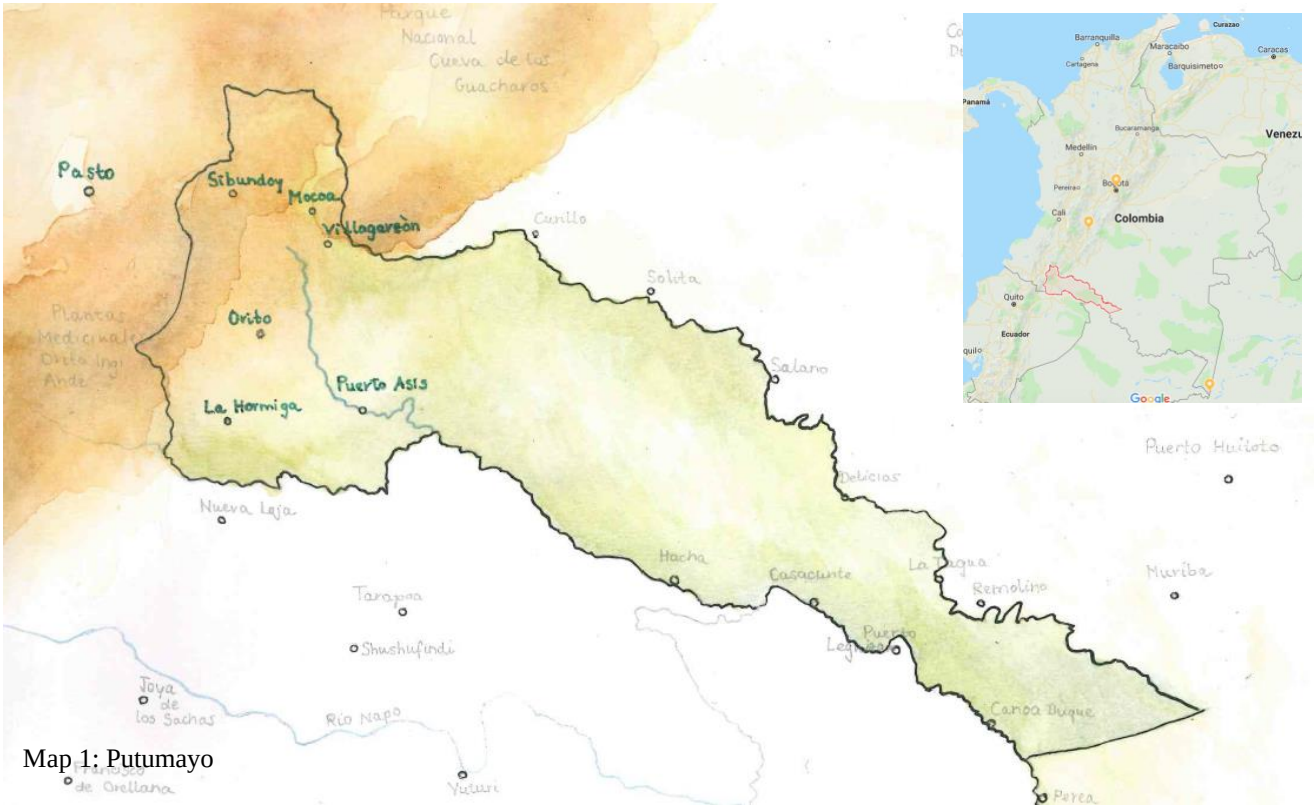
Historically, Ayahuasca/Yage was in the margins of local health; yet recently it has seen a new revitalisation and legitimisation at a rapid pace. As this type of medicine becomes ever more popular and enters the globalised world as a legitimate alternative medicinal practice,

it is producing complex effects on indigenous cultures, on local ecosystems and on the plants themselves.

This study will shed a light on the expansion of medicinal plants from Putumayo to local, regional and global markets. It will be an exploration of the folk medicine of Colombia and how it has incorporated indigenous practices, tools and medicine into its repertoire. To do this, I have decided to use material culture methodology to engage with some of its leading actors, the medicinal plants themselves. By using the plants as the primary character of this study, I sought to observe the multiple relationalities that make up the complex meshwork of existences in this landscape. Through careful observation and analysis, I will offer a new perspective on the lives of these plants.

These plants play a crucial role in the extended web of relationships that make up how people perceive the world. Acknowledging their role as actors in this world and at the same time highlighting their capabilities and limitations not only as botanical and organic beings but as medicines and spiritual agents, this dissertation will seek to legitimise these non-human as more than mere objects devoid of social subjectivity, instead, see them as nuanced actors with complicated social lives and a vital role in the communities who live in this territory. In order to face the daunting task of observing this massive and complex web of different people, cultures and practices that revolve around each plant, I will use an experimental methodology and layout, exploring the lives of significant plants, as they exist in the pluriverse of the Andean foothills.

Setting the scene

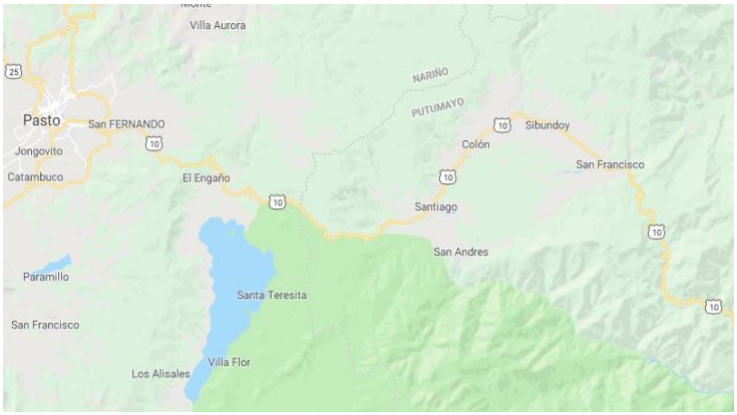


Map 1: Putumayo

This study is based on data collected during a year-long fieldwork in several locations around the department of Putumayo. This region is found in the southwestern part of the country just north of Ecuador and east of department of Nariño. It borders parallel to Ecuador like a long rectangle, between two of the great Amazonian rivers in Colombia: the Putumayo and the Caquetá (see map). This region has two great axis. The first is the Andean mountains that define the different ecological layers in the region. The second are the rivers that flow east towards the Amazon River. These geographical characteristics allow for a cultural, ecological and geographic division into three main regions: Upper Putumayo, Middle Putumayo, Lower Putumayo.

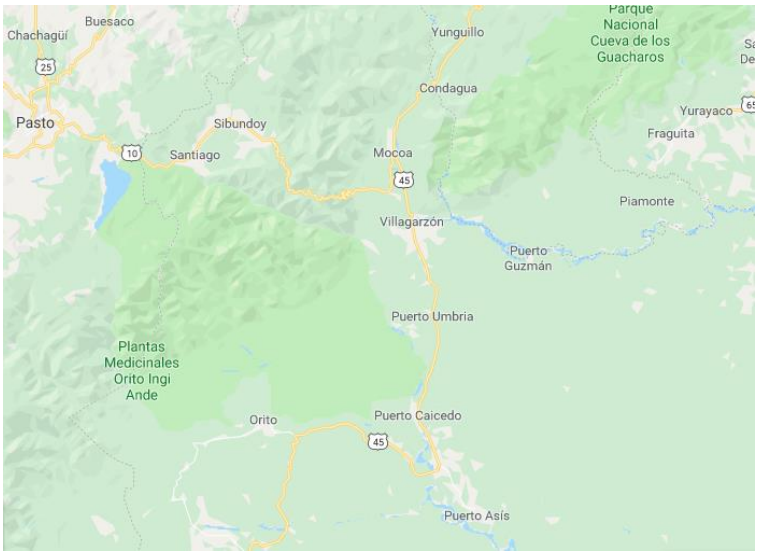
Upper Putumayo or Putumayo Alto is the region at the top of the Andean mountains. This region is where several of the main rivers are born. It consists of steep mountain slopes and valleys as well as an old lakebed that has become fertile land. This flat plateau is known as

the Valley of Sibundoy. In this valley there are some towns, mainly Sibundoy, San Francisco, Colon and Santiago. Although they are highland towns, they have a profound economic, political and ethnic link with the lowlands. To the West, is the Lake of La Cocha next to the city of Pasto the capital of the department of Nariño. To the East, down-river, we find steep mountains as they drop from 3,300 to 600 metres above sea level (hereafter "M.A.M.S.L."). Like most of the Andean foothills, this region is a biodiversity hotspot due to the different temperature layers in tropical mountain slopes, as well as a biological corridor from the Amazon to the Andes.



Map2: Putumayo Alto. Source: Google Maps

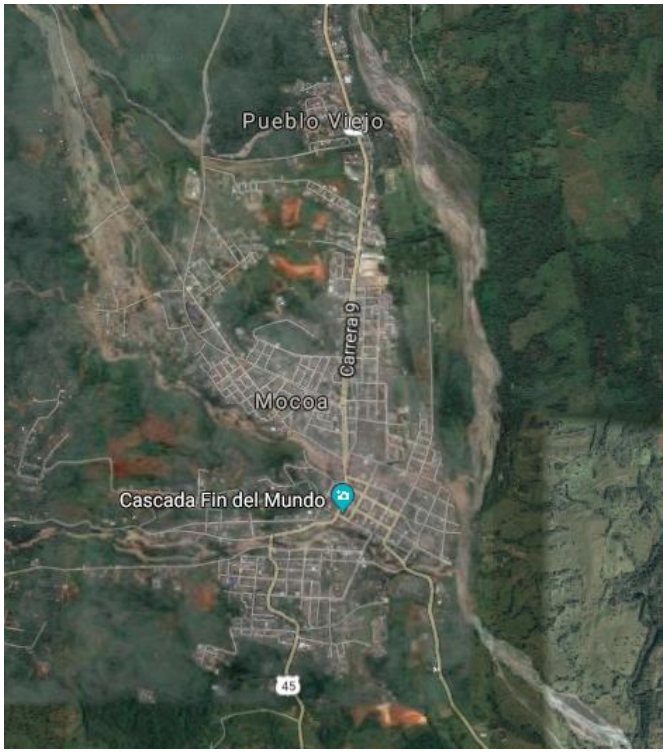
From the 600 to the 100 M.A.M.S.L. is Middle Putumayo, where mountains become less steep as they give way to hills and valleys of the foothills. This is the most populated area in the region, encompasing cities like Mocoa, Villa Garzon, Orito and Puerto Asis. This territory has suffered from heavy deforestation; the forest has given way to vast cattle ranches and grassy fields. It is also where the main oil fields are located and heavily affected by Cocaine plantations.



Map3: Putumayo Medio. Source: Google Maps

As the rivers flow East towards the lowlands, they begin to swirl and lose much of their speed. This is Lower Putumayo, which is the largest extension of the department and is heavily forested. In this region, there are separate towns, all of which are connected by the river. Puerto Leguizamo is the largest town in this region, containing the only road that connects the rivers Putumayo and Caqueta. It is mostly populated by indigenous people and is culturally and economically closer to Ecuador and Peru. It is has been affected by a history of violence, from the rubber barons of the early 20th century to the Peruvian war, the recent civil war and Cocaine industry.

In order to facilitate this ethnography I chose the region's capital Mocoa as the centre of my investigation. This city lies in the valley of the Mocoa riverm surrounded by steep mountains covered with dense forest. The city is surrounded by smaller towns, hamlets and communities which include several indigenous, *campesinos* and *AfroColombian* groups. It has few flat fertile areas for cultivation, and most people depend on small-scale agriculture. Even with these limitations, the city is quite large. About 35000 people make it their home in various neighbourhoods in and around the valleys of the many tributaries of the Mocoa River.



Map 4: Mocoa. This maps shows the lay out of the city as it goes along the river Mocoa and three tributaries cross the town. The main roads out connect it with different cities in the Andean mountains and the lowlands. Source: Google Maps

In its centre there is a large plaza with some palm trees and a few surviving historic houses from the Peruvian war. However, most of the city is new, having had a population growth in

the last 50 years since the discovery of oil in the nearby areas. The city is important as the seat of the government and as the main transport hub of the region.

As the gateway to the Amazon, Mocoa connects the highland Andean cities with the riverside ports. It is the crossroad that links with Pitalito and Bogotá, as well as Sibundoy to Pasto and Quito with the lowland towns of Puerto Asis and Orito. Since there is no other way into the highlands, the city has become an obligatory stop for the oil trucks that go to the centre of the country. This has facilitated Mocoa's role as the political centre of the region and the place where many governmental and nongovernmental institutions have their offices. It is in this city where we can find the main offices of the indigenous organization of Putumayo as well as the main environmental management offices, such as the National Parks Institute and CorpoAmazonia.

Due in part to its strategic location it has the biggest market of Medicinal plants in the region. The stalls have plants from the lowland forest of Putumayo as well as plants from the highland tundra or *paramo* around Pasto and Sibundoy. People from miles around visit them when looking for specific plants and medicines.

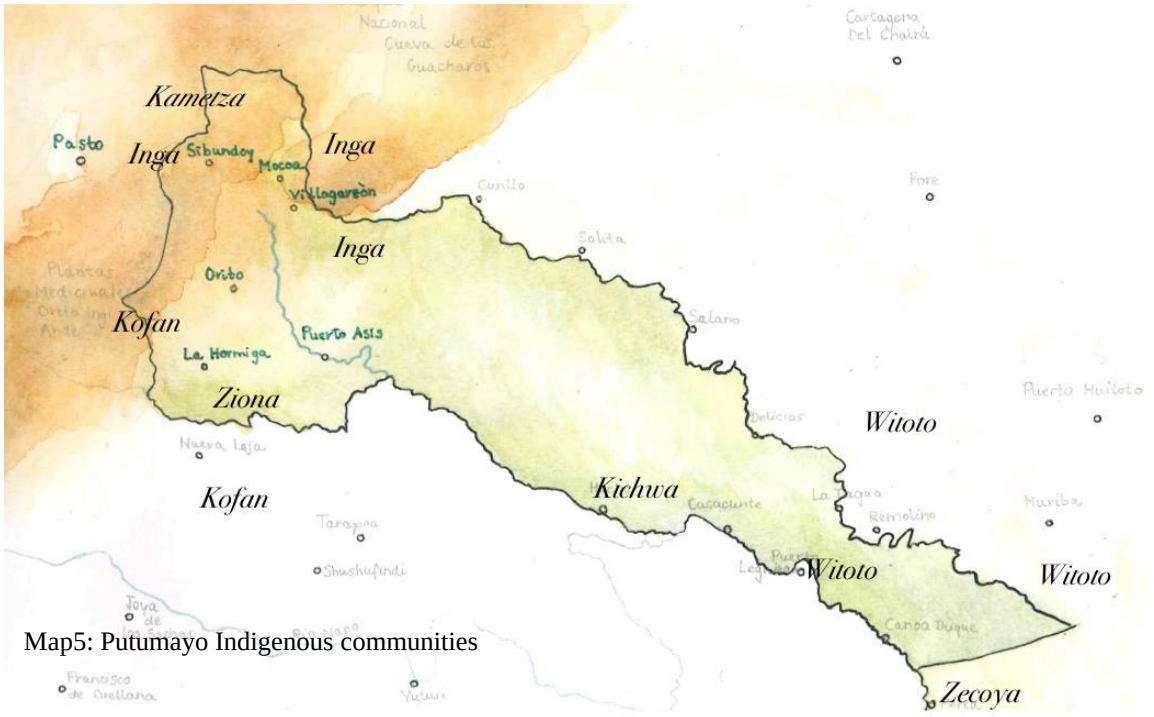
As a result, this ethnography required constant movement through the region. It was conducted in various other areas and towns in the department of Putumayo, such as Orito and Villa Garzon in Middle Putumayo, Puerto Leguizamo in the lowlands, as well as Sibundoy and Santiago in the Upper Putumayo. Interviews and participant observation were also conducted in the highland cities of Pasto, Cali, Popayan and Bogota.

Who

For this thesis, I worked with several indigenous and mestizo communities found in the lowlands, foothills and highlands of Putumayo. These communities are autonomous and have many ethnic differences, but they share many similarities. For instance, I worked with communities who belong to the network of people who practice Yage/Ayahuasca

ceremonies. Even with their ethnic differences they all share the same structured ceremonial use, as well as rituals, practices and tools associated with the consumption of Yage. The term "Cultures of Yage" has been used to describe this cultural complex (Zuluaga, 2004; Alhena Caicedo, 2010, 2014), which is made up of Inga, Kitchwa, Kofan, Kametza and Ziona, in adition to some mestizo and white communities.

Due to the rapid spread of Ayahuasca through indigenous groups in Amazonia as an effective method of healing (Lenaerts, 2006; 2011; Beyer, 2010;Brabec de Mori, 2011), other indigenous communities actively use it, but to a lesser degree. These groups have their own separate practices of healing, but, have adopted it as their own. Therefore, this study also included some participants from Witoto, Misak, Paez, Secoya, Pastos, as well as a large number of non-indigenous people such as Mestizos, *Colonos* and some *AfroColombian* people who are actively using medicine and rituals associated with Ayahuasca. As this medicinal practice gains more popularity throughout Colombia, more and more people will become part of this network.



Map5: Putumayo Indigenous communities

During my fieldwork I came across a number of key communities. Bellow is a summary of their characteristics and significance.

- *Inganos*

The Inga is a Quechua-speaking people who inhabit several territories around southern Colombia. They speak a dialect of Quechua known as Inga, which is part of the subvariety Kitchwa or northern Quechua closely related to Quechua II from the highlands of southern Peru and Bolivia (Levinshon, 1976), however, this is debated. This Kitchwa is divided into two subdialects, highland Inga and lowland Inga. The highland Inga live primarily in the town of Santiago of Sibundoy, while the lowland Inga live in the towns of Mocoa, Villa Garzon, Puerto Asis, in Putumayo and several townships and locations in the neighbouring departments of Cauca and Caqueta.

Their origin is up for debate, as I will show in chapter 1. They seem to be either part of the early expansion of the Inca Empire into Colombia (Levinshon, 1976); as part of secondary migrations from the lowlands (Ramírez de Jara and Urrea Giraldo, 1990); or as a result of the colonial use of Quechua as the lingua franca in this territory (Brabec de Mori, 2011). Nevertheless, the Inga considers themselves descendants of the Inca.

These communities are widely agricultural, depending on the fertile soils of the Sibundoy valley to harvest crops such as corn and potatoes and working swidden fallow systems in the lowlands for their survival. They have also established a tight network of merchants who trade medicines throughout the country. With the growing popularity of indigenous shamanism, the Inga traders have become important healers in the local markets throughout Colombia (Ramirez de Jara and Urrea Giraldo, 1990). As they travel through the country they have become the main advocates of Ayahuasca/Yage shamanism, spreading its use.

- *Kitchwa*

The Kitchwa are indigenous communities of the lowland regions who speak a dialect of Quechua from the Kitchwa subvariety. They are closely related to Runa Simi of Ecuador and Peruvian Napo River, making them Amazonian Runa and not Inga (Gamboa and Muñoz, 2003). They were heavily affected by the rubber boom of the early 20th century which probably cause their migration to the Putumayo basin. During the period of this thesis, they were undergoing a process of cultural revitalization.

- *Kofán*

The Kofán live in small reservations around the rivers of San Miguel and Putumayo, and larger territories in Ecuador. They speak A´i language, being the only surviving language in the linguistic family (Cerón Martínez, 1995; Robinson, 1996). They are considered to have inhabited these territories since precolombian times, and are named several times by the colonial chronicles (Uribe, 1986). They were particularly hard-hit by the expanding oil and Coca production in their ancestral territory during the 20th century, (Wasserstrom, 2014; Ramirez, 2004). Their shamans are considered to be among the most powerful throughout the region.

- *Kametza*

Known historically as the Sibundoy Indians, this ethnic group lives primarily in the highland valley in the towns of Sibundoy and San Francisco. They speak Kametza, which is also a language isolate (Pinzon and Ramirez, 1992). These communities are well-known craftsmen, famed for their woodwork. Like the Inga, they depend on agriculture, although, as the land near Sibundoy has been privatised they have been forced to higher altitudes.

- *Ziona*

The Ziona is a Western Tikuna community who live in the riversides of the Putumayo river. They concentrate around the city of Puerto Asis which is the largest urban centre of the region. They have had a long process of acculturation and persecution first by the Franciscan

missionaries and later by the government (Langdon, 2014). Known by many neighbouring indigenous people as powerful shamans, by the 1970s they had lost their shamanic practices. Only through a process of revitalising their cultural beliefs and strengthening their political agenda, they have made a comeback as one of the most significant communities in Putumayo (Langdon, 2014). The Ziona shamans of the 1980s were the most important in the region and trained many of the shamans I visited during my time in Putumayo.

- *Witoto*

The Murui or Witoto are an indigenous group that inhabit the lowland areas between the Putumayo, Caqueta, Amazonas and the Napo rivers as well as territories in middle Putumayo near Orito. They are part of the Bora Witoto linguistic family and share many similarities with lowland communities. Also known as the children of Tobacco, Coca, and sweet mandioc, they form part of an exogamous cultural group who share many cultural characteristics (Pineda, 1986). These exogamous and exolinguistic groups[1] make up what is known as "People of the Centre" and include the Barasa, Ocaina, Bora, Andoque among others who share similar cultural practices and beliefs (Echeverri and Candre-Kinerai, 2008; Echeverri, 2016; Pineda, 1986). All of these groups are known for their consumption of Mambe which is a composition of Coca leaf and other plants in the form of green powder, Mambe is a stimulant and used for ceremonial practices.

- *Other indigenous communities*

I often came across various indigenous people from different ethnic backgrounds who had close contact with Ayahuasca shamanism. These communities all share the particularity of having their own healing techniques and traditions, but opened up to Ayahuasca. This is the case of the communities living in the regions around Putumayo and Cauca who have some relationships with indigenous groups. As this type of shamanism becomes more popular, it

[1] Like the Tukanoans, these groups practice linguistic exogamy, while at the same time creating a strong cultural bond with each other. This has consolidated cultural practices, beliefs and exchange networks that includes a wide region between the Napo of Peru, Putumayo and Caqueta.

has begun to overshadow local practices (Caicedo, 2014).

- *Mestizos, Colonos and Blanco*

I also worked with several non-indigenous communities throughout the region. In particular, I worked with the *colonos* population who are white and *mestizo* from the highlands who migrated to Putumayo in the 20th century. The reasons for their migration are complex and multifaceted. Some of the most important causes include the difficult access to land in their homelands, the political violence of the 1950s, and the cycle of economic booms that occurred in this territory during the past century (Taussig, 1987). Many of these *colono* populations transform the environment to fit highland models of productivity, changing the landscape from forested to a monoculture or cattle fields.

Today, several healers and shamans are mestizo or white men who arrived in the mid 20th century and established a deep connection with local indigenous communities. These shamans practice many of the indigenous healing rituals, use the same plants and even are very knowledgeable in Ayahuasca. Mestizo shamans are very common, usually having someone in the family who is indigenous, for instance a mother, father or godparent. Yet, generally they do not speak the language.

Folk medicine in Colombia is widespread and complex on its own. Often it is based on beliefs in a landscape of spiritual and environmental relationalities that cause sickness through colonial hierarchies (Taussig, 1986). This belief system endows some communities with magical and spiritual characteristics. Most of the markets of Colombia sell a large spectrum of tools and medicines, to prevention against magic, witchcraft, envy, bad wind, or a number of folk ailments that are continuously threatening people. For these people, the relationship with Ayahuasca shamanism, or indigenous magic, is difficult and ambiguous.

Ayahuasca is becoming more popular in urban, highly educated communities. Indeed, neoshamanism has become an important alternative health system in Colombia. These neoshamanic groups have a close link with Ayahuasca shamanism and play a fundamental

role in legitimising this custom around the world. They often use the same tools and practices associated with this ceremonial hallucinogen but in a new hybrid context. Neoshamanic practitioners have access to multiple plant medicines, from Mexican Huichol and Native American Church to Aimara Coca rituals, as well as Asian and middle east spiritual beliefs (Caicedo Fernandez, 2015, Labate and Cavnar, 2018). They are constantly exchanging and experimenting.

In recent times, the use of Ayahuasca has become a global phenomenon. Journalists such as Michael Pollan (2018) have legitimised psychedelics in the mainstream as an effective tool for healing. An increasing number of scientific studies have further raised awareness about the practice around the world. At the same time, an underground network of psychedelic practitioners, and a growing spiritual tourism industry, have begun travelling into the Amazonian lowlands to try the famed medicine (Labate and Cavnar, 2018). This has happened mostly in Peru, but more and more people are arriving in Colombia -particularly in Putumayo- seeking the medicine.

- *Western Experts*

Local experts who work for government, NGOs and academic institutions were also included in this study. These are usually biologists and anthropologists who flock to this territory, attracted by its cultural and biological importance of the region.

The government runs the National Parks Institute, which controls extensive territories near Mocoa, Orito and Puerto Leguizamo. They are in charge of the protection and conservation of these territories. In this region alone, the National Parks institute has three main parks: PNN Serranía de Los Churumbelos Auka – Wasi, Santuario Plantas Medicinales Río Orito Ingi – Andí, and PNN La Paya. Most of the people who work in the National Parks institute are not local, arriving from the highlands and living for a short period of time in the region. They oscillate between living in the National Park and in the nearby urban centre. They also hire guides and experts from the area in order to facilitate their interactions with neighbouring communities.

The other government Institution is Corpoamazonia or Corporation of Sustainable Development of Souther Amazonia. This is the environmental resource management office, which controls the Colombian Amazonian territory. Its leaders are elected at the same time as national and regional governors. For this reason people joke that they are the second government of Putumayo. They have many specialists from a number of backgrounds including ecologists, biologists, and environmental engineers. Local people and anthropologists are also hired to interact with the different communities. Their main offices are in Mocoa and here they have one of the biggest botanical gardens in Colombia, with many of the living specimens of medicinal plants. They also play an important role in managing the biodiversity trade in the region, having set controls in many roads around Mocoa, which often confiscate timber, flora and fauna of different kinds.

Finally, NGOs also plays an important role. These are: Fundacion Gaia, Tropenbos, Rainforest Conservation and WWF, among others. They are the translators for local communities, helping in conservation and sustainability efforts as well as land tenure. Many of the people that worked in this territory had small offices, often working on their own or in small groups. Most NGO representatives arrived from the highlands. They were well-educated and often also had an interest in participating in shamanic ceremonies.

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During my study I found myself immersed social landscape with a multiplicity of actors, ontologies and perspectives on the world. Each with a different way to relate to ethnic difference, nature, and the body. However, all of the different groups and actors explored in this thesis are related through the use of Ayahuasca and shamanic healing practices. They are brought together by common practices, rituals and the use of the medicines found in the foothills of the Andes.

In folk medicine, each person brings their own unique worldview weaving it into the

complex network of people that actively participate in it. As a result, they are continuously sharing knowledge and creating hybrids. This exchange, while arising due to certain colonial processes, facilitates the consolidation of these practices and expansion of these medicines well beyond the local territory.

Theoretical approach

For my Master's dissertation, I explored local trade networks in Putumayo to assess the sustainability of these practices (Echeverri-Sanchez, 2015). It was intended to be a study of NTFP (Non-Timber Forest Product) in the foothill region in favour of conservation and protection of biodiversity, while at the same time applying ethnobotanical methods. During my time in the field, it became clear that these approaches tended to ignore the role of these plants in the greater ontological framework, as active beings with an agency. NTFP approach emphasises that forest products are already commodities, ignoring the deep-set cultural and ontological processes that make them an integral part of the local world making. At the same time, ethnobotanical methodology, as with most ethnosciences, tends to look at local plant use through a naturalist perspective, translating local knowledge to fit western ideas on nature and productivity (Neves, Fazito and Fernandes, 2014; Descola, 2013). By prioritising western biological sciences, I was actively delegitimising local knowledge.

Recently ethnobotany has begun considering ontological perspectives as a way to approach human-plant interactions. Daily et al. (2016) highlight some of the key elements that can come out from this approach; such as showing how ecological knowledge is dynamic, exploring multi-layered links between ecosystems and humans; as well as a more rounded and useful application of ethnobotanical knowledge. Ethnobotany is beginning to offering spaces to acknowledge the limits of western naturalism to truly appreciate the relationship between people and plants (Rival, 2012; Miller, 2016). Acknowledging that the "frictions between local ethnobotanical classification and “post-Linnean taxonomic orthodoxy” are not only epistemological but also ontological" (Miller, 2016; pg 105)

Similarly I began to appreciate how the shamans play a vital role as mediators between the spiritual and the physical beings that inhabit the world as well as between different human groups that cohabit the territory (see: Langdon & Baer 1992). Their capability to adopt multiple perspectives is what gives them their power and understanding of the world (Hugh Jones, 1994; Fausto, 2014; Whitehead and Wright, 2004; Langdon, 2014). The ability of shamanism to relate with extreme alterities, such as non-humans, inspired me through my investigation to install the plants as ethnographic subjects.

Consequently, I had to change the way I analysed these networks by reconsider my approach. I needed a method which would help me understand the lives of plants beyond ethnobotanical specimens that are merely classified, categorised, and quantified. Indeed, the approach I decided to use aims to investigate the ontological relationalities that make these plants such an essential part of local worldviews. It is a method that allows for an in-depth exploration of the pluriverse of the Andean foothills and explores the role of these plants as active agents.

I will begin with a theoretical overview in order to give context to the methodological approach. Like many regions of the lowland territories of South America, the various ontological perspectives that have come together over time shape the social landscape. The diversity of ontologies permits different approaches, conceptualisations and relationships of the world. This coexistence of different ways of relating to the world, or *pluriverse* (Mignolo, 2012; Escobar, 2012), is not to be understood as isolated groups, but as worlds woven together by colonial processes in which middle grounds are produced (Mignolo, 2012; Escobar, 2012). It is in the borders that we find these plants, existing in the liminal space where ontologies are negotiated.

Working in the herbal markets of Colombia I could see how the Amazonian plants gained new meaning and were quickly incorporated into new ways of dealing with health, nature and social relationships. As the plants travelled through the different ontological settings, they incorporated new interpretations, new uses and new effects. While at the same time, they kept many of the original characteristics from when they were first harvested. They are

ontological hybrids that represent a liminal space where a multiplicity of worldviews come together. However, in order to explore this, we must first analise the meshworks (Ingold, 2014; De Landa, 1997; Escobar 2008) that make their existence possible.

Using the plants as the starting point to explore the meshwork of interspecies relationalities that make up this territory, I was inspired by the works of Danna Haraway (2008) (2015), Ana Tsing (2015) and Eduardo Kohn (2013) as well as materialist approaches such as Jane Bennett (2010) and others from the new materialism philosophies (Harman, 2018; DeLanda, 1997). I chose to abandon the anthropocentric focus and instead centre on the other beings as the main subject of analysis. With this perspective, I believe we learn more about the relations that make up the world through our constant interaction with the non-human world.

Multispecies ethnography acknowledges the interconnectedness of humans with non-human beings and extends classical ethnography to include them in the investigation. In the words of Anna Tsing:

> "The experiment forms part of a larger argument for critical description, that is, arts of noticing the entwined relations of humans and other species across multiple non-nesting scales. Critical description considers how worlds are made in the intersecting trajectories of many species living in common" (Tsing, 2014: pg 223).

Therefore, in a multispecies landscape, social beings of various forms are continuously shaping each other's lives.

The entangled relationships between humans and non-humans are part of daily life for the inhabitants of the Amazonia/Andean foothills territory. Not only do humans cohabit the complex system of living and non-living beings that make up these forests, their lives are often deeply tied to the cycles and temporality of these beings. For Amazonian communities these cycles determine their survival, productivity and livelihood and define the way they understand notions of personhood, kinship, and society. The separation between humans and non-humans is often fuzzy, hence the importance of multispecies ethnographical analysis in

order to understand the multiplicity of beinghood (Rival, 2012), especially when it comes to animacy and agency.

For Amazonian anthropology the personhood and animacy of non-humans has been a major subject of discussion. There are two theoretical approaches to observe the relationships between non-humans and humans, Perspectivism and Constructional approach. I believe that they can be equally effective when observing medicinal plants since they complement each other, yet due to the extended multiontological fieldsite, the Constructional approach can be expanded to observe different ways of seeing and understanding the non-human. Let me explain.

On the one side, we have Perspectivism, which has shed a new light on how local indigenous people see the non-human cohabitants of the jungle as having the same level of personhood as humans (Viveiros de Castro, 1996; 1998; 2004; Lima, 1996). In it, the non-humans have a human perspective or soul but with a different physical body. This is a more metaphysical approach, which is deeply linked to indigenous worldviews, especially in relation to the humans, animals, and spirits that cohabit the forest. For indigenous people, for example, animals see themselves as humans, with their own crops, homes and kinship roles (Viveiros de Castro, 1996; 1998). In the case of the plants in this study, we will see how some of these plants exist in the forest as their own independent and fully formed persons, living both in the visible and invisible worlds. Some authors have explored perspectivism in plants (see: Descola 1996; 1986; Rival, 2012; Skrabakova, 2014; Daly et al., 2016). It allows us to understand emic notions of cosmological relationships between the different beings that cohabit the forests.

On the other hand, the Constructional approach[2], coined by Fernando Santos Granero, helps us understand beinghood and personhood as concepts that are closely related to Amazonian

[2] Not to be confused with either social constructionism or social constructivism. While social constructionism does focus on the creation of an understanding of the world through group interaction, social constructivism focuses primarily on the individual. In this respect, Santos Granero notions are closely related to social constructionism however they are more in tone the profoundly interrelated relationships between artefacts and humans

theories of Materiality (Santos Granero, 2012). This approach analyses personhood as a social product, made through the relationships with humans and non-humans. Substances play an important role in building the beinghood of a particular person or object (Londoño, 2012). This is why they have a fluid existence and their personhood oscillates between being an object and being a person. A moral person is thus the sum of various substances that generate consciousness, ethical values, and the capability to exist in society (Londoño, 2012). This Constructional approach permits the extension of the idea of personhood to objects, from daily household items to valued family heirlooms. These are objects that are constantly given subjectivity, which is closely relational (Santos Graneros, 2009a). This worldview bestows objects with a soul, in a similar way to the Devaru (Bird David, 1999). However, the level of their animacy and agency fluctuate and change according to their relationships to their surroundingsSantos Granero, 2009b). Medicines function both as a tool and as objects with a relative agency and animacy.

The constructional or relational approach to agency allows a more diverse interpretation of being. It helps us "rethink the ways in which we deal with technical activities and approach living processes, such as growing, as the combination of a diversity of actions, from a diversity of agents" (Coupaye and Pitrou, 2018: pg 4). It also permits us to think of ontology as emerging from different scales and stages in the relational process (Coupaye, 2018). Thus, a person may treat one of these subjects as a plant, a medicine, an agency of a spirit.

Therefore we must also remember that in the pluriverse of the Andean foothills, these plants not only exist in local indigenous worlds but also in mestizo and western worlds, all with distinct ways of relating and existing with them. Biologists, government officials, mestizo shamans and neoshamanic practitioners have different interpretations of what a plant or a medicine is, how they work and how they fit into the whole system. These people are constantly exchanging, negotiating and reforming their way of seeing the world. This multiontological perspective adds complexity to an ethnographic subject, forcing me to observe it not only through shamanic worldviews but also as part of an interconnected web in which I also participate.

Therefore, the Constructional approach facilitates a phenomenological understanding of agency and animacy, which can be extended into different worldviews and ontological perspectives on the non-human. In this respect, this dissertation will look at how different people relate to plants, endow them with power, move them and incorporate them into their worldview.

In these conceptions, I have been heavily influenced by how objects are viewed in Actor-Network theory (Latour, 2007; Tsing, 2015), Meshwork theory (Ingold, 2014; De Landa, 1997; Escobar 2008) as well as other material semiotics, which permit a relational approach to objects, in which an "entity counts as an actor if it makes a perceptible difference" (Law and Mol, 2008: pg 58). It is through the webs of relationships that objects exist and act.

For the purpose of this dissertation, I believe Meshwork theory has the best approach to such a wide fieldsite, since it highlights how these relationships are built and performed, according to different ontologies (Mol, 1999). Therefore, we will be able to see how these relationships are done and enacted to create not only one reality, but multiple ones (Mol, 1999). The idea of Meshworks permits to analyse the local social landscape as not merely a net of interconnected points but a "tangled mesh of interwoven and complexly knotted strands" (Ingold, 2014: pg 151) which can easily incorporate non-human relationships such as the complex ecosystems found in this territories. It is in this tangled mesh that multi-layered entanglements expand well beyond one ontological realm, incorporating several different ones (Escobar, 2008). Yet, as it will become more evident, the use of Meshworks depends on scale. I will also use the term networks as a means to explore more horizontal webs or relationships, such as those between the different shamans in the foothills of the Andeas.

However, by doing this, we risk losing sight of the object, as the relationships can be endless. In this relational world, it is often difficult to state what something does or is. In this respect, the discipline of anthropology has historically been preoccupied with the "relation between persons and things" (Gell, 1998:pg 9). Objects were placed in the centre of anthropological analysis because they were good to analyse several ideas at the same time (Coupaye, 2013:pg

18). In particular, Anthropology of Art and some strands of Material Culture have explored the deep relational and reciprocal agencies between objects and people as well as how we communicate through these objects (Tilley et al., 2006). Others have explored the objectification process in the same way that we would any subject, establishing the periods which make up the history of the object as a commodity (Appadurai, 1986) and the social life of objects in the sense of becoming rather than just existing (Kopitoff, 1986). In any case, the entangled relationships of objects and things allow for the added subjectivity and offered methodological practices that are applicable to this study. By establishing a phenomenological perspective of the non-human, giving it life by constant reciprocal interaction and establishing them in complex meshworks of relationships (Ingold, 2014), we can reconceptualise the medicines in the overall world they exist in.

Focusing on the different processes that make up these medicines we can appreciate how dynamic they are. My purpose here is to observe the different transformations as they come into being through different ontological worldviews. By doing this, I wish to highlight how these plants take chimeric existences that are a result of the constant negotiation between different ways of seeing and understanding the world. To observe something coming into being in diverse ontological landscapes, we must look at the act and techniques of transforming matter (Lemonier, 1992) and becoming (Schalnger, 1991; Coupaye and Pitrou, 2018) , at its exchangeability (Thomas, 1991; Appadurai, 1986), its ability to be incorporated into different worldviews through misunderstandings (Sahlins, 1995; Losonczy and Mesturini 2010), equivocal compatibility (Pina-Cabral, 2010) and translation (Fausto and De Vienne, 2014: Hanks and Severi, 2014; Carneiro da Cunha, 1998).

Methodology

This dissertation is based on an ethnography of the trade routes of medicinal plants in the Andean foothills. By exploring these routes I had a chance not only to interact with the plants themselves but with the various actors who came into contact with these medicines. However, to effectively arrange a comprehensive study of the different existences of these plants

required several rigorous methodological approaches: from a multi-sited ethnography and participatory observation to a detailed botanical examination of plant species, and analysis on physicality and techniques.

Due to the very nature of this ethnography, it quickly became apparent that it would have a massive scope. In order to facilitate the analysis of such a large fieldsite, it required scaling of analysis and methodology. By scaling the observation, I was able to look at the micro aspects of each plant such biochemistry, personhood and social-ecological characteristics, in addition to the macro characteristics, and its cultural and ecological context. Analysing micro and macro processes facilitated the observation of the meshworks of relationships that make up the epistemological and ontological reality of local people. At the same time, it enabled me to examine the effects of the other phenomena on these local webs, for example colonialism, migration and globalism.

To begin, I had to delineate the groups, people and plants that would be included in this fieldwork. Shamanism and traditional healing in this territory exists in a tightly knit network of healers, apprentices and patients who share similar practices yet have a varied cultural backgrounds (Caicedo-Fernández, 2015; Zuluaga Ramírez, 1994; Pinzón Castaño, Suárez P and Garay A, 2004; Chaumeil, 1991; Ramirez de Jara, 1996; (Barbira Freedman, 2014). To explore these networks, I focused on one type of shamanic tradition, Ayahuasca shamanism, and observed the plants that were a fundamental part of this practice. From this starting point, I expanded my pool to include as many informants who use these plants as I could, outlining the reach of these practices. By doing this and expanding my observation I was interacting with people from multiple backgrounds.

Key informants were identified and later contacted by participating in the neoshamanic and shamanic networks. Access was gained through a rigorous participation of Ayahuasca ceremonies, as well as continual networking with the different actors in the trade route and shamanic ceremonies. They were chosen based on their knowledge, capability as well as accessibility. These informants include nine experienced shamans, ten apprentices in many levels, several patients, and eight traders who continuously use these plants. I worked with

them to identify the plants that would go into this study. Characterising medicinal belief systems, classification system and cultural practices associated with each plant.

Once the plants were identified, a multi-sited analysis was conducted, exploring the various different ontological landscapes were these plants might exist. This required identifying and moving through the trade routes that cross the Putumayo region while visiting actors who have direct contact with the plants. By doing this I was able to observe the complex meshwork of interaction from a panoramic perspective. This analysis of trade routes gave a more global perspective. As part of this dissertation I will highlight how small shamanic networks are vast one part of a larger regional trade.

I conducted participatory observation in several key places, in particular, the towns of Mocoa, Villa Garzon, Sibundoy, and Puerto Asis in addition to rural areas around Orito, Yunguillo the Sibundoy valley and Puerto Leguizamo in the lowlands. This methodology was also conducted at a lesser degree in urban markets of Pasto, Bogota and Cali. I also visited smaller communities, and the homes of different shamans. During this time I participated in many shamanic rituals, healing ceremonies, the harvesting and preparation of these medicines, selling and exchanging, as well as identifying the middleman between the different merchants in and around Mocoa. Methods such as guided walks and interviews allowed me to go in depth on each of these aspects, exploring the ontological relationships that people have with these plants.

At the same time, I conducted informal and often unstructured interviews with people who have had some contact with shamanic plants. These might include casual patients who have taken a form of the medicine; shamans who were visiting my main informants, merchants in the different markets throughout the country; local people from a diversity of backgrounds who have had some contact with the medicinal plants, and biologists and local experts from the botanical garden of Mocoa and Bogota.

I was also led in guided walks around Mocoa, Orito and Valle del Guamez where many of the medicinal plants are found in the wild or managed forests. I visited them and follow them

as they were grown and harvested. I did conducting follow-ups in different stages of their life cycle of these plants. Carefully considering the characteristics of the local ecosystem, not only through biological and ecological classification but also through the worldview of the local people. This was done with indigenous and mestizo experts, depending on the accessibility to the plants.

During the participatory observation, I partook in many shamanic ceremonies and healing rituals, both as a patient and as an assistant. By doing this I was granted access to much of the philosophical and epistemological practices of this type of shamanism. The use of Ayahuasca was critical in order to understand the beliefs on health and medicinal plants. Sensory ethnography (Glenn Shepard, 2004) was an important tool when working with the plants themselves. Considering that shamans and healers use their bodies to experiment and test the medicines, as well as to classify the plants and their efficiency, trying these plants became quite necessary. This was done with certain care, just enough to taste the bitterness or sweetness and heat or coldness. I also experimented with herbal baths, smudging plants and preparations.

Using medicinal plants as the main focus of my ethnography might seem similar to other ethnosciences, especially ethnobiology. However, this thesis seeks not to compare local knowledge with the western epistemology of botany, but instead to explore how these plants exist according to different ontologies. In other words, how different versions of the plants are made (Mol, 1998: pg 77).

To do this, it is necessary to explore multiple interpretations, relationships and entangled coexistences between humans and non-human beings. These plants as we will see, manifest several dimensions of being: as a medicine, as a food source, as thinking agents that are capable to heal or to hurt, as plants and as artefacts. To focus on so many different variations, however, proves to be a challenge. Instead, as a major part of this ethnography, it is important to focus on how it materializes the multiplicity of forms, as well as how it comes into being through different conceptualizations of health, nature and local ontological relationships. Looking at the interactions that happen with and around the plant, I wish to highlight how

they are a result of a multiplicity of relationalities, practices and meanings which are defined by the ontological and cosmological perspective. It is through this perspective we can understand these plants as "processual entities…. Something intrinsically dynamic and changing, with only the appearance of being static" (Coupaye, 2013: pg 92).

This is especially the case as these plants are not only beings that coexist in the forest, but technologies which are dependent on cultural knowledge (Thomas, 1991: pg 87). Looking at them as technologies and artefacts can be beneficial when observing health and trade, which not only expands through different ontological regimens but also modifies and transforms the plants and medicines constantly. As the techniques of transforming matter and rituals of exchange encourage continuity and repetition as well as the recontextualization and reconfiguration according to different ontological regimes, a method such as *Chaîne opératoire* or operation sequence (Lemonier, 1992; Coupaye, 2014) can facilitate the analysis of this plants.

Chaîne opératoire establishes a biography of the object focussing on its making. It offers a narration of its history, which includes transformations and movements, as it takes shape and becomes an artefact (Coupaye, 2013). This methodology was therefore a key tool for exploring the processes which profoundly transformed the plants: From the constant management of local forest to facilitate its growth, to selective processes to benefit diversity and physical transformation into a medicine through distillation and commodification. All these processes are widely influenced by local ontological relationalities. Keen observation and documentation of the different steps that go into making local medicines are required, for a detailed description of the "chain of episodes" that can show the sequence, transformation, and the choices of each agent (Coupaye, 2013: pg 96). This is a tool to allow a more in-depth look at the techniques of modifying matter. Facilitating an analysis of the different scales of action, and how this influences the way people might relate to the artefact: at microscale (such cutting the plant or understanding the combinations and internal combinations when cooking it) or larger scales such as the power relations that are continuously formed and reinforced in the traditional medicine (Coupaye, 2018).

This method was essential to explore the way these plants were exchanged, translated, transformed and remade to fit new worldviews as these plants and medicines travel through this meshwork and interact with people. It was applied not only to the manipulation of matter to create an artefact but also in the way these organisms and spiritual beings manipulate the world around them.

Due to the great number of plants, as well as limited accessibility to the entirety of their chain of production, I was forced to limit my scope to only seven important plants. The plants presented in this dissertation are the ones that have the most comprehensive information. It is through these plants that I wish to highlight different aspects of ontological limitations, the relationality of local health and the environment which is often overlapping. At the same time, I wish to explore the temporal and spatial characteristics anddifferent types of trade that define the exchange of these plants.

Ethnographic Challenges

The multiple variables and challenges that I faced during the study were directly related to the complexities of the field site. Not only was getting access to some of this information difficult but some locations were dangerous which limited my reach. Navigating the complexities of this territory required a deep understanding of the different social processes that are currently affecting the territory, from the situation with Cocaine production to the peace process, ecological degradation and even interethnic conflicts.

The territory of Putumayo was one of the main fronts of the longstanding internal conflict of Colombia. This conflict was multilayered and complex having a profound impact on the social, ecological and economic reality of the territory. As an overview, it was a violent war between three main groups the FARC guerrilla, paramilitary groups and the government fighting for the control of a key territory of Cocaine production. It is important to highlight that it had a profound and often tragic impact on the communities that are included in this study.

This conflict limited my overall reach; I decided to focus on areas that were not contested Cocaine trade routes, such as specific areas around to the border to Ecuador. Territories around Orito and Puerto Hormiga, and Valle del Guamuez, were either not visited or were visited less. Cocaine plantations are still quite common in the territory, and it has significant influence on the local social, economic and political power structures. Sadly, many Kofan and Ziona shamans who live in this territory were inaccessible. On the other hand, access to many other territories was possible with the proper guides and gatekeepers.

At the same time, distrust of non-indigenous people and especially anthropologists also limited my approach and access to many communities. Slowly, however, as I became more aware of the plants and the local folk knowledge, the local experts were willing to share and discourse their practices in the manner of exchange of knowledge that characterises the network. However, some information was still very complicated to obtain due to this distrust.

Some technical knowledge was also inaccessible. This was particularly the case of many of the mixtures of plants that some shamans have produced after years of constant experimentation and which valuable recipes are kept secret. Fear of biopiracy required careful diplomatic approaches to medicinal plants, in which I reassured the participants that I would not collect information for this type of practice. Many of the medicinal plants are also secret since people are often stealing them in the wild. This meant that access to the plants themselves was extremely complicated. As this type of shamanism becomes ever more popular and more and more young people wish to become shamans, information has become quite valuable, which has accelerated distrust.

As an educated white male from the capital, I was also constantly aware of the colonial dynamics that I shared with my informants and friends. This had an important effect on my point of view as well as the relationships I had with them. I cannot escape this social reality. This system defines the social reality of Colombian interethnic relationships. I have done my best to limit its effect on this ethnography and dissertation.

It is for this reason I have chosen to add my subjective perspective in my study. In an effort to give accounts of my aesthetic and emotional relationships with the plants, especially considering that they do make part of my beliefs and relationship with nature. This subjective approach might not offer the proper objectivity of a scientific study but considering the main point of this dissertation, of establishing and legitimising these plants as active agents, their relationship with me seemed a right place to start. This subjective approach will also seek to highlight the colonial power dynamics in which my subjects and I belong, defining how we exist in this complex meshwork of relationships and how I understand them. By including my relationship with these plants as just another piece of their ecological and cultural landscape I seek to limit the hierarchical dynamics of modern science.

The language was another significant limitation. Language is, for many of these communities, the last place of resistance against colonial expansion. Therefore finding someone who would teach me was dificult. Most of the shamanic practices, however, are shared across ethnic identities, and the philosophical and ontological perspectives could be understood as similar. Spanish is the lingua franca of this network therefore I was able to communicate with all my informants. I also managed to learn some Quechua for classification purposes.

The Non-Human

As mentioned before, this study explores the plants as central characters and actors in the world. To do this, this dissertation will explore seven different plants which play a crucial role in these biocultural landscapes. By exploring these plants, I wish to shed light on the particular meshwork of relationships that make up the local ideas of health, environment, trade and ongoing colonial transformations. Using these plants to anchor each chapter, will facilitate understanding the ethnographic evidence and place it in a theoretical discussion.

Chapter 1 will focus Mopa Mopa (*Elaeagia pastoensis*), used by highland communities in their artisanal woodwork. Even if this plant is not medicinal, it is a great plant to explore the history of trade in the area. This is because there is archaeological evidence of its trade not

only between the Andean foothills and the highlands but also with the Inca empire and later with the Spanish colonial system.

The second chapter, the thesis will look at Chuchuwaza (*Maytenus laevis*). Through this plant, I will explore the ongoing inclusion of it as a medicine into popular Colombian folk medicine. As one of the most utilised and sold Amazonian plants in the markets of the country, it has established itself as an essential medicinal plant for people from multiple cultural backgrounds. It is by observing how Chuchuwaza is transformed from a local indigenous plant into a highly valued medicine in the urban markets of the country that I will highlight the cultural processes behind the use of indigenous shamanism in folk medicine.

The third chapter, Borachero (*Brugmansia* sp.) will be used to explore the shamanic networks in the highlands of Putumayo. This plant is widely used throughout Amazonia and has a close connection to humans. People have bred many varieties which are widely exchanged and bartered. It will offer a window into the shamanic web in Putumayo, in which exchange is not limited to medicines, biodiversity and shamanic tools but also to cultural practices and knowledge.

I will then explore Ayahuasca, of which *Banisteriopsis caapi* is the most important plant in the medicinal repertoire of local shamans and an important master. However, in an attempt to offer something different to the vast library on this subject, this chapter will use Ayahuasca as a means for theoretical and ontological discussion. It will look at the ontological realms and its borders, as well as the hybrid beings that are formed in between them (Descola, 2013). It is also in this chapter where I will explore the limitations of my emic perspective, as well as the necessary theoretical shift required to explore these medicinal plants.

Chapter 5 will talk about Chondur which is a sedge of the *Cyperus* genus. This plant is an invaluable ally to fight sickness, and I will use it to explore the medicinal landscape of the region of the Andean foothills. Exploring its multiple forms and applications both as a tool to fight the different beings that cause disease and illness and the sheer variation of the

medicinal world of the Andean foothills. This chapter will give a general overview of the meshwork of relationships that make up health in this territory.

Yoco (*Paullinia yoco*) will be analysed in chapter 6. This plant is one of the most culturally important plants for indigenous people in this territory. However, it can only grow in the wild and requires careful spiritual attention when working with it. In chapter 6, I will explore the relationships that define the way local people relate to nature as animist as well as the changing attitudes produced by colonial and western influence.

Finally, as a means of scaling up this study, chapter 7 will look at Coca (*Erythroxylum Coca*). This plant has historically been a major part of local indigenous worldviews but soon was hijacked into the illegal global trade. This transformation is visible not only in the effect it has on the territory and the social fabric of the local communities but also on the physicality of the plant itself that has seen severe transformations.

By using this experimental layout to write this dissertation, I risk reducing the complexities of local cultural practices, as well as the multi-layered meshwork of relationships that make up the social fabric of this territory. However, my point here is not to give a detailed analysis of an ethnic group or traditional practice but instead experiment with the possibility of non-human ethnography in a territory like Putumayo. I wish to show the reader a more comprehensive picture of the role these plants have in the local biocultural landscape, while at the same time exploring the many layers and scales in which they interact with both local, regional and global phenomena. These plants have a central place in indigenous worldview, and in an effort to legitimize this I have placed them in the centre of this study.

Chapter 1 Mopa Mopa

Image 2: ELaeagia pastoensis Source: (Newman, Kaplan and Derrick, 2015)

On Movement

Socratea exorrhiza is a palm that is believed to walk through the forest. How it walks is a manner of perspective; it is so slow that for us humans, the palm seems static. Yet evidence of its walking path is visible for keen observers, its long root system allows it to be above the soil, growing new roots to the sides while older roots rot and detach. By growing roots towards one side, the palm moves slightly over a period of time. However, this has been widely disclaimed by botanists, stating that the plant's root system is not necessarily there to walk but to take advantage of the complex soils and sunlight exposition (Radford, 2009). This movement is clearly apparent for people who live in this forest. The walking palm is considered a curiosity and my informants often mention it during our long walks through the forest. If plants were alive why wouldn´t they be able to move around like the rest of us?

For many modern urbanites, it seems that plants do not actually move that much. Obviously, most of us know that a plant grows vertically and horizontally, but that is about it when we

think of botanical movement. This might have something to do with plant blindness as they outline the stage of the human world, yet their movement define entire livelihoods. Their movement demands constant action by the human cohabitant. Knowing how a plant will move, grow, and behave becomes indispensable when working with our floral partners.

Unlike some of the Aristotelian traditions in philosophy, the shamans in Putumayo do not consider the plant world to be at the bottom of the pyramid of life; instead, plants hold a cental role compared to animals and humans. Plants here are the mediators, they are a node that connects multiple worlds together. They do not exist as separate individuals but are made up of complex relationships with other beings. This is what gives them their capacity to act and move, it is exactly these movements which define entire relationships with the environment and the human social realm.

Even at a biological level this is true since, as we know, plants move and spread through the forest floor through growth, pollination, seed dispersal, death and rotting, all of which are tightly linked with other organisms. Much as the walking palm may not literally move, its seeds are widely eaten by a variety of larger animals such as peccaries and some birds, allowing it to expand beyond its physical limitations.

Therefore, let us begin with the idea that plant movement is possible through relationships with other beings: with the sun, soil, people and spiritual owners, which allow it to grow and transform through time. Yet, this is not the only way they move since they can transcend their physical form and become something greater. On some occasions, they themselves are spiritual being that mediate the complex landscape of health in these territories. In other instances, they can become hybrid beings such as animal-plant or part of a web of interconnected beings that allow for it to move through different regions and ecosystems.

In other words these beings do not "occupy the world, they inhabit it" (Ingold, 2011: pg71) threading their existence in the meshwork weave that makes up the social-ecological landscape. These meshworks of existence, like vines, spread through the landscape entangling different beings, often blurring the lines between species.

Indeed most of these beings are not individuals so much as they are the result of relationships, both with other inhabitants of the forest and with the spiritual and human. These relationships are important, since for the different people who actively work with these plants, knowing how they connect and interact with the different beings and selves is vital to understand how they might work for the benefit or harm of their patients. It is for this reason that plants have such a central role of in the social life of the people of Putumayo, interconnecting them with the overall environment of the region, while at the same time influencing how people relate to their spiritual and religious worldview, their body and the other cohabitants of this world.

In the next few chapters, I will explore the movement of plants as part of trade, which has an enormous effect on the day-to-day life of the inhabitants of Putumayo. This is especially true as plants often move far more than what we like to think, since when they are traded, bartered, and exchanged. They flow through different places, different ontologies, even different ecological landscapes connecting people, offering spaces for cultural exchanges and building new worlds.

Humans, therefore, play an integral part of this plant movement. No doubt we take advantage of plants for our livelihoods but by doing this, the plants take advantage of our capacity to move to spread out and expand their habitat. In the same way, plants use animals for dispersal they use humans to disperse seeds. Many of the plants that I have chosen for this dissertation depend on humans for their reproduction. Some depend on humans for their reproduction. This has allowed them to spread beyond their ecological niches, as they become deeply tied to human environments.

From the perspective of the plant, trade is also movement, both as biological dispersal but also as a way to move through different ontological landscapes. As they are exchanged by people with a diversity of ontological backgrounds they are transformed both physically and symbolically to fit into new worlds.

A History of Trade in Putumayo

To explore the nuances of medicinal plant trade in the Putumayo region, we must first add a historical perspective. Working in the Andean foothills in Putumayo I became very aware of the historical processes that produced the modern economic and social realities of the region. Mocoa is at the crossroads between the Amazonian lowlands and the Andean highlands and the flow of people, products and culture through time have had an enormous effect on the local population and its environment. The diversity of communities who live in this territory has been interwoven together through a wide array of historical processes. They have lived through different forms of migration, from highland-lowland prehispanic migrations to those caused by colonialism and recent statebuilding projects. These communities are a result of these movements, as they are not isolated but instead interconnected with different groups of the Andean and Amazonian regions.

As we will see, trade between the Andes and the Amazon has flowed since pre-Columbian times. By the time the Spanish arrived, there were already complex networks of trade and exchange that connected vast regions of the continent. In this chapter, I will explore the history of trade in the region which has effectively linked both the highlands and the lowland, establishing in the foothills new dynamics that had a profound effect on how people live today.

Image 3. Two ceremonial Queros or Keros made with Mopa Mopa Varnish. The one on the left is from the precolumbian Inca period XVth Century. The one in the right was done in 19th century made with Spanish and indigenous representations. Museo del Arte de Lima object reference IV-2.3-0593 and 2012.22.51 (Museo del Arte de Lima, 2012)

It is for this reason I will talk about Mopa Mopa. Even if plants have been traded and exchanged in these mountain slopes through the ages few plants have a historical continuity at the same level as Mopa Mopa (*Elaeagia pastoensis*). I must clarify, Mopa Mopa is not a medicinal plant, however, I have included it in this dissertation because unlike the other plants explored during this fieldwork, there is archaeological and historical evidence of the trade of Mopa Mopa that can be traced from prehispanic trade networks all the way into modern commodity exchange[3]. It is a luxury item that has been continually exploited and traded from the Andean foothills to the highland markets for centuries. Establishing an

[3] Retrospectively, I regret not exploring the historical ties of Quina *(Cinchona sp.*) in this territory. However, during my time in the field I did not come across an active use of Quina. This might be due to the lack of Cinchona sp. in the Amazon basin as it is a plant grows in the highland forest and is associated with Andean medicine. In any case in future publicatons I will probably add Cinchona as it offers an interestin perspective on global trade in the 18th century.

important trading connection between both ecological and cultural regions that have not only helped the expansion of the Mopa Mopa industry but allowed for symbolic and cultural notions and ideas to flow between them. This inconspicuous plant will help me explore some of the bibliographical, archaeological and ethnographic evidence on plant trade in the Andes foothills. It will also allow me to give context to the vast and complex region of interconnected communities I am trying to describe.

Most of the primary sources on Pre-Columbian trade networks in western Amazonia are patchy. Archaeology in the lowlands of the Amazon has always been difficult due to the high humidity that accelerates the degradation of organic evidence. Mostly Amazonian and lowland archaeology depends on evidence in the form of pottery, ornaments and more recently rock art (Riris, 2017) and only limited evidence of trade has reached us today (Echeverria and Uribe, 1995; Ramírez de Jara, 1996; Salomon, 1980; Butt-Colson, 1973). Evidence of some of the lowland ceramics has been found in the highland territories of Cachi, Sibundoy and Ipiales (Bray, 2005), which are believed to be recipients of certain ceremonial medicinal plants. Yet plant material is even more difficult to find since it does not preserve well.

At the same time written historical chronicles from the early and late colonial periods give first-hand accounts of trade in the region, albeit often biased. The early chronicles were unreliable narrators when showing the full picture of these demographic and cultural transformations, however, they did show complex cultural landscapes where sophisticated trade did happen (Oberem, 1974; Salomon, 1980). When the Spanish conquistadors first contacted the Inca they were astounded by their complex trade network which guaranteed the supply many of the luxury and food products from all over their empire. As the Spanish consolidated their power, they used these trade networks to conquer the Inca and subdue them under the Spanish crown. However, complex trade routes were not unique to the highlands, in the Amazon lowlands such as the Guayana shield, European explorers documented extensive trade routes as they travelled through the complex systems of rivers in and around the massif. Here they documented barter economies, ritual gift exchange and inter-ethnic specialisation of products (Butt-Colson, 1973; 1985; Dreyfus, 1992) yet they also

inadvertently documented a system which was in disarray due to the pressures of colonial transformations.

In the later colonial period, the need to control the trade routes was a key for the consolidation of the colonial system and this required careful documentation. However, unlike the highlands, during most of the colonial history, the Amazon lowlands were seen as savage and unholy lands, with little incentive to maintain economic and political control. Those products that were found profitable by Spanish authorities were quickly exported to territories which were under the political and economic control of the crown. For those products that could not be exported and instead required local harvesting and foraging, such as Quina[4], guaranteeing the flow of these trade routes was indispensable for the crown (Crawford, 2016). Mopa Mopa was also a valued commodity for regional powers thus its flow from the lowlands was guaranteed, and it was well documented. Medicinal plants in regional folk medicine, however, were not as valuable for the colonial system. Therefore, their trade was barely registered.

More recently small-scale trade and barter networks in the Amazon have been widely documented by anthropologists, mostly showing the complex interethnic relationships that expanded well beyond ecological and regional zones (Oberem, 1974; Uribe, 1985; 1986; 1995; Ramirez, 1992; 1994; Salomon, 1980; Butt-Colson, 1973; 1985; Hugh Jones, 1992; Mansutti Rodriguez, 1986; Dolmatoff, 1986). Often trade and barter are shown deeply entwined with war and kinship patterns. There is evidence that many communities belong to extensive networks of exchange (Dolmatoff 1986; Correa 1997; Landaburu and Pineda 1984; Gasché, 2009; Echeverri, 1997; Grotti, 2013). They share many cultural practices as well as myths and some linguistic characteristics. For example, the "People of the Centre" in and around Putumayo and Caqueta river are a multiethnic and pluri linguistic community who share similar sociocultural practices, history and mythological origin. They have an

[4] Even though *Cinchona* does not grow in the Amazonian lowlands, it grows in mountainous areas throughout the Andes, some species of *Cinchona* are known to grow in the Andean foothills of Putumayo

established barter and ritualised trade network that extends throughout the region (Gasché, 2009; Echeverri, 1997).

Ethnohistorical analysis has shown that the Andaqui who are known as the People of the Axe, had a vital role in the extended prehispanic trade network that exchanged stone axes. Since stone in the lowland Amazon is a rare and coveted item, a trading network based on stone axes incorporated many communities around this territory (Landaburu and Pineda, 1984). With the arrival of metal, these stone axe networks quickly fizzled out, yet the tradition of exchange still binds the communities here. Often people prefer to obtain certain objects by trade even though they are perfectly capable of making them themselves in order to incentivise kinship bounds and intracultural exchange (Hugh-Jones, 1992).

In the Andean piedmont, the complex interconnectivity between the highlands and the lowlands facilitated extended networks that interconnected two very different ecological and cultural regions. There has been some research on the interconnection between the lowlands and the highlands in recent years, especially when it comes to the middle and southern Andean region. This is especially the case with the often fluid frontier between the Inca empire and the lowlands, which not only establishes a defined process of military domination but also builds on complex processes of acculturation through social structuralization and trade (Platt, 2009; Alconini, 2004). The communities who were at the frontier of the Inca Empire reflected the coming together of two very different spheres, the highland altiplano and the lowland forests (Taylor, 1996; Murra, 1972; Dudley, 2011; Ramírez de Jara, 1996; Salomon 1986). They were the mediators the intermediaries between both worlds. Their cultural characteristics demonstrated this. Symbolic and cultural objects from both worlds have been found in their archaeological record and their identity today is often tied to both the lowlands and the highlands. Examples of this bifocal world are the communities from Sibundoy, since they are highland communities who have a close symbolic relationship with the lowlands, while at the same time acknowledging their past from both lowland and highland origin.

The relationship between Andean and Amazonian worlds was and is still permeable, continually exchanging with each other. Putumayo being both a part of the Andean piedmont and the lowland basin has various systems of trade that reflect this interwoven relationship. One of these systems of trade is the complex vertical exchange system that still to this day is part of the lives of many people from Mocoa, Sibundoy and Pasto. Ethnohistorical and archaeological evidence highlight the role of many of the indigenous groups still seen today, primarily the indigenous communities of Kofan, Kametza and the Inga (Echeverría and Uribe, 2018; Uribe, 1986; Ramírez de Jara, 1996; Ramírez de Jara and Urrea Giraldo, 1990).

Like most of the Andean region, different temperatures zones define the ecological niches of the mountainous regions of Putumayo. John Victor Murra (1972) proposes that these slopes are used through a verticle exchange system, which allows the local communities control the many different ecological niches and products. This system helped these communities take advantage of the different temperatures, soils and environmental characteristics to grow a wide viriety of crops throughout the year. Through this process, they consolidated not only the control of a large number of ecosystems but also ensured frequent exchanges between different ethnic and linguistic groups. In other words, by using this system, trade and exchange became a necessary practice in the Andean region.

Examples of this system have been reported throughout Colombia, Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia. The Jibaro and Kofan of Ecuador had a complex trade network with the highlands of Ecuador, accessing mineral salt in the highlands in exchange for slaves, curare poison, and animal products (Salomon, 1980). In Colombia the Muisca had extensive trade networks with the lowland grasslands where they accessed several of their medicines, most importantly Yopo (*Anadenanthera peregrina*) (Torres and Repke, 2006). The Inca are known to have had an important trade relationship with lowland forest, defining their cosmological worlview through the duality between lowlands and highlands (Murra, 1985).

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In his book, *The Ethnic Lords of Quito*, Frank Salomon (1980) shows how this vertical production system existed in the Andean region in three main models. All of these would

show different scales of use of thermal zones, woven into complex webs of interconnected communities. The first model are the smaller communities, which used and still use the different temperature zones to harvest products moving from one place to the next. The second model, however established extended networks of trade that were connected by market towns. These market towns would pop up in regions where people from different ecological and cultural backgrounds could come together and exchange goods. Finally, the third model is a large often multicultural and multiregional trade system which is based on merchant class.

Historically, these systems of trade fluctuated constantly. Archaeological and historical evidence has shown how these approaches to trade were on many occasions just part of an overall system. Complex Andean communities would probably partake in a variety of methods to take advantage of the altitudinal zones (Murra, 2002).

In modern times as faster transportation, greater interconnectivity, as well as cultural and economic transformations has had an effect on the region, only a few original trade networks still exist. One of which is the system observed in the Putumayo foothills.

Vertical Production Systems in Putumayo

As mentioned the vertical system of production is found throughout Colombia. In the northern region of Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta indigenous communities actively move from one temperature zone to another harvesting a diversity of crops. The Kogui, Ika and Wiwa have for centuries moved through the mountain, inhabiting certain thermic floors according to the seasons, taking advantage of different climates and the crops that live in them (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1951). Moving according to the respective crop that needs to be harvested.

Vertical trade is dominant in foothill areas such as Putumayo and Caqueta, and Cauca. This system required centres or markets where the different regions were connected, usually populated regions at the crossroads of different ecosystems. Salomon uses a Nahuatl term

“Tianguez” (1980) to denote these market towns where people from a large distance might come together to trade their products. The Tianguez were established in a geographical centre and people throughout the territory would come and trade their products. A great example is the town of Silvia in the department of Cauca, which every week receives people from throughout the region selling products from the lowlands as well as the highlands regions. In this market, several Inga traders bring medicinal plants from the Lowlands and offer healing ceremonies with Ayahuasca.

Similarly, the pre-Columbian trade networks extended well beyond ethnic borders with huge networks that encompassed a variety of ecological and ethnic regions such as the Amazon, the Orinoco basin and the Pacific Coast. Establishing large population centres of power, such as Quito, Cuzco, Pasto, Zipaquira to name a few (Cárdenas-Arroyo and Bray, 1998). These markets would not only trade agricultural goods but would also trade luxury products such as gold, salt, bush meat and textiles as well as crops and medicinal plants from a variety of ecosystems. As is the case of the markets of Silvia some of them still exist today, however, most quickly integrated into the colonial systems, consolidating their economic and political power over the entire territory. The market of Pasto was quickly incorporated into the Spanish colonial system, and indigenous product such as the Mopa Mopa was later adapted as part of the Spanish symbolic system.

Larger trade networks depended on crucial trade routes that connected the highlands economic and political centres with the lowlands. These would go through middlemen, especially communities in regions between the highlands and the lowlands. For Anne-Christine Taylor (1996) these communities or “Montaña” communities are still found throughout the Andes. In southern Colombia, Ecuador and Bolivia where the mountains are steeper the lack of permanent population limits trade. Yet, some markets towns have sprong up in valley, connecting many different communities. In Ecuador, some of these towns connect the lowlands and the highlands facilitating their trade. These “tianguez” still exist today. In Colombia, the towns in the Sibundoy and Pitalito valleys could be classified as "tianguez" since they were set up for trading purposes (Ramírez de Jara, 1996).

On the other hand in the middle Andes such as Peru, access to the lowlands was easier due to paths flow through the valleys. Communities of traders would travel continuously from the highlands and the lowlands through these paths. These communities were what the Spanish would call “Mindales” and they flowed not only through the Inca Empire but were a common feature of the colonial markets up until the 20th century. The Spanish sources would classify them as a separate ethnic group, landless and nomadic to a certain extent. This Spanish term “Mindal” would be used to classify many trading communities in the Andes (Lorandi, 1983).

These travelling trading communities comprise the third system of trade classified by Frank Salomon (1980). When the Spanish arrived, they came across a large trading network controlled by this group of merchants. These were known as "mitmaqkuna", which means exiled people in Quechua. These were people from different parts of the empire relocated to frontier trade post to guarantee the flow of goods from neighbouring regions into Cusco and other centres of the Inca Empire. At the same time as a warring merchant class, they helped consolidate the political and military control of these posts (Lorandi, 1983).

In the western slopes of the Northern reaches of the empire, these communities would constantly travel from the lowlands to the highland bringing luxury goods that were appreciated by the highland communities. They spread throughout the lowland foothills of Peru and Ecuador, and they make part of the Quechua speaking populations that inhabit the forests (Lorandi, 1983).

In the southern and central Andes, the Inca, with a more complex centralised military and economic power, had an established Mindal system. The Tahuantinsuyo or Inca Empire had established extended trade networks for military and economic dominance through a warrior/merchant class. During the rapid military and economic expansion of the Inca, many of the Montaña communities throughout the Andes were quickly assimilated (Salomon, 1980). The central powers of Cusco managed its trading networks with precision expanding them throughout the Andean region. Inca traders would establish links with lowland communities who in part would supply the empire with slaves, medicinal plants and other

products from deep in the forest. As mentioned, the dualist approach of highland/lowland, is a complementary form of Inca identity, and was crucial to their worldview, reinforcing their continuous conection with the lowlands (Carpinter, 1992).

By the time the Spanish arrived, the Inca expansion had reached the southern border of Colombia. The Pasto, who inhabited this region of Colombia, had solidified administrative and policial control over much of the Colombian Massif controlling the trade between the highlands and the lowlands of the Amazon and the Pacific coast (Echeverría and Uribe, 1995; Uribe, 1986; Uribe & Lleras, 1985). They had established not only exchange of goods but also exchanged symbolical artefacts, establishing deep cultural bonds with those lowland communities. Consolidated their power through marriage alliances and kinship exchange, they exerted their influence on much of the southern regions of Colombia (Echeverría and Uribe, 1995; Uribe, 1986).

In their rush for military expansion, the Inca tried several small-scale and unsuccessful attacks on the Pasto during the late parts of their northern campaign. They already had a commercial relationship with the Pastos as Inca Mindales flocked into this territory trading objects from the Southern Andes, but now Huayan Cupac, the great Inca conquerer, wanted to dominate them militarily as well (Uribe, 1986).

However, it was not the Pasto but the Spanish diseases that stopped the Inca expansion in their tracks. Huayan Cupac died of one such disease, and instead of invading the Pastos, the empire quickly collapsed into civil war (Echeverría and Uribe, 1995; Uribe, 1986). This meant that the Inca were never able to consolidate military and administrative power in the regions.

Much the same way Tahuantinsuyo established dominance through trade, the Spanish Empire incorporated the region by controlling the trade routes. While the Tianguez towns would quickly be incorporated into the Spanish system, the Mindales continued existing well beyond the conquest. Missionaries, who were one of the main ways of colonial control, spread to the lowlands by the same routes used by Mindales for generations (Goulet, 2003).

The interethnic landscapes in Putumayo are a direct result of this process. The Inga and the Kitchwa, the only Quechua speaking communities in Colombia trace their origin to the merchant/warrior cast of the Inca. “Venimos del sur, eramos guerreros del Inca que llegamos hasta aquí” “We came from the south, we were warriors of the Inca who arrived here” a man told me while I waited in the offices of the main governmental building of the resguardo of Santiago Sibundoy. The Colombian state (Ministerio de Cultura, 2010), has also accepted this origin as official, citing local experts. However, I was never truly convinced of this since other Inga whom I spoke with did not know how to answer the question of the Inga origin, and those who did would tell me contradicting stories, such as an origin from the lowlands. In anthropology, this is also widely debated, since Quechua was a common vernacular language in the early stage of the Spanish empire in the Amazon and could explain why so many groups used this language (Gow, 1996; Ramírez de Jara, 1996a; 1996b). Whether the Inga came from the lowlands or from the southern Highlands, it does not matter, they ended up taking control of trade in the region, and much in the same way the Mindales did in the early colonial period.

On the other hand, the Kametza of Sibundoy are a Montaña community. They are considered to originate from somewhere in the north of the country, however as a language isolate this has been difficult to prove. No matter what their origin might be, the Kametza were one of the neighbouring communities who facilitated the trade between Pasto, Inca and later the Spanish with the lowland forest (Pinzon and Ramirez, 1992). One of the main roads to the Amazonian lowlands goes through the Sibundoy valley, “El Camino de la Medicina”, and the Kamentza who inhabit this territory share cultural characteristics with Andean and lowland communities. Their importance as middlemen was highlighted when the Capuchin built a large monastery in the valley as a base for future lowland expeditions (Goulet, 2003).

The case of lowland communities is much harder to identify. There is evidence of continued exchange with highland markets, especially when it comes to some key products such as some spices and medicines as well as Mopa Mopa. However, the ethnic origin of these communities is difficult to establish since they have changed so much in recent history. The

Mocoa, who gave their name to the city, through disease and colonial destruction have ceased to exist. The Corenguaje and Andaqui who inhabit some areas between Caqueta and Putumayo arrived here from the lowlands as a result of the violence of the Rubber barons (Casas Aguilar, 1999). Many of the communities who were highlighted by the colonial and early republican documents have changed so much that it is difficult to state with absolute certainty that they were there.

Those who can, such as the Kofan, have seen profound transformation through the middle and late colonial period. Not only did the first missionaries establish townships to convert lowland indigenous populations but also as these townships became centres of trade, they attracted more local indigenous people (Goulet, 2003). These townships, however, faced wave after wave of demographic collapse due in part to epidemics. Slowly, as people from the highlands migrated into the territory, their populations shifted into more mestizo and colona (Ramírez de Jara and Urrea Giraldo, 1990). Mocoa, Puerto Asis and other modern towns are all result of this process, going from centres of indigenous indoctrination to colonial towns. These towns became centres of Spanish and state control over the communities around them (Ramírez de Jara and Urrea Giraldo, 1990).

Lowland communities would continue trading with Mindales up to the XIX century and even today require highland traders to get many products. At the same time, Inga traders still trade in the urban markets of Colombia and Ecuador. Even if the colonial and republican periods widely transformed the traditional trading systems in Colombia, some of these trading routes are still used today. The route that goes from Mocoa to Pasto is one of these, still actively exchanging not only medicines and luxury items but also knowledge, worldviews and practices that influence the way people relate to their world. Indispensable lowland resources for highland communities guaranteed the resilience of this trade, even when lowlands became isolated due to changing demographic processes. One of them is Ayahuasca, as we will see in future chapters, however for the artesan communities of Pasto it was Mopa Mopa.

Mopa Mopa

As we can see, Mopa Mopa was and still is part of this complex system of trade that expanded throughout Southern Colombia since before the Spanish arrived. It is famously known as the "Barniz de Pasto" or the Pasto varnish. It is a small tropical plant that grows in the lowland forest but it is an instrumental part of the identity and culture of the highland city of Pasto. Its continuous use, since before the Spanish arrived, gives us an interesting overview of a localised trade network, one that deeply influences Mocoa and the Putumayo. This plant is an excellent example of the transformation and assimilation of the complex trading system by colonial powers. It also offers a general overview of the highland/lowland trade of biodiversity that has been part of this area for centuries. Even though Mopa Mopa is not a medicine, the lack of reliable information on the continual lowland/highland trade of medicines makes it difficult to truly explore these dynamics.

The method and technique of harvesting Mopa Mopa seem to have changed little since precolombian times, even if the ethnic landscape has been completely transformed. Mestizo still harvest and trade Mopa Mopa in a similar fashion, and artisans still use it with the same technique as seen in some of the archaeological evidence (Freedman, 1985). This continued practice has fomented the interconnectivity between the two regions, as the main raw resource of Mopa Mopa is found in the lowlands, which in part facilitated the cultural connection between the regions of Sibundoy and Mocoa.

Therefore I found myself looking in the markets and forest of Putumayo for the raw Mopa Mopa.

> "Toca ir bien adentro, eso se encuentran por montones. Lo que le dicen la Mopa Mopa para hacer el barniz" "You have to go pretty deep, you will find many of them, what they call Mopa Mopa to make the varnish" Doña J. once told me in the market of Mocoa.

She was referring to the famed preColombian artisanal product known as Barniz de Pasto. I had decided to ask her casually, seeking to understand what other products they could find in the forest around Mocoa.

> "Eso van hasta familias enteras para buscar el barniz y se traen kilos" "Whole families go to find this varnish and they bring back kilos of it" referring to the ongoing exploitation of this ancestral plant even to this day.

Mopa Mopa (*Elaeagia Pastoensis)* is a medium shrub that has dark green elliptic leaves from the Rubiaceae family. It is only found in the clouded forest ecosystems between of the Andean slopes 500 to 1200 meters in and around the region of Mocoa. It is an average looking shrub that sometimes grows somewhat tall. However, its most particular characteristic is the gum that covers the leaves, especially its buds, flowers and fruit. This gives them a smooth and shiny look. For the plant, this waxy gum is an effective deterrent against herbivores especially protecting the young leaves that are easy to digest. For humans, this gum is the main source of the varnish. The young leaves and buds are of particular interest as this is where the plant contains most of its waxy gum. The little reddish buds are shiny, about 5cm in diameter and grow in at the end of the different stalks and branches as the plant grows its leaves in decussate –opposite pattern of leaves with the next pairs growing in right angles to each other like a cross--.

Image 4: Eleaeagia Pastoensis
(Mora-Osejo, 1977)

During my time in Putumayo, I did not see much Mopa Mopa plants. Due to their rarity their accessibility is widely protected. However, I did manage to talk with people who actively harvest the plants as well as trade it and make it into a craft. According to many of those who were interviewed, harvesting is not particularly difficult; it often requires nimble fingers as the young buds are easy to break off even without the help of a knife. When harvesting it is essential to carry a basket where the buds can be stored since they can pop out quite easily from the tree and their small size means they can get lost. People can harvest only several grams of Mopa Mopa per plant, which is often sold in the market. In order to maximize the yield, many cut down the entire plant, which facilitates the gathering of the buds. This has proven to be a risk for the population of these plants, which are being overharvested and according to all of my sources, is becoming harder to find. Since most of the gum is still

collected from wild plants, their location is guarded and kept a secret to reduce the risk of thievery.

As Doña J. explains:

> "Esta escaso el barniz por que ya no hay casi, toca buscar mucho" "It has become scarce since you can barely find a plant, you need to look a lot". Those who have access to the plant protect it by only harvesting it in certain times a year. Recently more people have become interested in the prospect of having a sustainable use of this resource actively managing the wild populations, growing seedlings closer to their homes and in some rare cases, trying to grow a plantation.

Don C. who had land towards the road to Pasto was already on his second try when I saw the little seedlings growing in the shade. "Son difíciles de crecer, pero ahí vamos tratando" "they are hard to grow, but we will keep trying," he said stating that he had also gotten some recommendations by a local agro-ecologist in an effort to grow a stable population to supply the highland artisans. However, his attempts to successfully grow a cutting near his land had proven difficult and he would still harvest the gum from a wild population he knew grew deep in the forest to sell in the market "Le gusta la sombra, y no crece por semilla, toca con esqueje" "It likes the shade, and it doesn't grow from the seed, it has to be through a cutting". This statement demonstrate the complex relationship people have with this plant, as knowledge of the botanical and ecological characteristics of the plant might not mean having power over it. As a self (Kohn, 2014) it has its own agency, limiting and defining its use by people.

Any person who has access to the forest collects the gum. Mostly indigenous people who have land deep in the foothill mountain forests are able to access the plants directly. Finding it is difficult, however as some of the foragers have stated, it likes valleys and flat areas. Yet, as more and more *colono*s move into these mountains they have gained control over the population of these plants establishing constant availability for further trade.

In the city of Mocoa, where most of the harvesters take the buds to be sold, white *colono*s are generally the middlemen who have control over the trade routes to Pasto. This echoes the trend of *colono* migration from the highlands, who mostly came from Nariño and Pasto. These merchants were originally from Pasto, meaning that they have greater access to the artisans of this city. In Mocoa, those few merchants who traded Mopa Mopa had a personal connection to those artisans and would easily send several kilos of the raw resource per season. During my time in the field, I did not meet Indigenous people who sold Mopa Mopa in bulk.

Once it arrives in Pasto the raw Mopa Mopa is processed to make Barniz de Pasto. This technique consists of hitting the resin with a club for several minutes, breaking down some of the natural impurities in the buds. This process is repeated several times letting it rest in warm water. After a while, the resin will stretch like gum. The artisan will stretch and knead the varnish gum with their fingers, while the heat of the fingers will make it softer. At this point, the gum can be stretched into strings to finalise the purification process, after which it is placed on a grinder that will make it into fine dust. By the end of this process, the gum becomes malleable, and the colour is added. This colour can be industrial or a natural colourant from plants like achiote (*Bixia orellana*) or the cochineal insect (*Dactylopius coccus*). The varnish will be kneaded until it spread evenly. After which the artisan will grab it with his teeth and stretch it to form a thin sheet of the resin that is then placed directly on the wooden surface. The forms are then carved into the sheet of varnish and the leftovers are removed often leaving intricate patterns of both indigenous and colonial designs. Warm water is then applied to varnish to keep it from peeling off. (Freedman, 1985)

The origin of this craft is unknown. Most likely it did not originate in the highlands, instead, it probably started in the lowland forest where the plant grew in the wild and was traded, along with seashells, coral beads and feathers, by Protopasto communities (Jaramillo, 1982). Archaeological evidence of this extended trade network is found in Protopasto deposits since these communities had complex burials full of objects from different ecological regions (Uribe & Lleras, 1985).

As mentioned the Pastos would establish a trading network that extended from the eastern lowlands all across the Macizo Colombiano to the Pacific coast (Uribe & Lleras, 1985). Like many other highland/lowland trade routes, there were some syncretic processes evident in the Pasto art (Friedman, 1985; Jaramillo 1982). The importance of the lowlands for local cosmology was evident in many of the artistic motifs in their art, such as jaguars and serpents as well as other symbolic materials that are from the lowlands such as hardwoods and animal parts (Jaramillo 1982). Like other Andean communities, the forest and jungles of the Amazon were not only the place where people obtained products but also places full of magic and symbolic power (Carpinter, 1992).

By the time the Inca had sent their merchant/warrior cast to the southern territories of Colombia, the varnish products were of such good quality, they were quickly traded as luxury items to decorate the wooden ceremonial cups or "qiru" of Cuzco (Jaramillo, 1982). Pasto artisans were sent to Cuzco and other political and economic centres of the empire to make many of these valued artefacts.

This craft was later incorporated into the Spanish trade system, becoming an important craft for churches and wealthy Spanish landowners with objects such as furniture, chest and church altars (Friedmann, 1985). This quick adoption was an incentive for the persistence of the trade. As the Pasto ethnic community was slowly assimilated into urban mestizo populations, the artisans transformed from indigenous to Spanish artisan class. This gave them a higher social ranking in the strict racial hierarchy of the colony (Friedmann, 1985).

Image 5: Beautiful Mopa Mopa Varnish Cabinet W.5-2015. (V and A, 2017)

Thus, the craft endured through generations and monopolised by mestizo and white artisan families who still work on it today. The continued use of indigenous and traditional trade practices is rare in Colombia, yet the in the case of Mopa Mopa it has flourished. As the quality of this craft allowed for the incorporation to the Spanish elite and latter to the mestizo and Criollo —Colombian word for naturalised Spanish—communities.

It is no surprise that the Barniz de Pasto is widely celebrated as a cultural heritage of the nation of Colombia. Its indigenous origin and incorporation into the Christian and Spanish worldview are seen as an example of the ongoing mestizo ideology that makes up the Colombian identity. Mestizaje as a nation-building ideology is common throughout Latin America, often seen as a political process of domination of the lower and subaltern classes, into a homogenous white mestizo country. If seen like this, the Pasto varnish is an excellent case study, since it shows the gradual process of whitening of an indigenous practice. However, as with everything, the simplicity of this ideology is deceiving. The importance of its indigenous origin, not only to local harvesters and artisans calling it "milenaria" but Colombian academics who constantly cite its precolombian origins, highlights how indigeneity is still a coveted notion in the mestizo ideology. Here we see that the varnish is far more than a homogeneous mestizo product but a mosaic (Wade, 2005) that can permanently reconstitute itself, creating and destroying alterity, mixing while at the same time reinforcing the white and Indian worlds.

As we can see the shift from indigenous trade to *colono* traders is illustrative. It was a gradual phenomenon directly related to changing populations and colonial pressures, producing profound social restructuring. It is important to note that most of the urban population in southern Colombia are now non-indigenous, while the indigenous populations have been reduced to rural areas. The Pasto, who used to live in the areas around the colonial town have lost their language. Meanwhile, the region was known for its monarchist position during the war of independence and faced isolation from the central power of Quito and Bogotá. This allowed for further restructuring their notions of whiteness, indigeneity and mestizoism, in which the local artisans had an important role. This process highlights how traditional systems of trade can continue even if they are transformed and incorporated it into the new mestizo world.

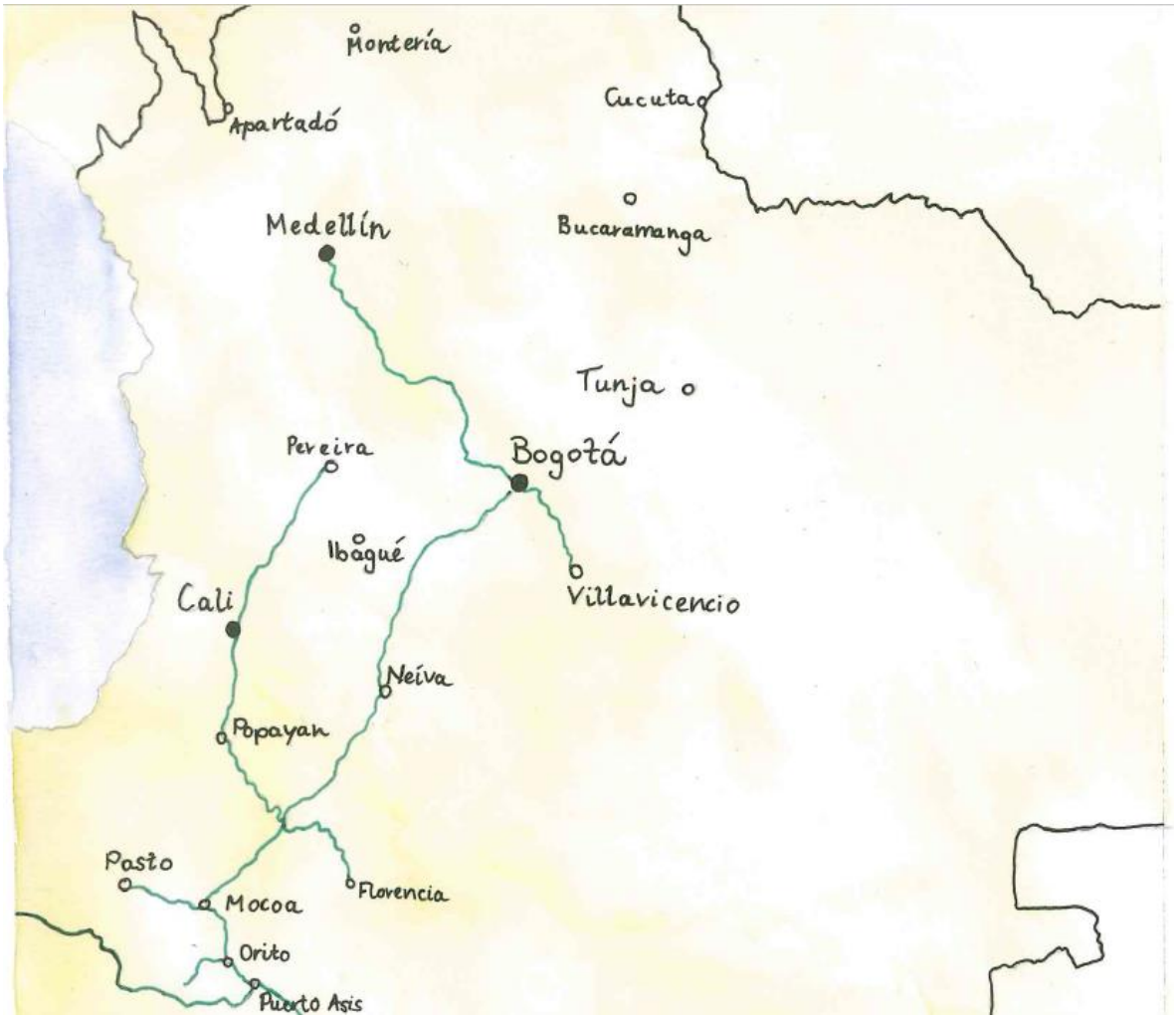
Throughout this chapter, I have given a general account of the historical processes in the southern regions of Colombia. The eastern slopes of the Andes have seen a gradual transformation that has had an enormous effect on local communities. The trade routes that

connect both the highlands and the lowlands serve as an axis for exchange between two ecological and cultural regions. The availability of such a diversity of different ecological niches, facilitates and incentivises such trade, while the ecological limitations of these plants force local communities to travel the steep paths to access them.

It must be stated that this trade is not unidirectional as trade from the highlands to the lowlands is as common and very important for local communities. The medicinal plant merchants in the lowlands get most of their small herbaceous plants from the highlands. Plants such as basil, rosemary, elderflower, eucalyptus, which grow in the highlands very well, are widely used by lowland merchants, healers, and patient. As more highland communities migrate here from the highlands, bringing with them the knowledge of highland medicines, they have become indispensable for local health.

The flow of trading products between the highlands and the lowlands has defined regions like Sibundoy and Mocoa. However, this trade has also made possible a wider web of exchange that includes not only the Andean highlands and Amazonian lowlands but most of the Country. Exploring the markets in and around Mocoa and Putumayo, it became clear that they were just an extension of the greater trade of medicinal plants that extended throughout the region. In the next chapter, I will give an overview of this trade, exploring it through one of few local medicines that have almost universal reach, Chuchuwaza.

Chapter 2 Chuchuwaza



Map 6: The paths of the medicine. A map of the cities and markets visited during this fieldwork

During my time travelling the country and visiting the medicinal markets, I would always ask about plants from the lowland forest. The people in the markets would usually show me some barks and dry herbs, often citing their mysterious and exotic origin deep in the forest of the Amazon, as if the forest itself gave them their healing power. However, most of these plants were in fact brought from tropical regions near urban centres, such as those found near Bogotá. Only a few were actually from the forest of Putumayo. They had arrived here through an extensive network of traders that had set up a commodity chain, linking the forest with the highland cities. This was the case of Chuchuwaza (*Maytenus laevis*). In every market I visited, Chuchuwaza was present, in some form or another.

Chuchuwaza, Chuchuhuasi or Capinuri has been described as a tall tree, 25-30 mt high with large leaves, small white flowers and hard dense reddish-brown bark (Taylor, 2005). People in the forest can identify it through this bark, as its reddish colour stands out from other trees. The bark can be ripped off the tree with ease and is 2-3 cms thick. Use ranges from rheumatism to arthritis, as an aphrodisiac, muscle relaxant and even prevention of cancer. This is due to its qualities as a warm plant, which has an effect on sexual energy, the muscles, the heart and the blood. The name "Chuchuwaza" is actually Quechua for 'trembling back', highlighting its effectiveness against back pains and muscle damage. Shultes and Raffauf (1995) classified it as a stimulant due to a registered amount of caffeine, whether this is related to it being a warm plant, like Yoco or Coffee, is up for discussion.

Image 6: Ch
through Col

Yet, its most outstanding characteristic is that, besides Uña de Gato (*Uncaria tomentosa*), Chuchuwaza is the Amazonian medicinal plant most widely found throughout country. Unlike other medicinal plants of the Putumayo forest, it is found in every market I visited, from the Caribbean coast to the highland cities (See map). I've been offered Chuchuwaza in the inter-municipal buses outside Cali by salesmen who would go from bus to bus selling ointments of different kinds. I have seen Chuchuwaza being sold in naturalist stores in the upper-class malls of Medellin as well as its extract being used in cocktails of upscale restaurants in Bogota. Thus Chuchuwaza has adapted to a number of different

medicinal, cultural and ecological setting. It is also found in markets from Bolivia (Macía, García and Vidaurre, 2005) to Venezuela (Giraldo et al., 2009).

Image 7: Colono Merchant in P. Leguizamo showing me the Chuchuwaza

During my fieldwork in Putumayo, Chuchuwaza was casually used as an infusion. It was taken as a cold refreshment after a long days work even if the taste was not particularly pleasant. As one of the mestizo healers explained:

"Ah! La Chuchuwaza es bendita… Después de un largo rato paneando oro, uno iba cogía un poco del palo de Chuchuwaza y se tomaba esa infusión y le quitaba todos los dolores" "Oh! The Chuchuwaza is magical… After a long day looking for gold, one could go and get a piece of Chuchuwaza to drink and it would take all the pains away".

Chuchuwaza would work not only to relieve joint and muscle pains but also swelling, making it a very popular drink for those doing manual labour.

For the *colonos* who had arrived at the forest during the past century looking for gold or land, it became an increasingly important drink. These people had worked hard to survive in this territory, thus Chuchuwaza had taken the role as a tool to aliviate the hardship of the colonial expansion. Elder Mestizo healers, whom I interviewed, associated this plant with their arrival in the territory and the difficulty of working this land. Chuchuwaza was the first medicinal plant they learned about when they arrived in this territory and would swear on its benefits.

> "Cuando llego nuestra madre de Nariño, eso era puro bosque, era mucho trabajo y uno vivía muy pobre. El monte estaba lleno de plantas medicinales, como la Chuchuwaza… si aquí se usaba mucho, uno lo tomaba después de trabajar para los dolores, era buena medicina. Así aprendimos a usarla." "When our mother arrived from Nariño, this was all forest, it was a lot of work and we were very poor. The mountain was full of medicinal plants like Chuchuwaza… yes we would use it all the time, after work for the pain it was holy. That's how we learned to cook it."

Meanwhile, the Indigenous shamans and healers whom I would talk to, would rarely drink Chuchuwaza as refreshment. It was a hot plant, something that should be taken in small doses as it could irreparably harm the internal organs. Instead, they would drink other infusions, drinks made from cool plants such as Ambar/Clavohuasca (*Tynanthus panurensis*) a common vine found in the forest here. Chuchuwaza was generally used for ointments, as mashed scraping on bruises and joint pains, which seemed quite effective. Yet, it never stood out. During my conversations with indigenous shamans, Chuchuwaza would never be mentioned in detail.

Its multiple uses, extended availability and universal incorporation to different ideas of health seem to highlight how each group understands this plant. In this chapter I will explore the role of Chuchuwaza in the markets of Colombia, and with it explore the different ways of approaching health while at the same time advocating for its role as an active mediator in the creation of hybridity.

Medicinal Markets

In the previous chapter, we saw how the historical and geographical dynamics have produced a market system that is indivisible from colonial processes. As the different power structures and colonial systems influence the trade routes, luxury items and entire chains of production,

they fomented a continual connection between ecological and cultural regions. We also saw how by incentivizing these trade routes they also allowed for interwoven interaction between different ways of relating to the world and how through these trade routes there is a process of creating hybridity and syncretism. However, other parallel syncretisms, separate from colonial power structures, were also continuously being negotiated in a much smaller scale and through much more personal interactions.

There is, I believe, no better example of this hybridity process than folk medicine. Even if western medicine is often placed in the centre of the national discourse, folk medicine has always been a space to exchange knowledge, ideologies and differences that produce syncretism. However, I must highlight that folk syncretism is not the same as national mestizo ideology even if these two processes are constantly overlapping.

The mestizo ideology is the main postcolonial nation-building project of the XX century in Colombia and has for a long time advocated for homogenisation of the social and racial diversity of the country (Wade, 1997). The racial categories, which were a product of early modernist and naturalist views on humanity (Mignolo, 2012), were used to reduce and simplify the multiplicity of ethnic and ontological universes into three essentialist divisions -- White, Indian and Black --. The idea behind this ideology is highly controversial, in which the best "qualities" of each race are to be incorporated to create a genuinely Colombian culture and people (Wade, 1997). Even though this notion is highly controversial in modern academic and scientific circles, it is still an important part of the identity of the Colombian state and popular culture.

It must be noted that such ideology and discourse do not include many folk syncretisms which go against modernist values and ideals. These folk syncretisms have paralleled the nation-building project and established themselves as motors of hybridity that are often hijacked and incorporated into the nationalist ideology (Wade, 2005). Folk medicine, which is a parallel syncretic process has been historically relegated into superstition and dismissed as primitive practice, non-compatible with modernist worldviews like the Carnaval and Colombian folk music (Wade, 2005).

Yet, the complex process of hybridisation produced by the colonial history of the country has offered spaces to establish the wide network of diverse practices that form Colombian folk medicine. In particular, it is the result of different colonial racial categories coming together physically and in the popular imagination of people; continually manifesting fears, hopes and deceptions. It is in this epistemic murk where the imaginary and symbolic spaces of intermediation between the colonial alterities are continually being made and reinforced (Taussig, 1987). As a result, we can observe how the power of the different racial categories is negotiated in the national imaginary.

Similar processes are visible throughout Latin America; one does not need to go far from Colombia to see how concepts of health, body and medicine are constantly negotiated from the contact of different racial categories. Haitian Voodun, Cuban and Venezuelan Santeria, Mexican Mayan shamanism, Brasilian Afroamerican practices, and many of the new religions in the Amazonian territory belong to this syncretism. These medicines thrive on alterity; they exist because of the secret powers produced by the epistemic murk of colonial hierarchies. Where magical power is a product of the myths and secrecy that surround the other.

In Colombia, the enormous diversity of ways of understanding the body, health and medicine, are deeply rooted in these mixtures. Markets here not only work to reinforce the epistemic murk but also work as spaces for hybridity. In a world full of alterities where the friction of different worlds come together to create magic, “the imputation of the otherness enchant the medley of difference in a poetics of place and race that is no less political and economic than it is aesthetic” (Taussig, 1987; 179).

During my fieldwork, I dedicated a large portion to travelling and visiting many of the main markets in the country. Often these markets sold primarily foodstuff, sometimes crafts and objects for daily life. In the corners, often away from the main entrances once could spot small stalls full to the brim with plants, resins, and objects used for health and spirituality. In Bogota, the large market of Paloquemado contained several of these stalls, but a short walk

away, the market of Samper Mendoza has a halo of the overpowering smell of hundreds of herbs and medicines that arrive in the truckful. Bogota was also the home of a small indigenous market, which contained everything to do with shamanic arts and magic, similar to the great Catholic shrine of the *20 de Julio*, which was a hub for esoteric arts.

Other cities had similar markets, albeit on much smaller scale. Pasto, Popayan and Cali, all cities in the south, closer to Putumayo were rich with a diversity of different stalls, from Afrocolombian healers to Ayahuasca shamanism. In the north, the cities of Cartagena, Santa Marta and Medellin contained less indigenous crafts yet were full of Santeria and medicines of the ecosystems throughout the region. Smaller towns and cities had markets with medicinal stalls, they were simple and often contained more herbs from the highlands, but if you knew how to look you might find, Palo Santo (*Bursera graveolens),* Uña de gato (*Uncaria tomentosa*), Zarzaparilla (*Dioscorea sp.*) and Chuchuwaza, from the lowland forests of the Amazon could be found.

Therefore, I will give a short ethnographic description of some of the most representative market stalls. To do this I will use the example of my friend N., who is from a small Afrocolombian town on the Caribbean coast. She has had an interest in medicinal plants ever since her mother took her to a *Santero* in the north of Colombia, near Panama. With the help of the saint Doctor Jose Gregorio Hernandez a modern Venezuelan saint, N. was miraculously healed from a brain parasite. From then on she was intrigued by the power of plants.

As this curiosity grew she learned to love plants and wished she could heal with them. Yet back in her hometown healers were considered witches, seen with distrust and believed to be aligned with the devil. She had to look elsewhere to get some training.

When she moved to Cartagena -a major city in the Caribean coast-, she started going to a healer and shaman she called Don Julio. He was an Afrocolombian healer, who said he had learned how to heal from a Zinu indigenous shaman in Sucre. Unlike the *Santeros* that N.

met before, Don Julio only focused on medicinal plants and had a good following in the popular neighbourhoods of Cartagena. She learned about many medicines from Don Julio.

Afrocolombian healers play an essential role in the trade of medicinal biodiversity in Colombia, not only through Santeria and other Afrocolombian traditions but also selling these botanical medicines in regions such as the Caribbean and Pacific coast. Having migrated to Bogotá, N. quickly got to know the diversity of healing practices found in the city. But, as many people do, she maintained a careful approach to these since they were often known to be both beneficial but also dangerous.


Image 8: Bogota Market Samper Mendoza

While I was doing this study I would ask her about medicinal plants I came across. On most occasions she could identify them, naming them (although sometimes with different names), telling me what they worked for and showing me how to prepare them.

I would also ask her about the best medicinal plant markets in Bogota and after visiting them we would discuss what I had seen. Together we came up with three or four general types of stalls and markets that can be found throughout most of Colombia. I believe one can easily classify these markets stalls and shops by characteristics they have. Even though these are very generalised categories they do seem to follow certain ethnic and colonial social division. However, having said this, I have not been to some medicinal markets in several cities, and this generalisation is only to give an overview of the complexity

of this multiverse of different ways to do health. Like any classification, it is dangerously oversimplified yet proved effective to think about this massive scene.

We start with the mestizo markets of herbs and medicinal plants, which are probably the most common. These stalls and markets are managed by campesinos, *colono*s and mestizo people and focus primarily on fresh herbs of European origin such as basil (*Ocimum basilicum*), calendula (*Calendula officinalis*), chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile*), among others, as well as dried plants from the region. Families owned most of the stalls, however, mostly were managed and controlled by the wife or mother of the family. Men might help to bring in the big boxes and might be there but it's not always the case. They do sell extracts yet in smaller doses and usually tend to be much more focused and specialised to fit their needs and the local herbarium and biodiversity.

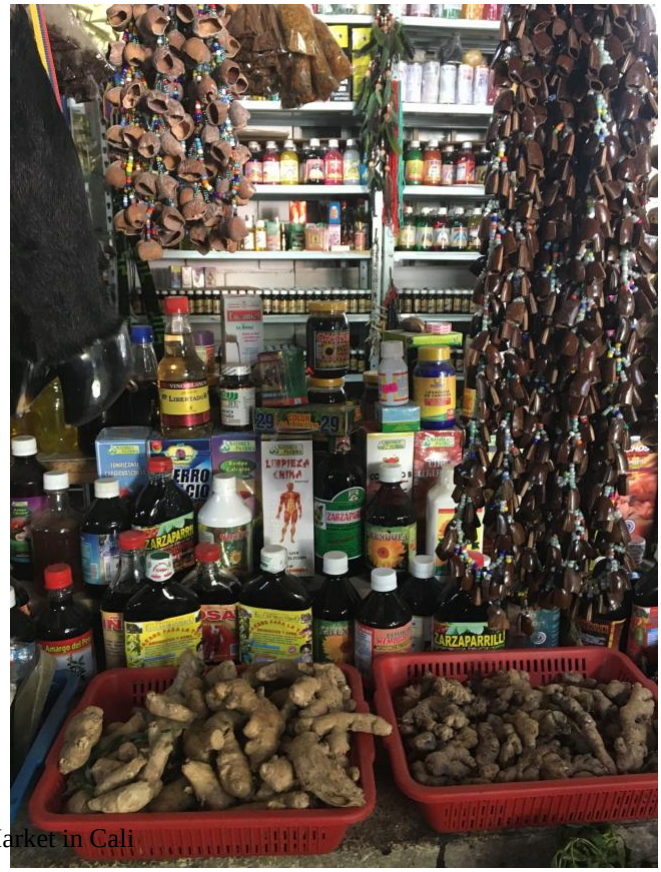


Image 9. Market in Cali

Mestizo healers and herbal stalls are regional; they continuously trade medicinal biodiversity but usually fresh plants, which arrive from nearby regions. In warmer climates, they might get some of the fresh herbs from the highlands where European plants grow best. Tightly interconnected trade routes provide a constant surplus of these plants. These same trade routes connect them to other parts of the country and they can get plants from areas as far away as Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela, however in small amounts. In Bogotá, the Plaza de Mercado Samper Mendoza is one of the central hubs of herbal trade in the country. The market is massive and can comfortably hold 100-200 people selling large amounts of different types of herbs. The several tons of aromatic

plants can be smelled from blocks away. This market is nocturnal since the cold mountain nights of Bogota preserve the fresh herbs for longer. Being so large, it is one of the main hubs of medicinal plant trade in the country.

The second type of stalls are the esoteric markets, which contain a significant amount of different spiritual, supernatural, and magical objects. This includes objects such as candles, statuettes and charms, as well as plants and medicines associated with luck and magic. These also might sell medicinal plants, yet they focus primarily on essences, soaps, creams and extracts. They are also quite diverse; you can find them in the local markets but you can also find them in high-end malls and religious site. These sell objects from a huge range of traditions, such as Orientalism, Gnosticism, Christian medicine, Crystal healing, and Aromatherapy.

The markets around the 20 de Julio in Bogota have many of such stalls. This area has an important shrine with one of the principal saints of the city, "El Divino Niño", and many of these esoteric stalls and shops can be found around it. Anyone can easily find several statuettes of different saints as well as Buddhist texts, books on magic and witchcraft as well as many different plants and animals associated with luck and superstition. Like the mestizo stall most of these plants here were introduced by the Spanish while others, like Uña de Gato (*Uncaria Tormentosa*), are native to the Amazon lowlands as well as some that come as far off as Asia such as the Ginko (*Ginko biloba*) and Indian Acacia (*Acacia sp*.). The sheer diversity of objects demonstrates the global interconnectedness of alternative medicine.

The third type of stall is the Indigenous shops. Managed by indigenous merchants usually Inganos and in a lesser degree some Kametza from Putumayo, these were my main group of study. Unlike the mestizo merchants, these were mostly managed by male shamans and hierbateros who would sell the plants but also do consultations and diagnostics. By the 1950s trade routes had been established by Inga and Kametza in most of the major cities of Colombia (Ramírez de Jara and Urrea Giraldo, 1990). However, as I pointed out, there is

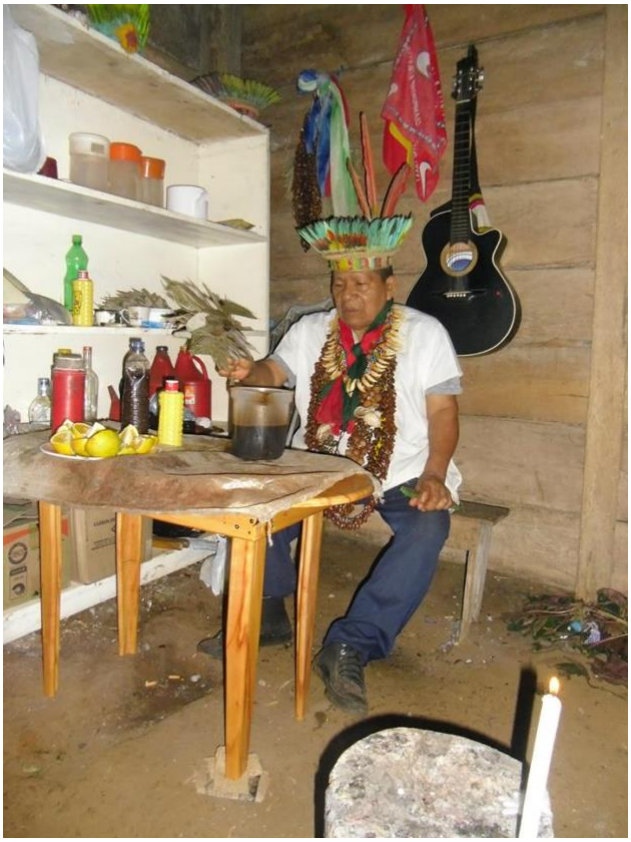


Image 10. Putumayo Inga Shaman, Taita Juan

evidence of extended networks of Quechua merchants who were trading medicines at a regional level. Some of the Inga healers, shamans and merchants whom I interviewed in Mocoa had a history of travelling throughout the country selling medicines and healing patients. This seems to have been happening for some time as many stated that their parents and grandparents had done the same. One of the shamans whom I worked with used to brag about the many times he travelled the country in the 1970s with his brother. His uncle and teacher had done the same. Another merchant of Mocoa told me she had lived her early life in Cali selling plants and travelling the country. Her daughters, a new generation of healers, had just opened their shops in the markets of Putumayo and established contact with the highland shamans and mestizos to get access to fresh herbs.

In the central market of San Victorino of Bogotá there is a small shopping mall called "Centro Comercial Caravana" where many Inga and Kametza traders have set up shop. On the second floor is an official Inga and Kametza resguardo, with its government system and a common house. Most of the Inganos here are from the highlands town of Santiago in the Sibundoy Valley where they keep essential kinship and commercial relationships that supply many of the medicines and also grant access to the lowlands forest. In Bogotá they have managed to maintain certain social cohesion, selling a great diversity of medicines from the Amazon and the mountains around their ancestral home of Sibundoy.

Putumayo shamanism has become synonymous with indigenous traditional medicine in Colombia. The particular image of a “curandero indio”, is commonly presented throughout the public sphere: in the markets, consultation spaces, city streets, advertisements and even modern communication such as TV and social media. The image and performance of the “indio” posses’ key visual elements, such as the feather crown, rattles, chants, and medicinal plants. Whether this was a concept produced in the markets of Colombia or if it originated from Putumayo is hard to say, as they are continuously reforming it and rebuilding it to fit changing times. As Taussig explains: “This magical attraction of the Indian is not only a cunningly wrought colonial objet d´art; it is a refurbished and revitalised one” (1987; Pg 172). In neoshamanic circles the same image is used to legitimise the power of specific shamanic practices such as the use of Ayahuasca.

It is so prevalent that Indigenous people of other ethnicities will visit Putumayo shamans quite often. In regions such as Cauca, which has many communities from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and healing traditions, Putumayo shamanism is the main form of traditional medicine. This was the case of the famed Guambiano/Misak market of Silvia, Cauca. I was surprised to see how Ingano from Sibundoy owned all the medicine stalls. When I asked local people about Misak healers, they seemed confused, often pointing to those Inga in the market as the primary source of medicines. In Bogotá, with the sheer diversity of ethnic practices, Ingano and Kametza shamans are still the go-to indigenous healers.

Nevertheless, even with the strict ethnic divisions, there were many grey areas. As I explored these markets, there seemed to be much tension caused by shamans and hierbateros that were not indigenous by birth yet use Indigenous symbolism and tools to emphasise their healing powers. I was continuously warned of these phoney shamans. People would warn me not of their incapability to heal but instead their capabilities to do the opposite, to harm and kill. Shamanic healing without the indigenous bloodline was seen as potentially dangerous, closer to witchcraft and the devil than to God and health. It seemed that the illegitimate magic is for those who do not follow the strict hierarchy of racial categories.

The mysterious and powerful origin of the Indian, as a timeless being, not tied to present or the past, as a link to the natural savagery and unmodernised jungles and as a subversive force against the ongoing globalised world all played into the essentialization of shamanic practice in popular medicine. In folk medicine the colonial hierarchy, where the black and the Indian are base of the social pyramid, is inverted. This means that these subaltern communities had the mystical and magical power to both heal and cause harm. Therefore by borrowing the visual elements of the Indians, these non-Indigenous healers had appropriated their power. Only reinforcing the importance of performativity in folk health, especially in ritualised healing.

At the same time, the people who were Indian by blood, who were entitled to shamanic arts due to their ancestrality or to the power that flows in "la sangre india", felt cheated and resented the appropriation of their trade. This notion of a hereditary shamanic profession is not common in lowland Amazonia. Hugh-Jones (1994) explains that this is due to closer contact with the nation-state and the legal system. However, I will explore this in later chapters.

AfroColombian medicinal stalls follow similar patterns, but they are much rarer. These stalls can be found in regions with more black populations even if they are often not as visible as the Indigenous ones. During my time in the field, I worked with a few AfroColombian merchants since they were not common in Putumayo. Most had arrived there as refugees from violence in neighbouring regions, having had to move many times even in Putumayo due to political persecution. These were mostly women who worked as midwives, requiring not only anatomical knowledge but also knowledge of local medicinal plants. They mostly used small herbaceous plants that they could plant in home gardens and would visit the markets only as a last resort.

In bigger cities, they would trade plants from the western Pacific coast as well as the common plants found in most markets, including some Amazonian plants. In the market of Samper Mendoza in Bogota, the only one that had Chuchuwaza was an AfroColombian lady who had direct connections with people in Nariño, Putumayo and Cauca.

As for my friend, she also used other types of herbal markets. Homeopathic and naturalist stores also sold medicinal plants, and she would sometimes go to buy plants like the Moringa (*Moringa orleifera*) a herbaceous plant from the Indo-Tibetan foothills, which had quickly established itself in as a panacea in the popular markets throughout Colombia. These, however, were usually sold as extracts and essences, which she would prefer not to use. This flow of foreign miracle plants was very common, as Noni (*Morinda citrifolia*), Acacia de la India (*Acacia farnesian*) among many other were quickly incorporated into the medicinal markets. By stating its exotic origin, these merchants highlight the power of the other, of the realm beyond this one, a place full of magic where plants have more power.

How people negotiate their way through this complicated system of beliefs and the sheer diversity of markets is a great example of the personal versatility in their pharmacopoeia. By this I mean that people who have attended these markets have a working knowledge of certain plants, knowing the basic effects and benefits of each of the plants that they use continuously. Yet everyone I asked was willing to experiment and incorporate a foreign plant into their personal medicines depending on the advice of the local healer and their experience while using it. Once the person is willing to accept the risks involved with learning something from an individual who might be a witch --who might work with magic or poisons-- incorporating different plants into their daily lives seemed trivial.

This is particularly true when it comes to plants to prevent witchcraft and help with luck and love. With the ongoing globalisation and changing traditional values, these plants have taken a new role, often mixed with both the conflicts brought upon by capitalism in its neoliberal form. Comaroff and Comaroff (1999) have highlighted how obscure economies have grown throughout South Africa in response to the postcolonial and capitalist contradictions and inequality. At the same time Taussig (1980), also explored the contradictions and looked at the new roles of traditional belief systems to explain the expansion of capitalist economies. These obscure economies are an important part in the folk medicine of Colombia. Comaroff and Comaroff (1999) explain that they are a result of the capitalist expansion and lack of true economic transformations. "Drawing on cultural elements with long indigenous histories,

this economy is itself an integral feature of millennial capitalism-that odd fusion of the modern and the postmodern, of hope and hopelessness, of utility and futility, of promise and its perversions " (Camaroff and Camaroff, 1999, 283). It seems that for some, to succeed in the "mysterious mechanisms of the market" it is worth returning to tradition.

My friend´s use of medicinal plants depends not only in her belief system and the knowledge she might have on a particular plant but also on her willingness to experiment, to use and incorporate different practices into her own. Therefore she would not only buy or grow the plants that were an essential part of her health but also continuously experiment with new plants, comparing them to the ones she had used before. This negotiation is not only benefited from the epistemic murk, but also because of the chemical, spiritual or magical internal characteristics. She would be open to any new medicinal plant, always asking about them and testing them, rationalising them in her own way, understanding them according to her body and to the way she understood health and magic. It is by using our body as the tool to explore the capabilities of these plants, that we become keen to include them in our lives and create new relationships.

Therefore, I believe that the power of alterity in folk medicine must also be extended to the medicinal plants, as they are not only endowed with the racial categories but also with their own physical and spiritual characteristics. It is true that we can explain the source of the healing power of specific medicinal plant by its association with folk representations of race. Yet, many other medicinal plants are not merely the embodiment of Taussig´s epistemic murk (1987) but active actors who affect our body. This shows that the modernist categories of race are not the only alterities that make up folk health in Colombia. Instead, the medicinal plants and medicinal markets continuously test the different ways to relate to the non-human. Not only as a commodity, a spiritual being, or medicine but also in the many ways in which these plants gain agency.

Trading Chuchuwaza

The tree was quite small, and full of scars. Constant use over several years was evident in cuts all over the lower reaches of the bark. Somehow the tree was still alive. Around it, the forest seemed quite healthy, yet the Chuchuwaza had been constantly intervened.

Image 11: Chuchuwaza bark heavily intervened to the point that it was drying up.

An Inga man in his late 40s from the local reservation of Villa Garzon had taken us to this particular tree. He guided us through the forest for several hours to reach it and when we found it, my friend quickly took his machete to cut several strips of the brown bark. Back in Mocoa, he had called me earlier that week to tell me they found a Chuchuwaza tree. I asked if I could go with him to harvest some of the medicinal bark.

He cut the bark his machete. Once ripped off the tree the reddish bark seemed quite bright. With the same machete, he cut several other pieces that were easily stripped from the tree. Cutting some of the bigger branches allowed him to get bark and prevented from harming the main trunk too much.

We had about 15 pieces when he decided to head back. As we walked back he happily talked about the many things he could do with the Chuchuwaza. He seemed content, considering he only gathered a few pieces. It was enough to cook several litres of the medicines he was later going to sell in the market.

As we reached the town, my friend paid and finalised the transaction of buying and accessing Chuchuwaza. They had agreed about this beforehand, as access to this tree would be

impossible without it. The tree was not old, but was probably one of the few Chuchuwaza left in the middle Putumayo. Allowing us to gather some Chuchuwaza was a good source of money for this man. However, he had only allowed us to cut a few pieces since a whole tree would cost several much more.

It had been quite a long time since my friend had found a Chuchuwaza tree to harvest. Gathering some pieces from a live tree was one of the only ways of getting enough to meet his demand. He preferred this than buying Chuchuwaza from other middlemen who might get him some other kind of bark.

During the next couple of days, he would work tirelessly. Every time I visited him he had his stove at full power boiling the Chuchuwaza, freeing all of its medicinal benefits. He had a whole spectrum of Chuchuwaza products. One of them was as the thick boiled down infusion that would be sold to retailers in Cali. Others would be pulverised and sold by the ounce. He made a cream with oils and wax to sell to the herbalist markets of Mocoa and an extract with alcohol for those patients who knew him personally.

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Several reasons might explain why Chuchuwaza has such prevalence in the multicultural landscape of popular medicines in Latin America. As we saw in the previous chapter, the Inca had extended networks of traders throughout the Andes. This, however, was also a place of exchange of knowledge and medicinal practices. In the Andes, this interconnectedness allowed for the spread of the Central Andean ideas and beliefs of health (Bussmann and Sharon 2006). Known as the "health axis" of the old central Andean culture, this traditional system of health includes many of the medicinal plants, symbolic tools and even practices which are common from Bolivia to Ecuador, most of which can be dated back to the 1st millennia b.c. (Camino, 1992).

By the time these routes had established themselves in southern Colombia, Quechua had become the main trading language in the Andes, thus many medicinal plants have a Quechua

etymology. Chuchuwaza is a Quechua word that would link it to Central Andean markets. However, this is just speculation and it is difficult to prove. The lack of mention in Archival records makes an in-depth ethnohistorical analysis of the use of this plant more difficult. However, I believe that the lack of local names --only in Brasil it is known as Capinuri (Taylor, 2005)-- points to two possible origins of the plant. Either it is a relic of these pre-Columbian trade routes, incorporated into Spanish and mestizo healing systems, or it is a reflection of colonial processes in Amazonia such as the use of Quechua as a lingua franca by missionaries.

Whichever reason it may be, it does not explain why Chuchuwaza has been continuously used for so long and its use is so common through the entire region. Many medicinal plants have gone out of use while the increasingly globalised trade has incorporated many others into the local pharmacopoeia (Bussmann and Sharon, 2006). In the case of the plants, I have explored in this fieldwork, some have stayed localised while others have expanded to regional and even global medicinal network.

Amazonian plants are widely used in a region while in the neighbouring cities this plant might not be available. To use an example found in this thesis, the use of chondur is widespread in the lowlands of Putumayo and Caqueta, but four hours away in Pasto it is challenging to find. Meanwhile, Chuchuwaza is used throughout the country. Understanding how and why this phenomenon happens enable us to explore the commodification process.

As Igor Kopytoff (1986) highlights, there is much more to the process of commodification than just making an object exchangeable in a system of trade. Being a commodity is not a permanent category; objects go in and out of being commodities all the time. Since it is a liminal existence, being a commodity has several phases that define how it travels through a trade route. Through this process, the object is given a value, then distilled from the cultural baggage it previously existed in, reshaped to fit different value systems and incorporated into new ontological universes. The act of trade stimulates intercultural exchange and allows for objects to take many shapes to fit different ontological perspectives.

For local communities, Chuchuwaza is valuable due to its potential of being a medicinal plant. The knowledge that a plant is medicinal is as valuable as the plant itself. Without it, Chuchuwaza would probably be just another tree, valued not for its medicinal properties but for other characteristics that are defined by the locals who coexist with these forests. This has defined the destiny of Chuchuwaza, made universally valuable and accelerated its introduction into the trade routes that make up the popular medicine of Colombia.

Image 12. Crushing Chuchuwaza bark to cook

The physical act of stripping the bark off the tree does not only strip it away from its original biological and ecological function but also strips it away from its previous cultural and social world. It is through this violent act that Chuchuwaza is reborn as a commodity. In other words, this is how Chuchuwaza is alienated (Tsing 2013).

As Chuchuwaza is separated from the local traditional relationships, we see how it begins to take a new form. It no longer depends on the closeness to the forest to get its vital and healing energy, or the mediation of the shamans to open up and grant access to it. It has taken a new existence, a new life beyond the shamanic worldview. For my friend, who was not indigenous, the power of the medicine to heal comes from its deepest essence, from the substances that it contains. As he boils and reduces the Chuchuwaza, he is trying to access this intrinsic property. No longer does it depend on the spiritual characteristics of the plant, instead its value lies in the healing substance as an object. He confirms this: “Uno lo hierve hasta sacar la parte medicinal, esa parte es lo que se usa” “one boils it to extract the medicinal part, that is what is used”.

The reason why a person might transform an object into a commodity depends on the cultural value given to such an object. Consequently, the value we give to an object depends on the social act of exchange; by giving an object a set of values that it can be exchanged for. This highlights the almost autonomous existence of commodities, as they are "disengaged from their makers and at the mercy of market transactions" (Tsing, 2013)

In the case of these plants, it is their medicinal qualities that are highly valuable to the individuals, to the markets and to other cultures. Yet even this is highly controversial since people might understand health and the efficacy of medicines in relative ways. Its medicinal properties might be due to certain spiritual agency and capability, to a biochemical component or even to colonial and racial power relationships. This highlights how the plant drifts in and out from a state of the commodity, as it travels through a network, gaining different values and meanings while losing others. Yet in its deepest, most distilled form, being beneficial to the body is that universal value that allows for cultural translation.

The act of commodification also adds further value to these plants. As soon as the plant is harvested this intervention has added a value to plant, transforming it from a plant with the medicinal potential to medicinal plant. Most people only know Chuchuwaza as a bark, not being able even to identify the tree; therefore its intervened form is the commodity. As we saw with my friend, further transformations adds value to it. Giving a new form through labour transforms it from a medicinal plant to a medicine. By this point, the plant is independent of its previous cultural baggage, made into a commodity that is as ambiguous as possible in order to be used by anyone who is willing to try it, but reflecting the cultural necessities and ideas of health and body of those who wish to use it. In other words, by making it ambiguous yet reflecting specific cultural values that can be translated and misunderstood by diverse cultural backgrounds, these medicines can be easily incorporated and sold throughout the diverse set of practices that makes up folk medicine in Colombia.

Chuchuwaza in the Markets

During my time in the field, Chuchuwaza was usually found as bark and as a processed product. Mostly it is sold in small pieces 5 cm long for 2000 to 5000 Colombian pesos, and you are able to find it in medicinal stalls throughout Colombia. Those who know Chuchuwaza, buy it as a bark. While working in the markets, I also witnessed people who would visit several times yet never really bought any of the ointments or syrups, always preferring to buy the fresh plants in bulk to cook at home. When asked, most stated that they would not buy the industrialised products since the essence of the plant was in its freshness. Usually, these people had more knowledge, which was quickly noticeable by how they touched and smelled the plants. For example, when offered a bark of black Chuchuwaza, an old lady quickly rejected it stating that its dark colour meant it was not this plant. Other would place small amounts of resins in their fingers to test the consistency, while many smelled the plant for identification. This ambiguous relationship with the medicinal plant merchants highlighted not only the deregularised trade of these plants but the complex feeling they produce.

This also illustrates that knowledge of the properties of these plants and how to process them from their raw state is not restricted to a specific social role –i.e. shamans-- but is rather more widespread. Indeed some of the medicinal knowledge as well as techniques used to transform them, tend to be less confined to a clearly defined role -the shaman- than most people seem to imagine. However, this is generally the case of plants that have been incorporated into the network, like Chuchuwaza, which has been separated from its original practice and incorporated into the blurry and fluid knowledge of medicinal plants in folk culture. In other words, some plants that have a special preparation, need a specific spiritual negotiation and belong to a wide set of techniques, when they are incorporated into the folk medicinal network they reduced to its most basic notions, such as identification, preparation and its consuption.

On the other hand, many people would have a list of plants to buy given to them by their healer, shaman or allopathic physician. This meant that they had arrived at the markets not really knowing what to buy but trusting on the advice of the experts they consulted. Not surprisingly, the merchants were able to convince many customers to buy the already

prepared soaps, creams, infusions and ointments which might contain the same plants but could be more effective. People were willing to pay for these substances as they were convinced of their efficacy and would trust in the knowledge of the merchants. There is a component of trust when selling the medicine since it is often easy to confuse with others. This could be described as part of their performance, as the merchants were often showing and highlighting their experience in the crafts of magic and health in a similar way as the shamans and healers I met. It not only legitimised their knowledge but increased the product´s value.

These industrialised medicines had packaging, which continued this performance in order to add value to them. The images and information displayed in the packaging legitimised it and if the shaman and merchant had recommended it, people were willing to test it[5].

Processed medicines had become an important product for small artisanal pharmaceutical companies located in urban areas. They produce many of the extracted solutions we find in the markets. Many of them are found in Ecuador or Peru, however, in Colombia, the main industries lie in the city of Cali, near the Pacific coast. Artisanal pharmaceuticals seem to blur the boundaries between medical systems and significantly complicate the picture of trade of plant medicine in the area. These companies are on the fringe of the global

[5] As I travelled through the country exploring the markets waking up in the early mornings and spending days siting in the stalls trying to stay out of the way, I could sense a distrust towards the western medicine that had driven a resurgence of traditional medicine. As I asked the different men and women of a range of class and age who would visit these markets I was struck with the distrustful of the biochemical compounds in modern medicine. Some were keen to state that they had previous knowledge of the traditional medicines that their parents and grandparents used, perhaps more to do with the aesthetic presentation of the plant as a source of healing. The fact that, for instance, biomedical products are so vastly separated from what most people understood and relate to it meant a lack of trust which the plants that have for centuries benefited their families does not. This however was not always the case. Many knew exactly what to buy, having a wide range of knowledge which even surprised the local traders. Others arrived out of curiosity, entreaged by the mysterious allour of this profound and complex science.

Pharmaceutics industry, as they seem to be linked with local concepts of health while at the same time dismissed by the western medical communities. They sell gels, creams, and infusions of local medicinal plants, often commercialising mixtures that are both traditional and experimental.

I have always been curious about the way they work out these formulas, as they often mix plants from a variety of different backgrounds, sometimes in ways I do not really understand. I believe that many just follow traditional recipes, often focusing on organs. For example, by grouping and mixing plants that might have an effect on a specific organ, they categorise the effects as similar and thus enable them to be mixed. One tablespoon of Chuchuwaza pulverised bark is mixed with 3 grams of Uña de Gato (*Uncaria tomentosa*) and 10 grams of Lapacho (*Tubebuia sp*.) which is then set to boil until the liquid turns a dark brown and packaged for asthma attacks. Each one of these plants is known for their effectiveness against asthma attacks, as well as for being an important soothing agent. The way in which the specific quantities are determined, requires constant experimentation, while at the same time a deep-rooted understanding of the qualities and benefits of each of the plants. For this reason, this type of chemistry follows similar patterns of indigenous and local tradition based on temperatures and flavours while at the same time drawing on practices such as Humorism and old world Herbalism.

There is an ongoing debate on the influence of European Humorism in American folk medicine, since analysis on Mesoamerican medicinal system suggest that there are some hot and cold concepts that have a prehispanic origin (Foster, 1994, Messer, 1987). Lowland indigenous communities also have concepts of hot and cold. The People of the Centre, such as the Witoto and Muinane, consider that moods and ethics depend on the internal temperature of the person. (Londoño Sulkin, 2012) These need to be balanced continuously in order to achieve the proper personality desired by the community. Women who are generally cool need to consume and use cool plants to balance their internal temperature when they get too hot (Londoño Sulkin, 2012).

The Mesoamerican notions of hot and cold can be understood as a classification system to understand the body, the medicines and other cosmological phenomena (Foster, 1994). Since the hot and cold systems of Mesoamerican communities are part of a cosmological duality, and not restricted to food and medicine as was the case for Spanish Humorism, the ideas had to be part of an already pre-established ontological notion. However, the similarity between the two notions promoted a quick assimilation and syncretic hybridisation going both ways (Foster, 1994). By the 18th century, the transatlantic exchange had spread syncretic concepts of health throughout the colonies, from Chile to Mexico, generating a surprisingly homogeneous concept of health (Foster, 1994).

Image13. Different processed medicines in Markets

In another example, the locally famous Jarabe del Indio—Indian syrup--, which contains Zarzaparrilla and 15 other unspecified cool plants works for the bile, one of the four humours, and can be used for bloatedness and liver problems, as well as for depression and "heaviness". Meanwhile, Chuchuwaza as part of an ointment can be used for erectile dysfunction, as an anti-inflammatory and for lack of energy, all of which are associated with the humour compound of blood. Additionally, others highlight the importance of Chuchuwaza for the bones and joints, which was its original purpose in Andean markets. Most importantly, the notions of temperature offer a lasting and effective classification to know which medicines can be combined and which ones may have contradictory effects on the health of the

individual. Food as medicine is also an important concept when dealing with these temperature notions, such as knowning what the patient ate before drinking a medicine or establishing strict diets.

In the southern Andean regions of Colombia, this Hispanic syncretic folk medicine was also influenced by preColombian practices. Many of the plants, rituals and cosmological notions that flowed from highlands to lowland through the Andean health axis (Camino, 1992) were given the classification of a transatlantic humoral system. The transatlantic humoral system became the backbone of folk health throughout the colonies. However, the resilience of the Andean health axis allowed them to exist in parallel, continually exchanging and mixing (Bussmann and Sharon, 2006).

Both early Spanish and Andean medicines can be classified as analogism. Descola (2014) describes how the ontological category of analogism understands the internal and external characteristics of the life as made of multiple components and continually shifting and relating to each other -in analogous ways-. This wide category includes not only Mesoamerican and Andean concepts of health but also humorism and aristotelian medicine. All of these have many similarities, even with distant origins.

With added biochemical understanding, many of the pharmacists and chemists are experimenting with the notion of alkaloids. Some have managed to isolate components through chemical processes and highlight these as the key for future medicines. However, most of this industry concentrates on the plants themselves since most of the patients have at least some understanding of their characteristics and have faith in the botanical properties of the plant, facilitating cultural assimilation.

This highlights one of the most interesting aspects of these medicines, as the power of these plants to heal can easily be incorporated into different ways of viewing health, often having equally beneficial results[6]. Healing, be it through the chemical composition, magic, humours,

[6] I have not done an in-depth biological or medicinal study on this, however, patients who use these plants continuously have stated that they are effective in most of their forms. However, it is worth

or temperature, is the main quality and characteristic of these plants allowing them, not only to interact with the body, but also to be easily incorporated into different ontologies as it travels through the commodity chains and medicinal markets of the country. How the plant heals requires further research, yet as I have been trying to specify healing is a value in itself, which permits this commodification, misinterpretation, and incorporation process. I wish to highlight how the plant's properties, and thus its own agency --intensified through cultural techniques- allow it to travel between human cultural settings.

The plants take the role of mediators, often being both a manifestation of the beliefs held by the merchant, by the cultural tradition it has existed in and the new ideas of health and body, rationalised and built to fit the personal understanding of each patient. At the same time, limited and built upon the actual chemical, spiritual or magical capacity to heal inherent in the plant. Since these medicines exist as crossroads, as the intersection of different approaches and existences on health, the markets also become crossroads themselves. They offer objects for a multiplicity of understandings on health, becoming a manifestation of alterity and spaces of hybridity. This accelerates the syncretism process, offering new medicines, new tools, and practices that can be incorporated into the person's medicinal pharmacopoeia. It is not surprising to see how the merchants and healers are constantly teaching new practices to those who are interested.

The lack of centralised information on medicinal plant accelerates this process in Colombia. Even if written material on Amazonian medicinal plants is available, it is usually only academic works or books that have no real reach into the traditional culture of Colombia. Information on medicinal plants still spreads through word of mouth and tradition. Since knowing and using medicinal plants is a technique, it requires constant repetition, teaching and reminding. The lack of centralised information allows for a misinterpretation of its properties and application. Therefore by experimenting and testing the plant, by cooking it and ingesting it people also produce knowledge.

thinking of the value and prosible problems of conducting something like this since, by giving it a scientific explanation might take a bias against local knowledge.

It is worth remembering that this is a different form of experimentation from those that are used to produce biomedical knowledge, where a scientific hypothesis as to the mode of functioning of the biochemical components is tested. Instead, this vernacular experimentation not only allows for syncretism but also encourages it. It is through this dialogue, between the sources, the artefact itself and the person who is experimenting with it, that information associated with it becomes flexible and malleable, transforming through space and time as it travels in the trade networks.

Lazonsi and Mesturini (2014) highlight how misinterpretation works to incorporate Ayahuasca shamanism in a number of different cultural and ontological backdrops. They use Veronique and Christine Servais (2009) model of misinterpretation and Sahlins "working misunderstanding" (1982). Stating that:

> "Misunderstanding is what allows communication between a multiplicity of actors and ritual contexts across the contemporary shamanic landscape" (Lazonsi and Mesturini, 2014; pg 106).

In the case of medicines, this misinterpretation has given these products the necessary flexibility to be incorporated into a number of different concepts of health and body.

It is through this misinterpretation that the values and symbolism of the power of those difference are created, transformed or hightened. It is common to see how medicinal plants are often sold by highlighting the ambiguity of the colonial power structures. It is in this aspect that the origin of the plant is evidence of its efficacy. We can see it when they package the medicinal mixtures with Chuchuwaza labelled as "jarabe del Indio" "Syrup of the Indian" as a way of legitimising its healing potential.

Chuchuwaza as a Mediator of Alterity

Colombian popular medicine seems to be born out of these interactions, the constant negotiation between different worlds that are interconnected through trade networks. These

plants become spaces of negotiations between the alterities that were produced by colonial racial politics. It seems that in traditional health, the colonial hierarchy is often inverted and the conquered and enslaved become powerful. Indigenous shamanism and Afrocolombian healers use preconceptions and stereotypes as a source of their powers (Taussig, 1987). The realms of the wild and savagery are utilised as a source of power, outside the civilised structure, where these shamans and healers to keep a monopoly over the powers to heal or to do harm. Urban shamans and healers often reinforce these powers by performing the part, dressing with a crown and talking about the forest. In a similar way the jungles of the Amazon and Pacific coast are usually invoked when talking about medicinal plants. "Esta es de la selva" "this one is from the Jungle" as if evoking the healing powers of the deep forest. Fetishising the perceived powers of indigenous knowledge allows for previously conquered and subjugated peoples to have power.

The process does not come without complex political backlash, since these healers are also widely feared. It is known that as much as they can heal they can hurt. Throughout Colombia, it is not uncommon for people to classify healers and shamans as witches and sorcerers, often feared and in some extream cases persecuted[7].

Witchcraft and witches play an essential role in Folk medicine and Shamanism. They are the source of much misfortune and disease, reinforcing the efficacy medicines and the ability of healers. The concept of witchcraft here is a complex syncretism notion. These sorcerers have characteristics of both Indigenous notions of the dark shaman, such as control of poisonous snakes and the use of spiritual arrows and darts as well as European and African notions such as possessions

My friend N, who is from the northern coast, would describe witches as those who have extensive knowledge of poisonous plants and would often warn me to be careful when working in the markets: "Toca tener mucho cuidado con los que conocen de plantas" "you

[7] Just in 2017, a women was murdered when people suspected that she was a witch. In a region like Colombia where distrust is so high due to the violence, witchcraft is often an easy reason to blame for a murder.

have to be careful with those who know about plants". Similarly, the local shamans of Mocoa distrust any healer who would work in the market. These were looked down upon as dangerously incompetent or capable of doing witchcraft for some quick cash. Association with the devil is not made explicit, yet these shamans and healers are usually described as capable of doing evil things. This is especially true when describing those who know so much about plants, since, it is believed, that they could access their poisonous and magical potential. In this world, the line between poison and medicine, between those that can give luck and take it, is so thin that suspicion often dictates how people see entire populations.

At the same time Christian concepts of witchcraft had established a vast distrust of specific plant medicine. Yet it never prevented people from continuously seek their counsel. Often witches are believed to be pagan or demonic yet capable of healing people by supernatural power derived by an explicit pact with the devil. There is a long colonial history of dealing with the ambiguity of these healers and shamans. The Spanish and local white people would often appreciate the botanical knowledge of local healers yet look down on them for their pagan beliefs (Crawford, 2016). By classifying these local healers as "brujos" "sorcerers", they would often enter a paradoxical relationship with them. The white elite would often shun them magic and superstition but would still seek them when necessary. As part of the push to convert the continent to Christianity, many healers were persecuted for their magical and religious beliefs, yet the medicines and techniques associated with healing were overlooked, surviving to this day (Crawford, 2016). It is difficult to separate local botanical knowledge from the overall spiritual and ontological notion that defines it. Even today, many of the explanations on disease and the potential of medicinal plants are linked to vernacular notions and rationalisations produced by this syncretic process.

This ambiguity could be extended to several plants, as they too, have a role in this epistemic murk as bringers of health and death. Some are clearly part of the devil's repertoire, and those who work with them are already cursed. Others like Ayahuasca and Chuchuwaza are generally used for good. Magic plants for love, money and luck; are used to cheat the system, surging in popularity as a means to improve chances in the unfair urban world. They are extreme alterities that even botanists fear. Plants are so far separate from our experience that

we barely see them as objects, and yet they communicate with us through chemical reactions. To understand them we have built entire rational system. In Colombia, modernists hierarchies help explain the some of the effects and powers of these medicines.

In the next chapter, I will explore this in more detail, as I talk about one of the most complicated plants in the shamanistic repertoire, full of contradictions and conflicts, Borrachero. It will guide us through the local trade networks of shamans who live in this territory and show us how it has been incorporated into the folk medicine of Colombia. It will allow us to explore the shamanic trade networks that function throughout Putumayo and beyond, paving the way for the ongoing Ayahuasca phenomena we see today. They will also give us a general perspective on the historical process that linked the indigenous people with the global capitalist economy, highlight how this commodification process has transformed widely-used plants of power into powerful agents of violence and corruption.

Chapter 3 Borrachero

The Floripondio

Borrachero or Floripondio (*Brugmansia* sp.) has always fascinated me. It is an intriguing looking plant, at first glance it is beautiful, almost magically so. Its long flowers with the characteristically trumpet-like form have pastel colours that range from white, orange, pink and yellow. They hang gently in the wind giving out a powerful aroma that fills the air early in the mornings. However, its relative beauty is often misleading, as it is also one of the most powerful shamanic plants and can be extreamly dangerous.

This woody bush can grow quite large often reaching 3 to 4 meters. As part of the Solanaceae or nightshade botanical family, it is closely related to Tobacco, potatoes, tomatoes and chillies. Like all of the plants in this botanical family, it has complex leaves and 5-pointed star-shaped flowers. The large flowers, often 20-30 centimetres emit a powerful aroma that

is used to attract nocturnal moths and bats, their main pollinator, however B. sanguinae attracts hummingbirds with their bright red colour.

Image 14. Borrachero in the entrence of a shaman´s house

You can find two main different genera of Borracheros in South America, the *Datura* and the *Brugmansia*. Both of them widely spread throughout the continent, and now found in Europe and Asia. *Datura* and *Brugmansia* are often known interchangeably as Borrachero, even though they have very different botanical structures. In North America *Datura* is known as "Hierba del Diablo" or Devils Trumpet, a plant Carlos Castañeda would often include in his books [8](1998). *Brugmansia* in Europe and the United States is known as Angels Trumpets and is widely used as an ornamental plant. I will focus on the *Brugmansia* since they are the most common type of Borrachero found in Putumayo.

In this region, it is widely used as a medicinal plant, and during my fieldwork, it was used quite often and consistently. Mostly it can be used both externally and internally, however,

[8]Even though Castañeda´s books are controversial in anthropology, they are often well researched and his knowledge of the different medicinal and hallucinogenic plants is a good indication of this. In his books Don Juan teaches Carlos how heal using the power of the plants such as using Peyote (Lophophora williamsii). However the common use of Datura is often seen as controversial, since there is little evidence of Yaqui shamans using this plant (Noel, 1976)

most of the time it is used externally due to the danger of ingesting it. Like many other Solanaceae, it has complex biochemical compounds produced as insecticides and deterrent for herbivores, many of which are poisonous for humans. Borrachero has many alkaloids that are harmful to humans in large doses, however the most important is known as scopolamine or hyoscine. In Europe, the nightshade family are frequently considered highly poisonous, but they are also an essential source of medicines and have a close association with witches (Schultes, Hofmann and Rätsch, 2006).

The poisonous character of this plant makes the relationship with humans ambiguous, as it is known to be dangerous plant but many indigenous and mestizo people use itymedicinally and love its beautiful flowers. Towards Cauca and around Naza, Coconuco and Guambiano/Mizak territory, Borrachero was usually planted in the doorways and fences of homes. It was used as protection[9], against evil spirits and unwanted guests from entering homes. In the Amazon, Borracheros are commonly found near people who work with magic or shamanism. It is easy to find a Borrachero trees around the homes of shamans and healers, as it also protects them from witchcraft and other evil forces. In Mocoa, a Borrachero front of the door would often mean the person was a healer, shaman or had some knowledge on the subject.

During my time in the field, I was able to see how Borrachero is also used as a powerful cleansing or smudging agent. Most of the time I observed how shamans would cook its leaves and flowers in water and use it to clean a space for ceremonial use. Others add it to the alcoholic extract and perfumes to give them more powerful healing property when blowing it on patients. Baths made with boiled Borrachero leaves help cleaning bad luck or evil spirits that might have infected you. As part of the bitter plants[10], it cleans the soul of the person along with Rue (*Ruta graveolens*), Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*), Garlic (*Allium*

[9] This is done in a similar way to the Aloe or Salvia (*Aloe vera*) eventhough these two are not poisonous. In fact their use might be opposite, while Borrachero is used to scare away dangerous spritis, Aloe Vera is thought to attract them. This means that when the Aloe dies off, it has protected the house.

[10] Unlike hot and cold, bitter and sweet are not necesarily a humourical classification. It belongs closer to indigenous classification from mesoamerica (Foster, 1993). It is also closely related to the idea of sweet and bitter maniocs that define the diet of lowland communities.

sativum), Eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus sp.*) among others. At the same time, this plant is commonly used as a medicinal plant for external bruises. On many occasions, mashed plasters of Borrachero leaves are placed on top of hematomas, painful joints, on the forehead and temples for migraines.

Its central role as a powerful hallucinogen, due to its high quantity of scopolamine or hyoscine, makes it an important but dangerous Master plant. However, the Master plant category depends on the people who use it. For some shamans from the highlands, Borrachero is a Master plant because it belongs to those plants in the pinnacle of their cosmological hierarchy of plants. This means that, when used in a certain ritualised way, it is a plant that can be an ally when dealing with sickness. When carefully consumed it can show the shaman the necessary methods to deal with a particularly tricky situation or for divination. However, since Ayahuasca is much easier to handle, Borrachero has become marginalised, used less frequently and left for experts or even just for those who wish to show off their experience.

For lowland indigenous communities, the Borrachero is seen mostly as a medicinal plant, just below the master plants, and it is rarely used in ritualised settings. It is, however, a valuable medicine, as I mentioned before. However it is also widely feared, and many shamans blame each other for using it as an additive in the cooked Ayahuasca brew. For the *Jivaro*[11] and the highland communities Peru and Ecuador where it is known as huacachaca (Schultes and Plowman, 1979;Descolla, 1996), Brugmansia is used in initiation rituals where children are required to drink Borrachero until they pass out (Descolla, 1996).

Due to its high amount of alkaloids, it is known to produces strong hallucinations, loss of consciousness, as well as being disconnected from reality for days on end (Schultes, Hofmann and Rätsch, 2006). In higher doses, it can cause long hallucinogenic trances that are characterised by a lack of conscious actions, nausea, vomiting, convulsions, amnesia, and death. Only some experts will use it in extremely low dosage. Its delicate flowers can be

[11] Indigenous community of the Andean foothills of Peru

brewed as a tea or in some cases eating a few of its seeds from the pod is known to have a more powerful effect. As mentioned there are some reports of it being mixed in the Ayahuasca brew. Additives in Ayahuasca are common, however, mixing Borrachero, is extreamly frowned upon, considered a practice only done by witches and sorcerers.

Even its local name alludes to its power. Borrachero in Spanish means drunkenness, or producer of drunkenness. Its effect, even at a distance is a cause of concern to many parents throughout the country. Often cautionary stories of sleeping under the tree were told to me as a means of warning to stay away from the beautiful flowers with an appealing aroma. For the people around the Andean Cauca, it is known to take the spiritual form of an eagle, capable of lifting the person to the clouds and getting women pregnant (Schultes, Hofmann and Rätsch, 2006).

However, even with the apparent risks involved in the use of this plant, it has been part of complex indigenous rituals since before the Spanish arrived. Indigenous communities throughout the country have historically used it for initiation rituals and dealing with magic, disease and witchcraft. It was widely exchanged through most of the Andean region, spreading from Venezuela to Chile. However, as I will show, the exchange of Borrachero seems more akin to a barter economy, gift and ritualised exchange. The exchange of *Brugmansia* would determine the existence of this plant, transforming it into species that is completely dependant on human interaction. *Brugmansia* embodies the traditional trade networks, as constant exchange has domesticated it, transformed it and made it into what it is now.

It is worth to note that the terrible powers of *Brugmansia* have not gone unnoticed and were quickly assimilated into an occult economy of drugs used primarily to do harm unto others[12]. In its distilled form, known as scopolamine, it is known to be a common date rape drug

[12] Borrachero is the primary source of scopolamine alkaloid and therefore the main ingredient for this underground network.

extensively used in urban areas of the country. As with everything, the complicated relationship of the western world with this plant is often full of nuances and contradictions. Like most of the plants that have a substantial physical and mental effect, people will experiment with them. Through the country, people know that by eating the fruit or drinking a tea of its leaves it produces a powerful hallucinogenic effect and some people do it recreationally. Eating "cacao sabanero" as it is called in Bogotá might have a severe impact on the person´s health, as it is known to trigger severe mental disorders and cause irreparable damage. In Bogota, consuming the seeds is one of the most common forms of plant intoxication (Secretaria Distrital de Salud, 2015).

However, for local shamans, this ambiguous relationship does not mean that these people do not have an intimate relationship with this plant. This chapter will explore how local shamanic networks facilitate this interaction and how the exchange of this plant has facilitated profound transformations in the biology of the plant. Analysing smaller more localised networks of healers, apprentices and patients who actively use and trade Borachero yet are part of larger networks such as those who use Ayahuasca.

A Borrachero Trade Network

Taita J. told me,

> *"*para conocer bien el poder de la planta usted puede acostarse debajo de ella, le pide a un amigo o alguien que lo despierte después de media hora. Esta planta le va a dar sueños muy reales y poderosas visiones. Así puede trabajar esa planta… Claro pero yo no lo recomiendo."“To know the true power of this plant you can sleep under it, you have to ask a friend or someone to wake you up after half an hour and it will give you realistic dreams and powerful visions. That's how you work with Borrachero… of course, I don't recommend using it"

> "Aquellos del alto (Alto Putumayo) ellos usan mucho ese borrachero, ellos tienen tradición en ese uso, es muy peligroso. Lo mesclan en el yage, puede creerlo… cuando cocinan. Así la gente se tumba y se revuelca, fuera de control. Uno siempre

tiene que tener cuidado cuando va por allá." "Those from the highlands, they use a lot of Borrachero, they have a long tradition of its use. They mix it with Yage, can you believe it, when they cook. That's why people fall down and have a really bad experience, out of control. One has to be always careful when going up into Sibundoy." He told me while drunk with Ayahuasca. "Yo conozco todos los tipos de borrachero, el Andaqui, el que llaman serpiente, cada color es uno pero yo creo que eso no hay diferencia solo para aquellos que creen que saben… no creo que los prueben." "I know all the different types of Borrachero, the Andaqui, the one they call the snake, each colour is different but I think there is no difference, only those people who think they are different but I don't think they try each one."

I then asked where this strange plant came from. He hesitated,

"Yo creo que eso viene del alto, allá si que hay tipos de Borrachero, aquí en Mocoa hay solo algunos el que llaman Andaqui que es blanco, pero allá hay mas de siete variedades." "I think it comes from the highlands, over there, there are many types of Borrachero, here in Mocoa there are only a few, the white one is the Andaqui, But up there, they have all the seven varieties".

I then asked him how did Borrachero ever arrive at Mocoa and the rest of the forest if it was from the highlands. He looked at the Borrachero that was growing in the corner of the house,

"Ese es el Andaqui (Brugmansia suaveolens) uno sabe por la flor blanca con tiritas como colas … Lucho (Taita L.F.) me dio una estaca de esta, yo no tenia donde ponerla y la sembré aquí. A Lucho se la dio Taita Pacho (Taita Francisco Pijuae[13]), quien sabe de donde la consiguió el abuelo pero lo más posible es que algún tomador del alto le regalo la estaca pues aquí casi no se consigue esta variedad. Los del Sibundoy bajan al bajo a aprender del Yage y traen sus plantas y se llevan otras, así siempre ha sido". "That one over there is Andaqui (*Brugmansia* suaveolens variety) it has a white flower with long hanging threads from the edges like tails… Lucho (his brother) gave me the cutting of a one they have growing in their maloca (ceremonial house), I didn't have where to grow it and I just planted it here. Lucho got it from Tatia Pacho, who

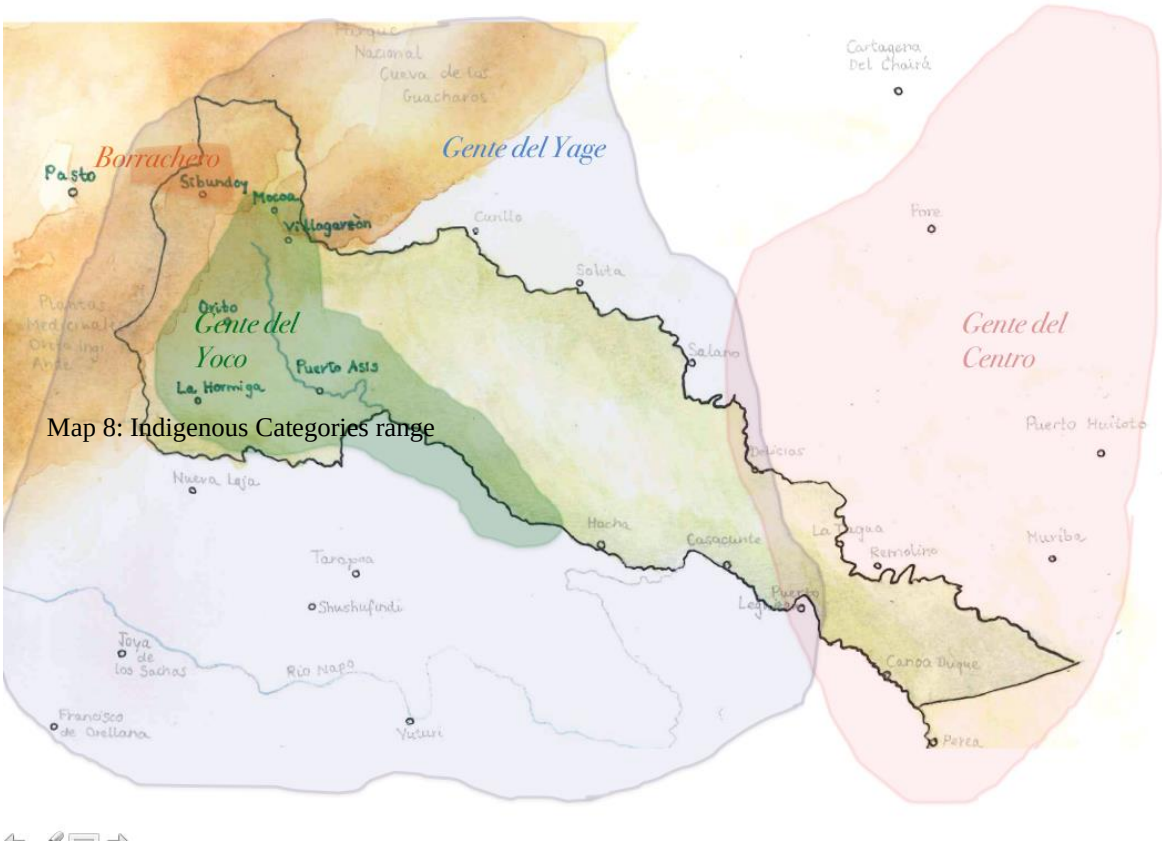
[13] A famed Ziona elder, who taught several of the powerful shamans now found in this region

> knows where the *abuelo* (grandfather) got it from, maybe an apprentice from the highlands since you can't really find this variety around here. People from Sibundoy come to the lowlands to learn Yage and bring their own plant and take other plants, it has always been that way."

As we have seen, exploring the trade of medicinal plants is often confusing, complex and multi-layered. In previous chapters we observed how pre-Columbian communities had established complex trade routes that expanded beyond ecological niches, complimenting existing resources throughout the elevations of the Andean mountain range. A "vertical archipelago" of trade, to use John Murra´s (1980) concept. I have also explored how these trade routes have been incorporated into the colonial and the postcolonial world, functioning on complex political and cultural processes of hybridity that have produced the ongoing negotiation on what people understand as health and body.

However, to continue understanding the interwoven meshwork of people, cultures, plants and ecosystems in this region, it is essential to explain the localised systems of medicinal plant trade found in the foothill areas of Putumayo. These smaller and much more intimate networks of healers, shamans and patients define local health and exist in the periphery of the regional folk medicine. These local networks of shamans exist independently; they have their own beliefs systems, use their particular tools and have their distinct forms of medicine.

Amazonia is full of ethnic groups who actively participate in the similar ceremonial consumption of a powerful plant, use a particular healing technique or specific culturally significant ritual. Even if they are not part of the same language family and have different cultural backgrounds they share tools, diets, myths, kinship bonds and practices. In an effort to classify this phenomenon, Colombian anthropology has grouped these supra-ethnic networks into groups of communities with a wide set of similarities (Caicedo, 2014; Echeverri, 2016; Londoño Sulkin, 2012; Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1996; Landaburu and Pineda, 1984; Pinzón Castaño, Suárez P and Garay A, 2004; Ramírez de Jara, 1996; Bolivar, 2005)



Map 8: Indigenous Categories range

Examples of these categories are exogamic communities who share a ritualised dance such as the "Culturas del Yurupari" (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1996), communities who have similar foundation myths such as the "Culturas del Hacha" (Landaburu and Pineda, 1984), communities who have an exogamic kinship bound and share similar rituals such as the "Culturas del Centro"(Echeverri, 2016; Londoño Sulkin, 2012) and so on[14].

In the Andean foothills, we can find several of these networks especially when it comes to the ceremonial consumption of master plants. Communities who share the use of Ayahuasca or "Culturas del Yage"; those shamans who use Tobacco and Coca or "Gente de la mambe y ambil"; as well as those who use Yopo (Anadenanthera peregrina), Yoco (Paullinia Yoco),

[14] In a similar fashion, we can find groups of highland healers who specialize on particular techniques and master plants, such the "Healing Axis" of Ecuador and Northern Peru (Camino, 1994; Bussmann and Sharon, 2006). Other networks facilitate a similar exchange of plants with a high cultural and symbolic value. This is the case of Ananderasia Peregrina (Yopo), which was used by Indigenous communities throughout the northern region of South America. As well as Tobacco and Peyote in North America(Schultes, Hofmann and Rätsch, 2006).

and Guayusa (Illex guayusa) (Chaumeil, 1992; Barbira Freedman, 2014; Pinzón Castaño, Suárez P and Garay A, 2004; Ramírez de Jara, 1996; Bolivar, 2005;Schultes and Plowman, 1979). The techniques associated with the consumption of these plants are shared throughout the region by a diversity of different ethnic and cultural communities with many similarities.

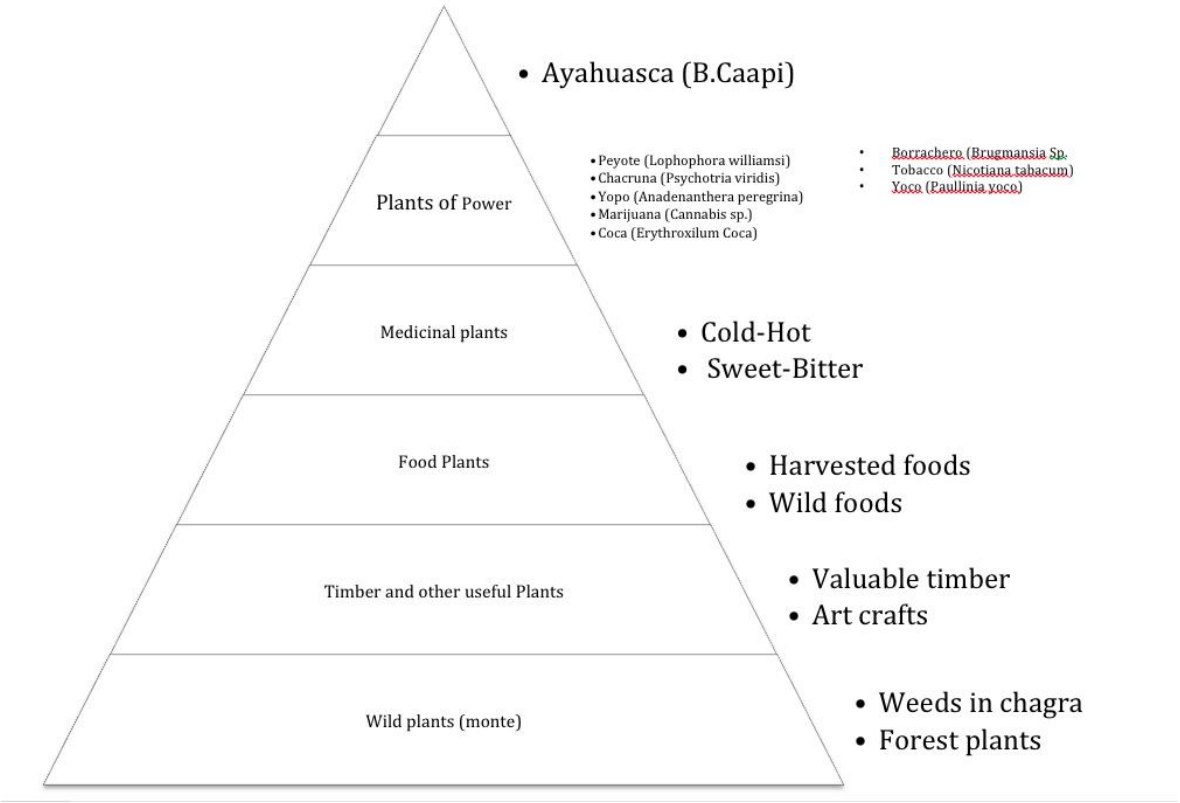
There is a variety of archaeological and ethnohistorical evidence on similar prehispanic networks throughout the country. This evidence shows a complex network of shamans and healers throughout Colombia. Symbolic and ceremonial objects with closely associated with shamanic practices have been found in the Caribbean coast in the north to the highlands of Pasto and Nariño in the south[15]. Made of gold or stone these objects have characteristics that might indicate an exchange of shamanic beliefs similar to those in the Amazon today (Rodriguez Cuenca, 2011). Familiar motifs such as the feline and jaguar anthropomorphisms, birds and flying creatures as well as tools of the trade such as snuff pipes, containers, and musical instruments are widely available.

Curiously, there is no category for People of Borrachero. There is no doubt that throughout the Andean foothills, from Sibundoy to Mocoa and all through Middle Putumayo, Borrachero still plays a central role in the complex dynamics of local shamanism. Its use, even if it is varied throughout the region, falls into certain practices and rituals that are similar in every ethnic community. These are practices such as drinking small quantities to give luck and protection, healing with smashed pulp for bruising and smudging to cleanse the body and the area that are generalized and done used with similar techniques. Why is it then that Ayahuasca and other master plants have their own classification while Borrachero is marginalised?

Like Tabacco, Brugmansia is one of the most common shamanic plants in South America (Schultes, Hofmann and Rätsch, 2006). Its widespread availability might be explained by its

[15] It is also probable that Borrachero flowed through the lowlands with help of these networks. The varieties that grow in the lowlands arrived at this territory by similar networks of shamans and healers who would exchange knowledge and practices and constantly experiment to produce new varieties. Borrachero expanded through a diversity of ethnic backgrounds and is grown by communities all through Amazonia.

continual use since early prehispanic times. Probably one of the earliest archaeological representations of this plant is a Chimu stele from the Early Central Andean Horizon (900-200 b.c.) with engraved images of its flowers (Mulvani, 1984) however there are other more inconclusive records that show a longer tradition (Schultes, Hofmann and Rätsch, 2006). Borrachero seems to be widely available even before many of the famed shamanic master plants like Ayahuasca, San Pedro and Coca were widespread.



Graph 1: Piramide of plants for mestizo shamans

It is also one of the few plants that is continuously described by Europeans, such as Fernandez de Oviedo´s XIV century book Historia General y Natural de las Indias (2010 [1852]). In his travels through the territory around Bogotá he was told of a plant capable of driving people into insanity:

> "Hay una hierba en aquella tierra, que llaman tectec, que enloquesce, y tanta podría comer un hombre della, que lo matase. Y para hacer que uno enloquezca, echan desa

> hierba en la olla en que guisan de comer, y comiendo después de la hierba que con la carne se coció, quedan locos los convidados o comedores para tres o cuatro días; e según la cantidad que echaren, así es más o menos la locura" "There is a plant in this land, which is called Tactec, that drives men crazy, and if eaten can even kill. And to make people go crazy, they just cook it in a pot, and eating it with meat, they become crazy for three to four days; and according to the quantity it produces more or less craziness" (2010[1852]).

This is a clear reference to the effects of Borrachero. Even Humboldt mentioned this plant, writing about how the Muisca used Tonga --Muisca name-- in the ceremonies of the Temple of the Sun in Sogamozo (Humboldt, 2006 [1819-1829]). This might be due to a continual shamanic use or because it has such an outstanding effect.

However, shamanic use of Borrachero was widely persecuted by the Spanish, hindering its use in most of the country (Schultes and Plowman 1979). At the same time, some other shamanic plants have been given different roles in the Spanish colonial system, such as Coca and Tobacco as early commodities. Others were used far from the Spanish sphere of influence such as Yopo and Yage in the lowlands. Instead, Borrachero continued to grow in the gardens and fields, in front of homes and near roads but no longer for ceremonial and shamanic practices. The Spanish seemed to have been tolerant of the beautiful flowers

In Sibundoy, its continual use went under the radar of the Spanish priest and monks. The shamans from Sibundoy are known as experts of Borrachero, as Taita LF mentioned:

> "antes de que llegara el yage al Sibundoy los Kametza habían llegado al valle desde lejos… Ellos trajeron el borrachero y el conocimiento de como usarlo desde donde venían." "Long before Ayahuasca had arrived at Sibundoy, the Kametza had arrived at the valley from far away… they brought Borrachero and the knowledge to use it".

As we saw in the vignette, Borrachero is still an important plant that interconnects the local shamans from the highlands and the lowlands. It has moved through the territory with the

help of these shamans and their apprentices who are actively exchanging cutting while collecting varieties.

Yet, as we know only a few specialists can use this plant, and only for extream cases. Drinking Borrachero mixed with the Ayahuasca, or drinking a brew made with Borrachero is a known to happen, however often as a hushed story. Instead, shamans in the highlands prefer to use Ayahuasca, they consider themselves closer to this network than to the smaller Borrachero community. They travel to the lowlands in search of the Ayahuasca brew and to master the techiniques to heal with this plant spirit. Borrachero, on the other hand, is barely noticeable.

Borrachero in Sibundoy

This does not mean that Borrachero is still not traded at a smaller scale. During my time in Sibundoy, I accompanied a friend who wished to trade a litre of Ayahuasca with a highland shaman. The trade went well even though the highland shaman was in a position of power, due to the fact that he had been elected as Cabildo the previous year. We managed to negotiate several plants and objects due to the high quality of the Ayahuasca. One of these plants that were negotiated was Borrachero, a variety that was not common in the lowlands. After he tasted the brew, he gave us several other fresh herbs, a harmonica and pound of glass beads for artisanal crafts to sell in the market of Mocoa. My friend was happy, especially for the harmonica, which had the special pitch he wanted but did not find in any store in the lowlands. We then headed to his house and in his garden; the Borrachero grew beautiful with long white flowers. He then proceeded to cut a stalk and gave it to us. Explaining “Pongalo en tierra y ese crece”"Put it in the ground and that will grow". I was a little doubtful, however, I had not seen this variety in the lowlands and I was sceptical of its ability to resist the soils and temperature of Mocoa.

Like other plants that I explore in this thesis, Borrachero varieties are exchanged through stalk cuttings, meaning that Borrachero has been cultivated and manipulated for centuries, producing complex hybrids that depend on humans for their survival. In this process of

domestication, which has created a great variety of the colours, leaf sizes and hallucinogenic potency, sexual reproduction has been sacrificed. Only cuttings can be used to grow this plant. There are no known wild specinments of Borrachero meaning that it has been domesticated to such a degree that it is a species deeply tied with humans (Hay, Gottschalk and Holguín, 2012). The seven different species categorised by different botanical sources do not represent the wide availiability of hybrids and varieties found in Putumayo. The continual exchange is invaluable in producing new hybrids. Since the seeds are sterile, only cuttings are traded, exchanged and on many occasion taken from plants found on neighbours' land. People who value the diversity of varieties must trade in any case to obtain more varieties, but this is even more essential where clones rather than seeds are concerned (Rival 2001).

However, to produce these hybrids means that the production of viable seeds is not imposible. Instead cross-pollination is a slow and painful process. These viable seeds are scarce and require a considerable horticultural effort by part of these shamans demonstrating the tight bond between the human and the Borrachero as well as the pleasure of experiment and produce something new. Due to the difficulty of sexual reproduction a certain intimacy is required to breed these varieties of Borracheros. Carefully selecting the different types to put nearby so that they can pollinate and produce hybrids, collecting the different seeds and testing them, waiting to see if they grow, hoping that a fertile plant is produced and a lot of luck might through generations produce new and special hybrids. Even though I do not think that these shamans are actively pollinating the flowers as a modern horticulturist, they have a deep knowledge of the cycles and varieties that mix together to allow a more gradual hybridization.

There are also special varieties that are kept away from the public in private gardens. These varieties are often exchanged with other shamans who have access to an unusually breeds. Whether these are bred to have different potency or if it is more of aesthetic characteristics, is difficult to say. During my fieldwork, I saw some of these collections of Borracheros growing in their gardens, yet whenever I asked if they had some different effect they would change the subject or deny it. However, I have my doubts whether these classifications go

beyond the aesthetic characteristics since due to its powerful effects -which could kill those who test them-, continual experimentation to test potency is difficult to imagine.

In the Sibundoy valley, Taita A. once took me to see some of the varieties of Borrachero around his town. It was a short walk as the beautiful flowers were widely prevalent and used as living fences and on the doorsteps of many of his neighbours. While we talked, Taita A. would show me the main ways to identify each variety, from the colour of the flower to the leaf forms, which ranged from ovulated to jagged, to even thin and long. Culebra (snake), which has long thin leaves, was almost unidentifiable as a Borrachero. This characteristic is also mentioned by Schultes and Plowman (1979), Bristol (1966), and Schultes(1955) who extensively worked in the Sibundoy valley.

The sheer amount of Borracheros that grew in this highland valley was incredible. During a short walk, Taita A. showed me five plants, each by name and key identifying features in the gardens near his house. Upon further exploration of the region I identified many more. However, as I knew that Borrachero was a sensitive topic, I did not ask about specific uses. Interestingly enough he also mentioned that those plants did not grow through seeds; it could only reproduce by cuttings. In fact, if this was the case, most of the Borracheros seen in the valley were probably the clones of the same varieties domesticated years ago.

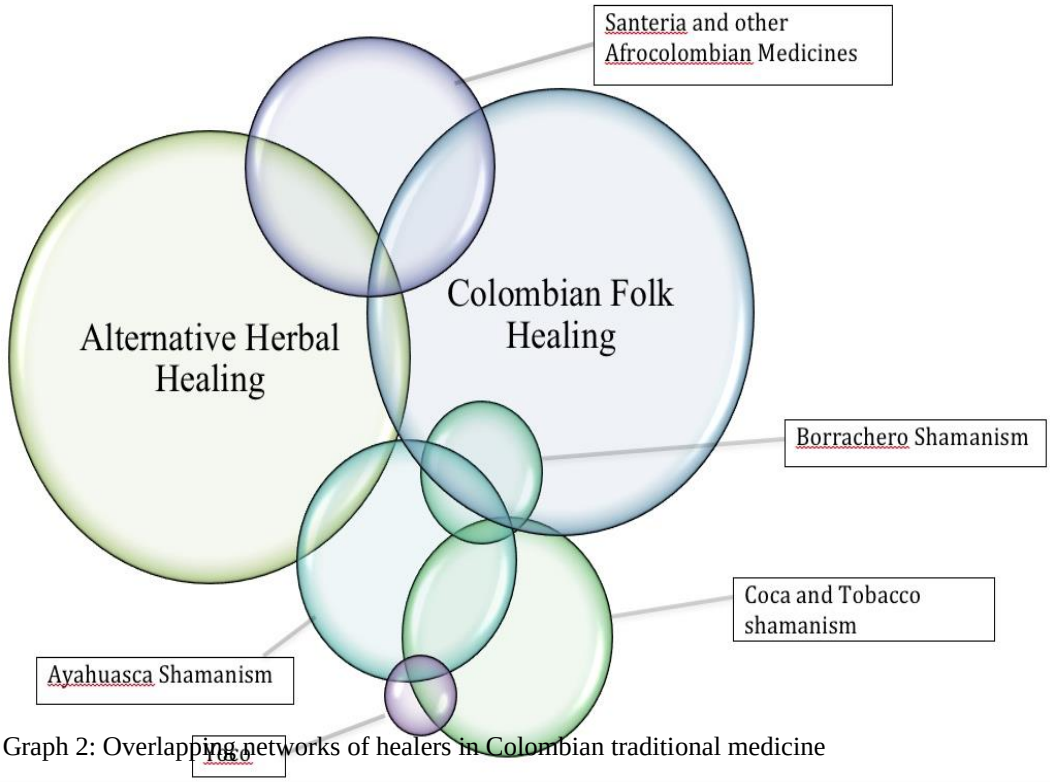
Image 15. Four different virieties of Borrachero found in 1 km walk. Completely different size and colour

The networks of healers and shamans that make part of the “people of Yage” facilitate the exchange of different varities of Borrachero in the highlands as well as in the lowlands. However like most things in the Andean slopes, plants and cultural practise not only flowed to the lowland but also flowed to the highlands. We can find plants from the highlands growing in lowland forest, which have been slowly adapted to the hot and humid weather, we also get a huge number of traded plants from all over the region encompassing several varied ecosystems. Examples of other plants that were found in diferent regions were Chondur *(Cyperus sp*.) found in the highlands near Pasto, the main component of Yage, *B.*

Caapi which was also found in Sibundoy and is known to grow in some gardens, but with great difficult to grow and effort as well as some other plants Coquindo (*Aspidosperma album*) and papa china (Colocasia esculenta). Meanwhile from the highalnds to the lowlands we find aromatic herbs, such as Eneldo (*Anethum graveolens*), oregano (*O. vulgare*) and Poleo (*Mentha poleo).* The constant experimentation and desire to collect different varieties (Rival, 2001) stimulate diversity and biological domestication as well as incorporating plants from different ecosystem into their landscape.

It is also probable that Borrachero flowed through the lowlands with help of these networks. The varieties that grow in the lowlands arrived at this territory by similar networks of shamans and healers who would exchange knowledge and practices and constantly experiment to produce new varieties. As such Borrachero expanded through a diversity of groups and is grown by communities all through Amazonia.

Ayahuasca Networks



Graph 2: Overlapping networks of healers in Colombian traditional medicine

Therefore let us consider that the small-scale networks of trade make part of larger interregional networks. In other words, Borrachero network makes part of the Ayahuasca networks and consecuently make part of the Folk medicine trade of Colombia. Those shamans and indigenous healers explored in the previous chapter are Putumayo shamans mostly belonging to the Ayahuasca shamanic tradition. They have the same plants and use many of the shamanic tools and techniques associated with Ayahuasca.

The exchange of Borrachero has defined not only the biology of the plant, but also the interregional and interethnic networks. As we saw, the extended prehispanic use of this plant has allowed it to spread throughout the region, however, its traditional trade is limited to few areas. In the valley of Sibundoy, the Kamentza and Inga, shamans still commonly use this plant its varieties are widely exchanged and hybrids are produced. Since the highland shamans actively use Ayahuasca as their primary tool to heal patients, their dependency on the lowland shamans foments the flow of highland Borachero to the lowlands as a medicine and as a way to combat dark shamans. In other words, the interconnection between the highland and the lowland has facilitated the spread of populations of Borrachero through the region.

In order to understand the larger-scale exchange of Borrachero from the highland to the lowlands I must give a description of the overall Ayahuasca networks. This network is made up of shamans from communities who ceremonially use of Ayahuasca as the central pillar of their shamanic practices. Therefore these shamans belong to the classification given by Colombian Anthropology as “las Culturas del Yage” or “the People of Yage/Ayahuasca”.

Jean Pierre Chaumeil (1991) states that these networks are supra ethnic due to the fact that they transcend ethnic background, and manifests itself in multiple forms throughout the region and beyond. Even if the consumption of Ayahuasca is generalised, the ritual and ceremonies associated with this drink change very little between different ethnic backgrounds. The main ethnic groups who belong to the Cultures of Yage in Colombia are the Cofan, Ziona, Inga, Kitchwa, Kametza, as well as a growing community of mestizo and

“blancos” shamans who are having an increasingly significant role in the overall network (Caicedo, 2014).

Most of these networks facilitate continual exchange. Reinforcing cultural practices and inter ethnic social relationships between experts. They exchange knowledge on medicinal plants and reinforce techniques that are needed to master this art. Shamans are also keen to interact with others as a means not only to learn new techniques, and test each other's capabilities but also as a way of control against dangerous practices. They also exchange medicinal plants such as Borrachero.

This network works through three main actors. The established shaman who has a large following and a healing house, the travelling shamans who are regularly travelling throughout the country selling their services and the apprentices who visit shamans in an effort to learn the art of Ayahuasca healing. Obviously, this is a very general overview of this complex web of relationships, which is also fluid and dynamic. In this group, I have not included other healers who do not use ayahuasca even if they are widely and deeply interconnected with the web. As well as patients who visit and casually participate in the ceremonies and are healed by Ayahuasca shamans.

Women healers are an integral part of this network. They are not only the mothers and wives of the powerful shamans but also the main source of medicinal knowledge beyond the use of Ayahuasca. In most of the cases, their knowledge of plants stays in the private setting, as a contraposition to shamanic ceremonies that are more public healing practices. However, Ayahuasca shamanism is generally a male-dominated practice and most of the interconnections analysed during this fieldwork were based on male relationships.

The first group I wish to describe are the established shamans, who have a long trajectory with broad experience on Ayahuasca ceremonies. They have an established following of patients and apprentices as well as a ceremonial house that is often lined with borrachero shrubs. Their capabilities are well known, often highlighted by strong power in local politics and fame.

These shamans often meet to test each other´s abilities, exchange practices as well as gossiping about other shamans. I believe that by continually meeting new shamans they regulate and control this practice and the use of Ayahuasca. They work as an unofficial regulating authority, warning patients about the possible misuse of the sacred brew. During my time in Putumayo, all of my informants would regularly talk about the times they visited other shamans. They would describe the ceremonies in great detail, explaining the strength of the brew, the capability of the shaman to sing and maintain a ceremony, as well as warning and stories of those other shamans who might easily fall into a wicked path. Much in the same way as Taita J. warned me of the terrible danger of drinking Ayahuasca in the highlands due to the added Borrachero. I was constantly told a number of stories about other shamans. This continual interaction allows for exchanges of techniques and medicines.

The second group of shamans who play an important role in this network are the travelling shamans and healers who continuously move through region and country. These shamans do not have a ceremonial house, and instead, visit town and cities to offer their services. Historically, these were Inga and Kametza shamans from the highlands, who, as we saw, have a history of travelling through the territory similar to the Mindales (Salomon, 1985). They would regularly travel through the country, visiting small towns and cities as well as visiting shamans from different ethnic backgrounds. They travelled with their medicines, books on magic, and ceremonial tools selling and exchanging them with others. It is through them that many different contacts in major cities were created and I believe it is through them that the Ayahuasca shamanism became such a central figure in the folk and alternative medicine in Colombia as they popularised this practice and allowed access to a number of different ethnic groups.

Finally, the last group are the apprentices who travel from shaman to shaman learning the art of healing. These might be indigenous, or of any ethnic background who travel to learn under the tutelage of a shaman. They have minor roles in the ceremony, often highly hierarchical depending on the knowledge they have. Most of the apprentices, however, did not start right away to become a shaman. Instead, it is a long and arduous process that starts with a slight

interest in the subject. For this reason, I consider patients are also part of this group since as they start attending more ceremonies; they become more interested and often take an apprentice life.

The gradual process from patients to shamans can be classifed into three distinct groups, the "pacientes" who go casually out of curiosity or to heal a disease, the "tomadores" who begin drinking continuously and have a greater experience of the subject and those who can "repartir" or give Ayahuasca. Most of the casual people you meet in the ceremonies are "tomadores", who drink Ayahuasca on a regular basis and are knowledgeable on certain aspects of the ritualised practice I, for example, consider my self a "tomador", however a minor one. Those who are gifted or have a great motivation on becoming a shaman might get to the stage of "repartir" or offer Ayahuasca under the permission of the shaman himself. These rarely move from shaman to shaman, often focusing on one as the power and brew of another might be dangerous to their master and consequently to their patients, only when the apprentice feels that he might learn more from another he will change his master. Meanwhile, the patients and tomadores are allowed to experiment, often travelling through the multicultural landscape of shamans trying the brews and ceremonies that best works for them.

These apprentices and patients are an essential source of interconnectivity. As they move from one shaman to the next, they also allow for a continual exchange of knowledge and techniques, and as they travel through the territory they bringing and exchanging plants from different ecosystems. As we saw in the vignette, these apprentices are constantly giving different varietites of plants such as Borrachero to their masters.

Hugh Jones (1994) uses the term Vertical Shamanism to describe these types of shamanic practices. They share severa features with other, more structured religions. Vertical shamanism establishes a small elite of experts on esoteric and magic elements, who monopolise these practices, creating a sort of priesthood that possesses access to ritualised and ceremonial political power. This group of elites allow for a more prominent role with other different ethnic groups since they are tasked with intervening in multi-ethnic exchange, as well as multispecies negotiations. The outward-looking nature of this type of shamanism

facilitates the expansion of these practices among different ethnic groups. This sort of missionarism allows for continual exchange and cultural negotiation. We see this all the time, with the apprentices that go from patients to "tomadores" quite quickly, with the travelling shamans who establish complex networks of contacts throughout the country, and the established shamans who have a long-standing following of hundreds of people.

In the Sibundoy valley both of the main ingredients to make Ayahuasca do not grow locally, yet its consumption has become a major part of the Kamentza and Inga identity. The practice probably arrived from this closely interconnected network especially from trade routes through the mountains. The complex networks and trade routes such as the ones seen in Putumayo, demonstrate how the line between the Andean and the Amazonian world has been fluid for centuries (Ramirez, 2005).

However, this fact has forced highland shamans to rely on the lowland counterparts to supply the Ayahuasca, having an enormous effect on the spiritual and social hierarchy of local shamanism. On the one hand, the highland shamans are continually invoking those of the lowlands as the main source of their power. During the ceremonies and healing rituals, some shamans like Taita A. would evoke others to legitimise their powers. As Barbira Freedman (2014) stated

> "The social networks constituted during geographical travels that double as astral or out-of-body travels under the effect of psychotropic plants are crucial for activating the polarities of power that shamans operate with"(pg131).

Taita A. would confirm this, when he would tell me about the time a famed Kofan shaman visited him in the "pinta" and gave him the power to heal.

On the other hand, the shamans around Sibundoy are looked down upon by lowland shamans due to the lack of access to the sacred plants. The lowland shamans believe that the highland shamans are incapable of controling the agency of the Ayahuasca brew, do not know what they are doing or even cause harm. The fact that they have no direct access to the medicinal

plants means that they do not know cook the Ayahuasca, and therefore, do not know the ingredients that have been used. Similarly, Borrachero is also considered inferior to the Ayahuasca, it is widely used, but as a medicine and not as a plant of power. This inferior hierarchical position is highlighted by the consideration that the highland shamans might include Borrachero in their brew of Ayahuasca, corrupting the final essence of the sacred brew.

Some highland shamans whom I visited were actively experimenting with some of these medicinal plants, growing them in the highland flatlands. They are constantly trying to grow *P. viridis, D. cabrerana* and *B. caapi* in order to produce their own Ayahuasca brew and break away from their dependency on this interconnected network. Yet, this seems to be extremely challenging, effectively guaranteeing the continued interdependence. In this respect, the shamanic networks function as spaces of creation, experimentation and ethnogenesis. Accelerating the adaptation of these plants into different ecosystems and the production of genetic diversity.

The constant exchange of practices has allowed for an accelerated hybridity process. Medicines such as Borrachero are exchanged frequently, and these networks allow for the different varieties and techniques associated with them to flow freely. Foreign practices are also quickly incorporated making the network quite dynamic, capable of adapting to different historical and social processes. As such, you might find a mestizo shaman who sings songs of Ziona origin or vice versa as well as Indigenous shamans who might include the use of Peyote (*Lophophora williamsii*) or yoga in their ceremonies. This is especially the case of broader global networks of healers such as New Age and Neoshamanic practices, which have quickly incorporated Putumayo shamanism into regional and global dynamics.

Due to the central role of Ayahuasca for this growing network I consider it vital to spend some time describing and discussing the processes by which Ayahuasca shamanism creates spaces of hybridity and exchange. In the next chapter I will explore this in more detail, while I take a theoretical approach to analyse the complex relationship this medicine has with the people who use it.

Chapter 4 Ayahuasca

In the previous chapters, I explored the trade networks that facilitated the interconnection between the highland mestizo folk medicine and the indigenous communities of the lowlands. People, plants, products and knowledge have flowed through this region since precolombian time, uniting both territories (Uribe and Lleras, 1983; Pinzón Castaño, Suárez P and Garay A, 2004). I have also given an overview of intimate networks of shamans who have adopted Ayahuasca as their main shamanic tool while marginalising the use of Borrachero and other plants of power.

These trade routes allowed for the highland shamans to establish a close cultural bound with the lowlands and with Ayahuasca shamanism. The ancient trade routes between Sibundoy and Mocoa are, for the highland shamans in Sibundoy and Nariño, deeply associated with the trade of Ayahuasca. For this reason, the Kamentza and Inga shamans of Sibundoy call it "El Camino De La Medicina" or "The Road Of The Medicine".

However these same trade routes have facilitated the expansion of Ayahuasca far beyond Putumayo, western Amazonia, and the local networks of the "People of Yage". The plant´s use has created an even more complex multicultural and multilocal meshwork of people from

a wide range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds beyond its traditional sphere of influence becoming a global phenomenon (see: Labate and Cavnar, 2014, Labate and Cavnar, 2018).

Ayahuasca, it seems, is easily adopted by different cultural and religious practices. This has accelerated its expansion through the region and the world. There is evidence that the use of Ayahuasca spread rapidly through indigenous cultures in Amazonia during the late 19th and early 20th century (Beyer, 2010; Gow, 1994) and was quickly adopted by mestizo religions such as Santo Daime and Vegetalismo (Dobkin de Rios, 1984; 2011; Dawson, 2013; Luna, 1986; Labate and MacRae, 2016; Beyer, 2010; Gow, 1994). The shamanic use of Ayahuasca has even overshadowed local medicinal and shamanic practices (Lenaerts, 2011; Babira Freedman, 2015). Slowly this expansion has established Ayahuasca shamanism as one of the primary forms of indigenous medicine in Amazonia and Colombia (Caicedo Fernandez, 2014). At the same time, its adoption into global networks such as alternative spiritualism and psychedelic culture have allowed for it to be used in a plurality of different cultural backgrounds and ontologies.

Much has been speculated of the origin of the powerful shamanic brew[16]. It is a mixture of two widely available and semidomesticated plants from the Andean foothills, *Banisteropsis Caapi* and *Diplopterys cabrerana or Psychotria viridis*, and unlike what many of the local shamans state, it seems to be a relatively recent discovery which spread throughout western Amazonia quite rapidly. Peter Gow (1994) and Barbec de Mori (2011) both believe that the discovery of Ayahuasca was a result of colonial processes as missionary and trade centres began bringing people together throughout the Andean foothills. It is difficult to say with certainty if this was the case since the communities that are now part of the "Culturas del Yage" have changed dramatically through recent history and the ethnohistory of Ayahuasca is often sensationalised due in part to the lack primary sources. Archaeology and ethnohistorical analysis have shown inconclusive evidence of Ayahuasca use (Naranjo,

[16] Some early scholars were convinced that this shamanism was part of a surviving pan-American prehisrotic religion (Wasson, 1971). The particularities, and possible recent efflorescence of Ayahuasca is compatible to a long-term diffusion, or multiple emergences (Gow, 1996).

1986). In any case, local indigenous people consider the use of Ayahuasca as ancestral to the same degree as other shamanic plants such as Tobacco, Coca, Anadenanthera Snuffs and Borrachero.

I will, however, not explore this in detail. Instead, I will focus on how Ayahuasca can facilitate intercultural exchange. It is through intimate, regional and global meshworks that Ayahuasca has become what it is, transcending the local indigenous worlds and expanding to mestizo and global realms, establishing itself as the central pillar of shamanic practices in Putumayo.

During my fieldwork, Ayahuasca had been the centre of the world. Every conversation that was about medicinal plants, biodiversity, ecology and even politics in this territory revolved around the power of this medicine. As such, in order to discuss the ability of certain plants to build and establish spaces for multicultural exchange, Ayahuasca seems to be a great case study.

This chapter will engage in the processes by which this practice spreads. In particular, it will look at how Ayahuasca flows through this multi-ontological landscape, where people of distinct cultural backgrounds are drawn to it, redefining their place in the world along the way. I believe that Ayahuasca has become a space for ethnic interaction, of negotiation and hybridity. By using Ayahuasca as a case study I hope to shed a light on the role medicinal plants play in the hybridisation processes, offering spaces of ontological syncretism, where the different ways of relating to the world are negotiated.

A Radical Non-Human Agency

I had been working with the shaman for some time, visiting his home every other day. He lived in the middle of the Barrio Jose Borrero in Mocoa. It was the only home in the neighbourhood that looked like a forest. His small wooden house was surrounded by large trees and stood out from the urban surroundings. He was a kind man, of advanced age, suffering from paralysis in his legs and he had much difficulty walking. I grew very fond of

him during my time in Mocoa and visited him often since I felt he was very lonely. Having been a good shaman in his youth, he had become less respectable in the highly hierarchical networks of shaman in Putumayo and many considered him a witch due to his physical limitations.

As my interest grew, I began drinking Ayahuasca with him. It was during one of these sessions that I saw her. Her face was beautiful, almost bizarrely so. No discernable features, deformed and faceless yet beautiful. Like most spiritual being in the Amazon basin, she changed shape. She took the form of a sloth, hanging from the branches of a great tree but then quickly transformed into a woman who would slowly walk in between countless plants and trees. Somehow this faceless being was both sloth and human, shifting from one form to another with ease. Her presence reminded me of those statutes of the Virgin Mary that accumulate dust in the old Catholic churches and as a sloth, she was part plant part animal. The colours in her garden were beautiful, changing continuously like a mother of pearl in the light. She guided me through it slowly showing me plants that I had not seen before, blurred by the continually changing colours. She motioned to look in between her hands, she was hiding something small and when she opened her hands, a flower was visible. This was unlike any other flower I had seen, with an odd elongated shape like a trumpet or a brass horn. The flower was spotted, like a jaguar, yet its form looked like a snake, a cobra displaying its menacing look. At first, I did not recognise it, it was only after several weeks that I learned what it ment.

The following day, I went back to the Taita, while we smoked a cigarette, I told him of what I had seen. He seemed surprised, we had of talked about what he called the “jardin botanico del cielo” “the botanical garden in the sky” during my visits and it seemed to shock him that I had seen it. I described my visions to him and he soon explained that the Virgin and Yage were owners of these forests and the medicinal plants. When someone was sick, the shaman had to ask Ayahuasca/Yage to grant him access to the medicines necessary to heal the patients. She would make them visible to the shaman so that he could heal his patients. It seemed curious that I had visualised the flower, but I did not know why, after all, no one I knew was sick.

Image 16: Tigrewasca flower seen in my pinta

Only after a few weeks, I came to find the flower growing in the gardens of a local healer. When I asked the healer about it she told me that it was Tigriwasca (Aristolochia sp. Or Dutch Pipe) a powerful medicine for snakebites and other hot related diseases. I was perplexed, why did Yage/Ayahuasca show me this? I had not seen a snake during my time in Mocoa, nor anyone who might have gotten bitten. After some time, however, I was overwhelmed with a realisation of just how much this experience had impacted my research. The idea of an agency beyond the human, which as many shamans and psychonauts would say not only communicates but teaches you, was overwhelming. At the same time, I thought of the hundreds of people who had similar compelling experiences with this radical non-human and how much it had changed them.

As a *Taita* said to me once,

> " es la unica de las plantas de poder que tiene conciencia, que cuando uno la usa uno sabe que la luz lo guia a uno" “it is the only plant of power with a conscience, which, when one uses it, one knows that the light guides you”.

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Many authors have described their experiences with Ayahuasca throughout the years (Shanon, 2005; Burrows, 1963; Davis, 1996; Weiskopf, 2002; Harner, 1980; Brown, 2014; Virtanen, 2014; Wilcox, 2003; Narby, 2014; Campos and Overton-Wiese, 2014; among many others). For most, however, it had always been challenging to describe it in academic terms. It should be stated that many, if not most of the anthropologists who have worked with or around Ayahuasca, have tried this brew. In Colombia, it has become a rite of passage for young Anthropology undergraduates. This has had an enormous effect on how local people feel and relate to this substance as well as popularising throughout the world. As more and more spiritual tourists flock into regions of western Amazonia the home of Ayahuasca shamanism, much of what is currently being written about Ayahuasca has shifted towards spiritualism, romanticising indigenous knowledge as well as interwoven political discourses.

During the latter half of the 20th-century, anthropology has focused on establishing Ayahuasca and other psychedelics as legitimate parts of indigenous worldviews and practices (Dobkin de Rios, 1984; Schultes and Raffauf, 2004; Labate and Cavnar, 2014; 2018; Harner, 1980; Calabrese, 2014). It seems, however, that most of this work has centred on the social processes around Ayahuasca as a ritualised plant. Not much has been written on the materiality and ontological processes that make Ayahuasca such an exciting plant not only for local indigenous people but also for so many westerners.

I will give a short analysis on how local people work and deal to this substance, highlight some of these qualities and characteristics, as well as the limitations of western ethnoscience to classify it. To fully understand these processes let us start from the beginning. Ayahuasca, or Yage as it is known in Colombia, is a brew made of a diversity of plants that produces strong psychedelic experiences (See: Jonathan Ott, 2006). Most Ayahuasca brews are made from two specific plants, the Yage plant (*Banisteriopsis caapi*) and the Chagrapinta (*D. cabrerana*) or Chacruna (*Psychotria viridis*). On their own, neither of these plants produces a substantial effect on the body, together they cause an intense psychedelic experience[17].

[17] *B. caapi*, though containing the alkaloid *MAO* inhibitor, would not produce the famed visions by itself. However, when mixed and cooked with *D. cabrerana* or *P. viridis*, which contains *N, N-dimetiltriptamina*, the *MAO* inhibitors allow for the slow ingestion, and it

For the communities in Putumayo, Ayahuasca plays a significant role as a spiritual entity, as a conscious agency that is not only a powerful ally to shamans but also a determining agent that defines how people see the world. It has a profound effect on local religious beliefs, personal choices and even how people live their daily lives. For the indigenous communities, political and social decisions need to be "consultado" consulted with Ayahuasca. In this respect, many of my contacts' life choices were influenced by what Ayahuasca had shown to them. As one of my main informants would say "toca consultar con el remedio, el Yage muestra lo que se debe hacer" "one needs to consult the medicine, Yage shows you what needs to be done".

It is not surprising to see that Ayahuasca shamanism is often described as animist practice (Dolmatoff, 1978). Plants have always been difficult to categorise as animist due to their relative static nature, yet throughout Amazonia, many plants are given animist descriptions and complex personhoods (Rival, 2012; Descola, 1996; Chaumeil, 1991). This has been explored by anthropology to a lesser degree than animals and forest spirits (Škrabáková, 2014; Daly et al., 2016). In any case, due to its complex agency, Ayahuasca belongs to the category of "Planta Maestra" "Master Plant" which means that its animist personhood is multi-faceted.

Animism, as an ontological regime, helps rationalise psychedelics since, according to Viveiro de Castro (2015), animist non-human beings such as animals, plants and spirits "see themselves as human: they perceive themselves to be anthropomorphic beings" (Viveiros de Castro, 2015: pg 197). As such when the plant speaks to us, it speaks to us from the innate and universal humanness. Similarly, as Descola (2014) highlights, for animist the interiority of beings, like the soul, culture, conscience, is shared among humans and non-humans. Psychedelics like Ayahuasca make sense for animist, since, if they can be heard and

becomes active in the human brain. Cooked together, they produce the chemical reaction needed for the body to absorb the active alkaloid and cause the powerful experience. Even if this recipe does vary throughout the region, these two ingredients are essential to make it Ayahuasca.

understood, they are thought to posses internal spiritual agency that is in many ways similar to our own.

Animism as an ontological category can also help us analyse the subtleties that are involved when interacting with Ayahuasca. It helps us see how shamans work with Ayahuasca both in physical and spiritual ways. By understanding Ayahuasca as an animist entity, we can understand the emic rationalisation that goes into the different techniques and processes used to manipulate this plant.

The Yage plant, or B. caapi is considered the most essential part of the brew and many of the shamans in Putumayo classify it as "el rey de todas las plantas" or king of all plants. This "bejuco" or liana can make noises, glow, and even call people in its vegetative form. These sounds are a glance into the invisible world[18]. Similarly, like other animist beings, these lianas are known to move and even change shape from plant to animal with ease such as a snake or jaguar. Very rarely it can also take the form of a human shaman with a great feather crown. Therefore, to work with the Ayahuasca is to acknowledge its humanness. During my time in the field, only the men and older women were able to come in contact with it, often stating its jealousy and its capacity to go bad if not treated correctly or touched by young menstruating women. Calling it by its more recent name "remedio" "medicina" or "Yagesito", they would often speak to it in hushed voices, with affection and respect as you would to an elder.

When harvested the liana is crushed and cooked with the other plant, the Chacruna or chagropinta. Shamans often call this plant the vision or "Pinta", and it is this plant that allows them to see into the invisible world, to see the Yage spirit. Unlike Ayahuasca, Chacruna does not have the same level of personhood as a master plant and does not require the same

[18] The multiplicity of beings that populate the forest are constantly manifesting through sounds, which can be used by the shaman through their chants to answer back and "contribute to harmonious conviviality" (Hill, 2013) as well as "domesticate" (Wright, 2011) these beings for the purpose of healing.

thorough interaction. When foraging Chacruna the shaman does not need to ask permission, instead, the leaves are quickly stripped from the bushes and collected in a bundle.

Cooking it is a long and arduous process, and the shaman must always be attentive to the different people and things that come into contact with it. It is through this attentiveness that shamans control the quality and potency of the brew. Most of the time, the shaman is constantly drinking it to taste it. On some occasions, they might have several batches with different plant additives included. Cooking Ayahuasca means placing layers upon layers overlapping crushed Yage vines and Chacruna leaves into a pot full of water. The process may take several days of constant boiling to reduce the mixture in the large pot into three or four litters of a thick brown active brew.

For these shamans, Ayahuasca is the most important tool to interact with alterity. Ayahuasca allows the shamans -and the patients- to “ver más allá de lo que pueden los ojos” "see further and clearer than their eyes can". Making the invisible world visible with all its inhabitants. It is through Ayahuasca that a shaman can communicate with the beings that exist in it, to visit them in their houses and negotiate the health of his patients. Ayahuasca can shed the skin or dress of the animal or spirits and show its real form. By making the invisible visible, it also reveals the disease in the patient's body. The shaman then can see the real reason behind an illness, be it witchcraft, an arrow from a neighbouring shaman, the envy of others or a spiritual attack.

Therefore, the Ayahuasca ceremonies offer the proper cultural space to interact with the multiplicity of agencies that cohabit the region. The shamans are constantly aware of this during the ceremonies, they are constantly managing the different spirits through techniques such as songs and smudging. As such, during healing ceremonies, the shaman must continuously negotiate with many spiritual agencies, this includes the Ayahuasca spirit, the spirits of his shamanic tools –such as other medicinal plants-- and the different spirits that can cause diseases (Jauregui et al., 2011). For this reason some shamans do not like that people smoke or use other substances that would add to their work. Ritualised techniques

allow for the proper use of these tools and prevent them from causing undesired consequences.

Once the invisible world is visible, the spirit of Ayahuasca itself can be seen or felt. This is the personification of Yage, the invisible form that has become visible. It is often described as the central consciousness of the plant, formless yet communicative. However, with the "pinta" or visions it can take multiple forms, from the shape of animals like jaguars, snakes and birds, to the shape of elders, shamans, healers and even children. It is central in the narratives of the shamans whom I worked with, as it is this spirit that guides and gives them advice. With the ongoing globalisation of its consumption, the term "Mama" or "Mother" Ayahuasca has become very popular even in Putumayo (Jauregui et al., 2011). However, most of the time, the spirit is only a guide. It grants a direct line of access to the light, God, the creator, the Great Spirit, Pachamama. This idea is highlighted by name “cordon umbilical” or “umbilical cord”.

When the individual consumes the brew they incorporate this agency into their own, becoming the vehicle for Ayahuasca to manifest itself. The similarities to the Catholic communion are not lost to the shaman, as they often call it “la communion con el Yage” "the communion with Yage”. It breaks down the boundaries to create hybrids[19], a medium between human and plant in which the line that separates our internal thoughts and that of the other becomes increasingly blurry[20]. These are interwoven semiotic processes that go beyond the reductive explanations of a biochemical reaction in our brain. As a shaman once told me:

> "Nos habla y nos muestra todo lo que hay que ver" “it speaks to us and it shows us everything that we have to see”.

[19] For Haraway (1991), these Cyborgs are a mix between people and technology, however if we consider that ayahuasca brew is a technology would this not produce cyborgs as well?
[20] Similar to the entity I witnessed in the vignette at the start of the chapter.

As another shamans told me:

> “Esa voz, que escucha durante la ceremonia, esa es el espiritu del yage. Ese le dice lo que tienen que hacer, le muestra la medicina que toca usar, le muestra la enfermedad.”
> "That voice, the one you listen during the ceremony, that’s the spirit of Yage. It tells you what to do, how to get better, what medicines to use and shows you the sickness."

Since this region is a meshwork of intersecting ethnic and cultural communities, Ayahuasca ceremonies can also offer the space for the people to come together and exchange knowledge and beliefs. Different indigenous ethnicities, colonial racial categories and global communities have been attracted to Ayahuasca due in part to its tangible effects. For most of the non-indigenous patients, the powerful experience produced by the brew is often difficult to rationalise. Animism, I believe, grants the proper ontological framework to make sense of it and thus shamans are often highlighting these characteristics. Still, for many people who actively use these substances, thinking of the world as full of spirits and non-human personhoods is often counterintuitive.

However, the vagueness of the psychedelic experience facilitates other interpretations. Its existence as a multi-layered and multidimensional being permits multiple approaches to it, while at the same time acknowledging the agency of the plant. Its flexibility and adaptability have allowed it to include not only a multiplicity of beings but granted flexibility to different interpretations. It facilitates new perspectives to deal with old realities.

As different communities come together not only through trade, but also through ritual, shamans have adapted their practices to include many different ways of interpreting the world. Examples of this are the interwoven relationships between Christianity and indigenous shamanism, which have produced interesting syncretic interpretations such as the image of the Virgin as the owner of the medicinal plants and God as a great shaman. As we saw this type of shamanism have the techniques to deal with alterity. The role of shamans as mediators of alterities, allows them to deal with an abundance of spiritual agents as well as offer the proper spaces for cultural dialogue and syncretisms. Meanwhile, the profoundly moving

experiences produced by Ayahuasca have a capability of both reinforcing already established spiritual beliefs and at the same time opening those who consume I,t to different ways of seeing the world. This facilitates a greater acceptance of difference and allows for the malleability needed for cultural exchange.

The Coming Together of Different Worlds

I would often hike through the forest around Mocoa with a friend after some Ayahuasca ceremonies. We both agreed that it was the best time to go since we felt more "in tune" with nature. I would love to go on hikes with him since as a biologists, he was capable of identifying many of the plants, fungi and animals we came across. Anyone who has had the experience of visiting a complex and hyper-diverse territory like the Andean foothills with a biologist might appreciate how interesting this experience is. Their taxonomic eye and understanding of the multiple layers of ecological relationships are astounding. Often it seems like they are reading the forest, in a similar way to musicians who read musical score. Botanists, in particular, can identify a plant genus and species through a series of physical characteristics and patterns that not only highlight a semiotic understanding of these forests but also highlight their temporality and relationality to both evolution and adaptation to the larger meshwork of life.

Gregory Cajete (2000) explains that like any other ontological worldview, biology depends on the classification of organisms to define and categorise nature. It is a world-building technique, fomenting the cosmology of evolution through rational classification by observing the similarities and affinities, which embody the passing of time and ecological relations. For a biologist, understanding biological and ecological processes by categorising them produces a way of existing in the world. Descola (2013) describes the naturalist ontological worldview as a way to relate with the physicality and interiority of nature. Naturalism was from its origins, a different way of existing within the world; where humans and non-humans share the same exteriority bounded by the physical and biological laws while internally all individuals are different (Descola, 2013). Biology as a discipline and a worldview sees organisms as individuals who belong to complicated webs of relationships.

Unlike other ontological realms, biological sciences tend to understand organisms through Cartesian paradigms. This means that these organisms do not have a soul or culture and exist almost mechanically. This is even more pronounced with plants as they have been considered for most of history as nearly inorganic, between the living and the non-living. Limited by their lack of mobility and subjectivity these organisms are bound to the weather and temporality of the earth more than animals. For biology, to truly understand the floral world, meant categorising them by physical attributes that can illuminate the processes by which they have changed and adapted to different ecosystems through time.

Ethno-sciences, such as ethnobotany, try and add the human factor that is often forgotten by natural scientists. However, due to the overwhelming universalisation of natural sciences, many of these studies tend to fall short of establishing vernacular knowledge in the same footing as scientific knowledge. Ethnobiology, thus, tends to translate emic concepts into the naturalist perspectives (Descola, 2013). Even I do this by giving the binomial name of each plant.

When my friend and I would come across the plot of the local shaman, we would often look into the plant and classify it according to its external characteristics. Looking at the physiology of each plant, we could deduce the family and ecological characteristics to group them in categories that would fit our understanding of the world. By translating these emic concepts into scientific ones, we are continuing a totalising attempt to construct meaning from different codes and systems, trying to find points of resonance in which the intention is the same (Carneiro da Cunha, 1998), in which a Sacha --Quechua for plant/forest-- is the same as a biological plant. However, we are caught between different regimens: one which validates the knowledge of different people in an equal footing –shamanism-- and the other as part of a complex hierarchical power structure which validates one knowledge –the scientific-- as superior.

Image 17: Yage vine flowers (B. caapi) and chagrapinta (D. cabrerana)

If we look closely at the two plants that are the main ingredients to prepare Ayahuasca we can deduce that as a climbing liana with aggregated inflorescences of zygomorphic (bilaterally symmetrical), 5-petaled flowers, *Banisteriopis caapi* is part of the *Malpighiaceae* family of neotropical flora. *Diplopterys cabrerana* is also part of this family, albeit with a woody bush habit. Meanwhile, *P. viridis* belongs to the Rubiaceae family, which is easily recognisable as simple, opposite leaves with a pronounced interpetiolar stipule and resembles its close relative Coffea genus.

This information, however, is limiting, as it shows little or no relationality between these two plants other than that they exist in the same ecosystem. If we did not know that cooking them together would create a substance that would give us powerful spiritual experience, we would not even group them together.

Nonetheless, natural sciences do give us the proper tools to understand the chemical reactions and their effects on our brains. By contemplating the laws that bind all materiality, we can identify the chemical composition of these alkaloids, opening the door for a whole set of new dynamics. It was through the process of classification and experimentation that people were able not only to extract similar molecules from other plants but also synthesise them artificially. This process has not stopped here, as these techniques and knowledge have spread beyond academia as the Internet facilitates a growing number of people who make their own synthesized mind-altering substances. Knowledge of matter, biochemistry and biology have allowed for widespread global use.

Here again, we reach an impasse of the naturalist ontology since even if we know the material processes that produce these experiences, understanding them has proven quite difficult. These experiences, unlimited by its physical materiality and due to the incomprehensive and overpowering effects on the individual's personal perception, are impossible to classify or quantify through scientific terms.

Like other psychedelics, Ayahuasca can produce what is known as ego death, which means, "experiencing a complete loss of subjective self-identity" (Johnson, Richards and Griffiths, 2008: pg 613). This has a profound and lasting effect on the individuals who consume it[21]. Often it can cause awe-inspiring spiritual experiences that can define how people see and relate to the world. It is also known to offer different perspectives, such as seeing the world through the eyes of animals and different people, which has a fundamental effect on how people see their place in the world. How and why these substances produce these effects is not understood, however recent interest in the spiritual qualities of these experiences have shown the limits of a scientific approach to these substances (Griffiths et al., 2006). More and more psychedelic studies have become open to notions that have historically been marginalised as pseudoscience (Griffiths et al., 2006).

[21] Studies on psychedelics have been historically marginalized due in part to the War against drugs. However, recent human testing has become increasingly popular, and new approaches to these substances have used much of the lessons of learned in 1960s psychedelic revolution.

Meanwhile, the agency and consciousness of these plants have also raised a set of new questions. Naturalism has historically limited intelligence to some animals, but attributed none to plants. Yet, for many people who use these substances, their consciousness is unquestionable. The psychedelic experience also opens the door to worlds populated with non-humans that can be interacted with, such as the machine elves (Mckenna, 2998), mescalito (Castañeda, 1998), entities, angels, spiritual guides, and a whole host of other beings. The act of consuming a psychedelic is such a profound experience that it requires a cognitive shift in the way we deal with the non-human. In other words, it forces the person to establish a relationship with these non-humans that acknowledges their consciousness and intelligence.

It is with this in mind that my friend and I arrived at Mocoa. We were motivated by the profound ontological paradox of seeing the natural world through a scientific perspective while having this overwhelming experience that had forced us to rethink the way we relate to the world. Many authors have highlighted this state of incongruity, especially ethnobiologists and Psychonauts (Mckenna, 1998; Castañeda,1998; Davis, 1998; Letcher, 2006; Giraldo Herrera, 2018). They have all advocated adopting a new language to build the necessary bridge between the two worlds. They advocate a new epistemic, built on hybrids between shamanism and science in order to further understand how these beings exist.

In a sense, the global psychedelic community is already doing this. Collectively they are creating relationships with these non-human beings in a very animist manner, giving them agency, personhood and consciousness. While "hunting", people who look for psilocybin mushrooms are constantly giving them names, carefully admiring them, talking to them, even singing to them (Letcher 2006). For many, this is a sacred act, representing not only the agency of the one who harvests but also the agency of the harvested. By adopting a shamanic discourse, modern 'shroomers' have produced techniques to interact with these powerful agents. Andrew Letcher (2006) claims that Terrance McKenna was one of the first to advocate shamanism as a way to deal with psychedelics in his "Archaic Revival". Part of the psychedelic revolution of the 1960s, he linked animist and non-western spiritualism with

psychedelia, much in the same way as Aldous Huxley, Timothy Leary and Carlos Castañeda. By creating a set of hybrid beliefs between western naturalism and non-western ontologies, they have opened the doors to a more straightforward analysis of these substances, facilitating their assimilation into the modern world.

The Colombian psychedelic culture[22] can also be classified as a hybrid worldview. These groups, inspired by the hippy movements of the northern hemisphere as well as spiritual literature that arrived in popular culture around the 1960 and 70s, began experimenting with different traditional psychedelics, expanding their influence into local Shamanic networks. It was during this time that the Ayahuasca shamans were first popularised, as educated white and mestizo people began flocking to the region of Sibundoy. A shaman friend of mine, who was the son of a Taita of that generation stated:

> "Comenzaron a llegar, yo era jovencito, asi llegaron blancos de Pasto y de Bogota a tomar remedio. Antes eran solo de aqui pero de repente llegaron todos estos mechudos, -- he laughs-- a revolcarse con el remedio." "They started arriving, I was young, and they started arriving from Pasto and Bogota to drink the medicine. Before it was only for locals but then some of these long haired hippies arrived and started getting drunk with the medicine"

The relationship of these neoshamanic and psychedelic communities to Ayahuasca is based on an institutionalised scientific and naturalist perspective as well as deeply rooted indigenous beliefs and practices. During my time in the field, I was amazed to see how much some of the young spiritual tourists knew about the different psychedelics, their plant species and biochemical alkaloids. At the same time, they would use wording and notions from shamanic or neoshamanic discourses heavily influenced by McKenna and other psychonauts as well as the shamans from the lowlands and highlands of Putumayo. In Colombia, a

[22] By Colombian psychedelic culture, I mean an educated urban people that are open to indigenous and other alternative modes of being and who are interconnected with the global underground culture produced by the psychedelic revolution of the 1960s. These are in constant contact with indigenous and mestizo communities who practice healing with psychedelics and are themselves hybrids of different processes.

romantic appreciation of indigenous people has profoundly influenced this community in much the same way as eastern philosophy has influence psychedelia in the west. The romantic view of indigenous communities or Indigenismo has catapulted the popularity of Ayahuasca in Colombian anthropology as well as an in alternative and folk medicine.

As for my friend and me, we had established a deep relationship with Ayahuasca on a personal level, which could be defined as animist. Unlike any other non-human I had come across, Ayahuasca honestly felt as if it had a conscience, a voice, and was a direct link to some greater interconnectedness. It allowed us to consider that these experiences go beyond naturalism and modern ontological frameworks. It provided a perspective on nature, not as a "thing" to be controlled by humans, but as a spiritual essence to be heard and learned from. Animism seemed to allow for this multiplicity of thoughts and diversity of thinking beings.

An Inhabitant of the Pluriverse

I believe that this is what makes Ayahuasca exciting, because unlike so many other non-human beings that inhabit the world it is one of the few that answers back. Other animist plants such as Coca, Borrachero, and Yopo have a similar effect. This is why they are the master plants, used as allies by shamans to deal with the dangerous world. By communicating, Ayahuasca seems to have an intentionality and consciousness. As we saw, shamans use it to access the invisible world to diagnose and fight disease. Meanwhile, the psychedelic community uses these substances to explore beyond the limits of our over-rationalised world.

Even with my experience, hearing the voice of the spirit of Yage, I was left with more questions than answers. Consolidating these experiences through a scientific rationale became increasingly difficult. In particular, I was left with an nearly unanswerable question. Is the plant producing these nitrogen-based compounds to communicate with us or is it just pure coincidence that these substances feel like they are communicating with us? For local shamans and other people who drink it, there is no doubt of its intent. During my time in

Putumayo, I was continuously told of the "intention of Ayahuasca" as a force of good in the world.

However, this was difficult for me to internalise. Like many other naturalists, I would assume that the production of this alkaloid is a result of the relationships of the plant with its environment, and we are just misinterpreting and misunderstanding its intention. I will explore this question in a future chapter. Instead, here I wish to highlight how this dilemma, reveals how difficult it is for modernists and naturalists to fully understand something like a psychedelic, due to their --myself included-- own ontological limitations. As another friend once told me one night as I mentioned my stubbornness to let go of my positivist approach to these substances:

> "Estoy decepcionado contigo, despues de todo lo que has visto y sigues sin creer" "I am disappointed with you, after all you have seen and you still don't believe"

As time went by, I was forced to rethink my approach to these plants and substances. At the risk of sounding unscientific, I came to the realisation that they exist in the crossroads of different worlds. As organisms, they can be understood as natural phenomena, but at the same time, I have come to acknowledge they are multifaceted beings with complex personhoods similar yet entirely different from ours. These plants are hybrids; the nodes where the meshwork of the pluriverse can be appreciated. Bruno Latour (1993) emphasises how these hybrids invalidate the Cartesian duality of naturalism as a means to include nonmodern beings into the modern world. Therefore, it is important to "use the premodern categories to conceptualise them" (Latour, 1993: pg 134).

Not surprisingly, the rest of the Colombian psychedelic community was doing just that. They had approached these substances in a very animist way, calling them by endearing names such as "Ayahuasquita", "Yagesito" "mama ayahuasca" or "abuelo"[23]. While at the same time, acknowledging them as biochemicals produced by biological adaptation.

[23] In the case of mushrooms the name "niños" is commonly used to relate to their mischevious behaviour

Nonetheless, this ontological interpretation of psychedelics enables me to explore the political landscape of Putumayo in a different way. Some postcolonial thinkers of Latin American schools had arrived at similar conclusions, in which indigenous ontology facilitated a more nuanced approach to certain phenomena (Mignolo, 2011; 2012). They considered that naturalism, which had been imposed on Latin America by the colonial power structures --not for the production of knowledge but to control natural resources-- was not able to explore the intricacies of the meshwork of relationships in these territories. As Mignolo states:

> "The legacy of the colonial transformation lives today, in our assumption that "nature" is the provider of "natural resources" for daily survival: water as a bottled commodity. The mutation of nature into natural resources in the West was a sign of progress and modernisation and at the same time a sign that other civilisations stagnated and were falling behind the West." (Mignolo, 2011:pg10)

By doing this, several of the postcolonial academics have legitimised indigenous worldviews as part of a significant political movement for self-determination. Highlighting Indigenous worldviews and epistemology, authors like Arturo Escobar, Mario Blaser and Buenaventura de Sousa Santo among others, have shown the importance of alternative models for the global south. In particular, Southern Epistemologies (Santos, Meneses and Aguiló, 2016) emphasise the multiplicity of worldviews and ontologies that coexist in the world as fully functional and equally valid. These ontologies are continually producing knowledge different from that of naturalism and modernism, and it sees shamanism and indigenous people as crucial creators of alternative knowledge (Santos, Meneses and Aguiló, 2016).

Arturo Escobar (2009; 2011) advocates experiencing the world as a *pluriverse*, where the modern and westernised monopoly over reality is broken. In this respect, psychedelics offer something similar, widening the perspectives of those who consume it, to accept a multiplicity of ways of relating the world. In other words, psychedelics allow experiencing "the world as a pluriverse in constant movement, a web of always changing interrelationships

between humans and non-humans" (Escobar, 2011: pg 46). Ayahuasca, therefore, could be classified as a postcolonial tool, legitimising multiplicity of agencies, rationalities and existences.

As such, by consuming these substances, those western psychonauts navigating through different forms of social existence, from capitalist and modernist to more animistic and analogic, continually build and reform the way in which they relate to the world. Meanwhile the local shamans were already actively doing this.

There is no doubt that Ayahuasca is deeply interwoven into the local shamanic worldview, defining the way they see and interact with the world. Having such an effective access to the invisible realms opens the doors to a whole dimension of relationships with a different set of rules and interactions. For the local animist ontology, these relationships make sense, they define the way the world works and define the way people might interact with others, human and non-human. These invisible relationships make up the world, the forest and the people who inhabit it. In other words, Ayahuasca helps local indigenous people make sense of the changing and often tumultuous world around them. However, this is not limited to indigenous people; as I noted, many non-indigenous shamans, healers and patients are regularly participating in the ceremonial use of Ayahuasca.

As we saw, those people who are interacting with the plant are not only influenced by the shamanic discourses and ontological relationships but also negotiating their own beliefs due in part to the powerful effect of the brew. Being granted access to the invisible world and experiencing direct contact with the spiritual beings that inhabit that world, while at the same time seeing their real-time effect on the visible world, promotes a reconceptualisation of one's belief systems. At times, it also might reinforce them.

During one of the Ayahuasca ceremonies in the town of Sibundoy, I witnessed how a colono woman had one of these powerful experiences. She was able to see the curse that had been placed on her house. The next day she explained how the ceremony had changed her perception, since before she did not believe in the power of witchcraft, but now that she had

seen it with her own eyes she was convinced. “Lo vi, en la puerta de mi casa hay una laja suelta, esta ahi, estoy segura” “I saw it, next to the door of my house in a loose tile, its there, I´m sure”. She then added on the power of Ayahuasca: “tiene mucho poder, ese espiritu, es de cuidado” “it has lots of power, that spirit, one has to be careful”.

As mentioned, Ayahuasca lies in a middle ground between different ontological meshworks, producing hybridity. In this case, it shows the genuine possibility of an animist ontological realm to people who come from an analogist background, offering the space to relate in a different way to the complex health landscape of this territory but also to a non-human, such as the spirit of Ayahuasca. The fact that it makes the invisible world visible, with its infinite forms, foments the expansion of the open-ended web of relationships in the world.

As modernity is fundamentally transforming Putumayo, new ideas, new discourses and worldviews are being consulted and incorporated into the Ayahuasca experience. People of a diversity of backgrounds go to the shaman and drink Ayahuasca to fully understand or get advice about their lives. As the region becomes more mestiza and colona, it is fundamentally changing the way people relate to the forest and to health. The rapid urbanisation has added many other risks associated with the interwoven urban lifestyles. Long gone are the spirits of the forest, instead, the animas, mal vientos, and witches become the main non-humans that need to be negotiated with. This, however, will be explored in more detail in the next chapter.

The influx of foreigners attracted by Ayahausca has introduced Neoshamanic practices into this medicinal meshwork. Auras, crystals and other master plants are now common in the area, having been introduced and incorporated with relative ease. During several of the ceremonies I participated in, I have witnessed much of this syncretic process. From mandalas with local flowers and fruit spread out in the centre of the ceremonial house to the cleansing of elementals like crystals and auras, these ceremonies had incorporated a diversity of foreign practices. In one of the most interesting moments of my fieldwork, a shaman´s wife who was a healer in her own right, read my Mayan Horoscope. On other opportunities, post-ceremonial talks would often lead to discussions on karma and angels, as some of the patients swore that Ayahuasca had shown them their past lives and the importance of entities who

take care of them. Some of the shamans, in particular, those in close proximity to Neoshamanic groups, were willing to have an even more fluid relationship with foreign beliefs creating close personal links to neoshamanic groups throughout the world.

As Ayahuasca spreads throughout the world, infinity of possibilities are being created. Aliens, machine elves, 4th-dimensional beings (Mckenna, 1998) are all now part of this entangled world. As a result, urban shamans accept a broad range of subjectivities, from the Christian to the indigenous and New Age, since Ayahuasca does not reject any of these practices and it has made it easy to adapt to different worldviews. It does, however, reject the basic principles of modernity, as it shows that intelligence is not a monopoly of Humans. As one of the shamans used to say to patients who would show up to his house

> "Si quiere ver lo que es la verdad, venga despues a tomar Yage conmigo" "if you want to see the truth, come later to drink Yage with me".

In the next few chapters, I hope to demonstrate this is not exclusively a characteristic of Ayahuasca and other master plants, but of some other key medicinal plants. Their hybrid existence allows for multiple interpretations, determining the building material for new ways of existing with our body and the world. In the next chapter, I will explore how this entangled meshwork of existences defines health, medicine and the body in Putumayo. It is through this exchange of different worldviews that Folk medicine and Ayahuasca Shamanism have become interwoven.

Chapter 5 Chondur

I first came into contact with Chondur during my first Ayahuasca ceremony in the outskirts of Bogotá. I had been invited to participate and was nervous about the event. This

nervousness became worse when I drank the powerful brew. As I felt overwhelmed by the intense feeling of nausea and disorientation, a young man came close to me and made me put my hands out, placing some drops of liquid on my hands and telling me to smell them. It was a revelation. As soon as I smelled the powerful essence, the nauseating and disorientating feeling passed, and I could calmly go back to the treatment.

The morning after the ceremony I woke up and found the young man who had given me the essence. I found him crouching next to the shaman; the cold Bogota morning had forced these men, who come from the tropical forest, to huddle together to keep warm. After a quick introduction, I asked him about the essence. He then took out a yellow bottle that looked like a beehive, he passed it to me, and I quickly recognised it. It was what in the Santeria markets is called the seven essences (Siete esencias), a widely used perfume to protect against the evil eye. I smelled it, but it had something else, I was sure it was something different. My friend quickly smiled and took out another of the same bottles, but this time it had something inside. "Chundur" he said smiling, and then repeated "Tigre Chondur".

I had not noticed the prevalence of this plant in the ceremony, but soon I saw it everywhere. People carried small bottles of it, some even as charms to protect themselves. In the Yage ceremony, Chondur plays an active role in healing and protecting the people from the diversity of problems that might be caused by the sensitive state of the patients. There is more to Chondur than meets the eye.

Cyperus sp.

Image 18. Cyperus articulate. Source: Plants of the World, Royal Botanical Garden, Kew

Chondur, also known as Chundul, Piri Piri in Peru and Priprioca in Brazil is an inconspicuous group of plants, yet it is one of the most powerful plants in the arsenal of shamanic tools. A small grasslike plant of the *Cyperus* family, it is closely related to the papyrus and the water chestnut. Botanically, the sedges or *Cyperaceae* are very similar to the *Poaceae* or grasses, they both have similar characteristics to herbaceous monocotyledonous plants that have an epigeal habit. However, as you look more closely, grasses and sedges are quite different. Unlike the Poaceae, whose leaves form several nodes from the stem, the Sedges grow in culms rarely noded, except for the inflorescence with grows from a node on the top, like a small umbrella. Both grasses and sedges have similar culms, yet the sedges have a very particular triangular shape. Other characteristics also seem quite similar such as the flowers and seeds, which have very specific shapes and morphologies that differentiate them from one another. However, it must be said that if one does not know these particular characteristics of a sedge, it will look just like a grass. Shamans who work with it during most of their lives put it in the same category as grasses, "un pastico" "a little grass", yet it is largely different to grasses and even to most other sedges.

Like other sedges, it grows well in grasslands especially in an extremely intervened territory such as western Amazonia where most of the forest has been cut down and transformed into grass fields for cattle. Chondur grows quite easily, sprouting from the roots in a few days and

reaching maturity in a couple of weeks. As I was told by one of the daughters of the merchants in the market, I just need to leave fresh rhizomes in a black bag with a splash of water to make them sprout. It can easily be planted in any type of soil yet prefers wetlands and marshlands.

This lack or malformity of inflorescence and seeds make its pollination and reproduction quite difficult[24]. Yet the Chondur group has been found throughout the Amazonian Basin, from the lowland forest of Surinam to the foothills of the Andes (Shephard, 2011). Its lack of biological propagation limits it to home gardens, never too far out of reach. Considering this, we can deduce that it has undergone some sort of domestication process that has modified its biological characteristics, however more studies are needed to confirm this. To support this, in Putumayo, each shaman and healer has their own strain that they have been reproducing for generations or that they have received from trade. Some of them like Taita J.M. had grown the same Tigre Chondur for several decades brought to Mocoa by his brother from the region of Lower Caqueta.

The fact that it is not capable of biological propagation demonstrates that this is a plant that has been domesticated through a long and arduous process (Tournon, Cauper Pinedo and Urquia Odicio, 1998). Mythical origins of Chondur are often associated with the birds but it is difficult to identify one underlining theme. Conflicting notions of the origin of this plant by local people is shared through western Amazonia (Tournon, Cauper Pinedo and Urquia Odicio, 1998; Descola 1986)

The origin of the plant is still debatable, as the plant is just starting to be analysed by the ethnobotanical community. However, the availability of this plant highlights the importance of the indigenous exchange system throughout the Amazon. As we saw in previous chapters, borrowing different techniques and practices from neighbouring communities is a common practice in Amazonia (Lenaerts, 2006; Descola, 1986). Constant experimentation with the different plants and cultivation practices also facilitates the incorporation into the local

[24] Indeed, for the same reason it makes taxonomic identification extremely challenging (Plowman et al, 1990)

worldviews. Trade has also helped spread different medicines through indigenous and mestizo communities. Transportation and propagation of the rhizome have allowed it to spread with ease even beyond its ecological limitations. Some of the species that have been identified as Chondur have been found in faraway places such as Argentina and even North America. In Putumayo, the generalised use of the name Quechua Chondur even if other ethnic communities have their own name and particular use, demonstrates its association with the Inca trade networks explored in the first chapter.

There seems to be no doubt that the word Chondur is Quechua, starting from the prefix Chun or *Chunt*, it can be related with *Chuntu* which is Quechua for palm, while –dur as well as –dura seems to be a suffix that comes from Spanish (Musu Runakuna, 1997). This mixture of languages is typical for Inga, the only dialect of Quechua in Colombia and a common language used in medicinal plant trade. According to local Inga sources (Musu Runakuna, 1997) the highland Inga community identifies at least nine different varieties (Musu Runakuna, 1997). These are: *jinti* (People) Chondur, *kari* (man) Chondur, *kuku* (devil) Chondur, *wagra* (cattle) Chondur, *waira* (wind) Chondur, *waraka* (sling) Chondur, *warmi* (woman) Chondur. During this fieldwork I was only able to observe 8 types of Chondur, yet with slight variations. In particular I was able to find some varieties with their Spanish names such as *Trueno* (Thunder), *Tigre* (Jaguar), *Danta* (Tapir), *Ajo* (Garlic), *Gente* (people). These seemed the most popular and their names in Spanish might be due to the growing importance of mestizo shamans.

Identifying the different types of Chondur proved difficult for me, I was always surprised by how shamans and healers throughout Putumayo could quickly know the varieties by a glance or smell. For anyone who is novice, all the different varieties of rhizomes look the same so buying them in the market proves challenging. Some Chondur, however, are quite easy to identify like *Warmi* and *Danta* Chondur, which look like a totally different species altogether, while *Coco* Chondur has smaller rhizomes. The other varieties, however, are much more tricky, can only be identified by smell, taste, and spiritual qualities of the plant. *Tigre* Chondur, for example, can be identified by markings in the stalk, while Ajo can easily be identified by its smell.

Chondur is a popular for its aromatic characteristics. Only the rhizomes and tubers are used for medicine since this is the most aromatic part of the plant. They are small and round, no more than 5 cm in diameter for the larger species while for the smaller ones they might be 1-2 cm in diameter. Their round form makes them easily confused with bulbs, however botanically they are rhizomes. When gathered from the soil they come in clusters and are then separated into the smaller pieces when used. These rhizomes contain essential oils with several compounds, which have a proven calming effect on the nervous system (Rakotonirinaa et al., 2001; Couchman et al., 1964; Nyasse et al., 1988; Bum et al., 2001). In other parts of the world, *C. articulatus* is widely used not only in medicine but also for the perfume industry (da Silva et al., 2014). However, some scholars have argue that these plants gets infected by the ergot fungus (*Claviceps sp*) which has some psychedelic characteristics[25]. This could be a reason why it is such an important plant in the local pharmacopoeia (Plowman et al, 1990; Shephard, 2011; Brown 2014). Ergot can cause hallucinations, uterus contraction, be a strong abortive and vasoconstrictor (Schultes, Hofmann and Rätsch, 2006). All of these are side effects of Piri Piri and other of the *Cypreseae* seen throughout the Amazon (Shephard, 2011), however, I have not come across this during my fieldwork.

The primary way of using Chondur throughout Putumayo is quite telling of the characteristics of the plant. The shaman or healer will crush the rhizomes at a table using a wooden hammer. The crushed rhizomes are then placed in a bottle of alcohol, usually, *Aguardiente* (a spirit made from liquorice), to dilute the essential oils of the plant. After a short time of letting it rest in a cool area, the alcohol will take the particular smell of Chondur. Usually, the preparation will be more or less twelve Chundur rhizomes for half a bottle of *Aguardiente*. *Aguardiente* being so popular will always come as a *media* or half bottle which more or less a quarter litre. This will be used in three main ways: first as a rubbing alcohol to smell, placing small quantities in the hand and rubbing it to accentuate the smell of the essential oils of Chondur; second as *riego* or to pour on objects that need protection; third and probably

[25] Made famous by Albert Hoffman as one of the main sources of inspiration for the LSD molecule and also the cause of the St. Anthony's fire, the medieval name for Ergotism.

the most important as a *soplo* or a blow, taking a small sip and blowing it on the patient or object.

I will explore how Chondur works in different settings. It is important to state that as a warm, bitter plant, it plays into the categories of plants that are used to cleanse evil spirits. In a similar way, people use Tobacco in the lowlands of Peru (Gray, 2004; Chaumeil, 1984), shamanism in the Andean foothills of Colombia depends on this practice to help manage and control the many different evil spirits that might attack a person. At the same time adapting its use for more mestizo and western ideas of health and illness such as the management of multiple spiritual entities that are common in folk medicine in Colombia.

Due in part to these various characteristics Chondur has a fundamental role in traditional medicine. Indeed this chapter will observe how Chondur allows for spaces of intercultural exchange, for the coming together of different ways of relating with the environment, the body and health. In particular, explore the hybridisation process that has produced the multi-layered and complex folk medicine of Colombia.

Therefore the purpose of this chapter is to look at how these medicines exist in this meshwork of relationships that make up local health in the region and what role they have as mediators of alterity. By exploring how Chondur embodies and represents different cultural processes we can understand the close entwined relationship between indigenous practices and the overall folk medicine in Colombia. As the migration of the highlands flows into the lowlands, it has produced spaces of intercultural exchange, hybridity and where symbolic and semiotic communication is often blurred and different ontological relationships overlap.

In order to explore this, I will use four different varieties of Chondur each representing different aspects of traditional health in Putumayo, from ceremonial and ritual healing to the overall complex often predatorial relationality between the different beings that cause disease and people. It is through Chondur that I will explore some of the cosmological notions of spiritual disease in this medicine.

I will start with Tigre Chondur, which is a powerful shamanic tool used primarily in Ayahuasca ceremonies. In this case, I will explore how symbolic notions of health have changed over time as the social and environmental characteristics of the territory change. The second Chondur I will explore is Waira Chundur, which is primarily used as a healing tool not only for ayahuasca shamans but also many local healers throughout the region who have seen the advantages of this practice and incorporated it into their practices. The third, Trueno Chondur, will allow us to explore the role of shamans in the local cosmology, as the expansion of this practice has attracted many young men to become shamans making the Ayahuasca network more complex. Finally, I will explore Danta Chondur as a means to understand the relationships between the body, health and the forests.

Before I continue, I must state that most of the fieldwork done for this plant was conducted in middle Putumayo. It is widespread in this territory and it is used by healers and shamans from a spectrum of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. It is true that some highland shamans prefer to use another plant known as Coquindo (*Aspidosperma album*), and smudging and "limpiesas" can be done with a wide array of bitter and sweet plants, but Chondur is still the “go-to plant” in local shamanism.

The trade of Chondur is not as common as that of the other plants seen in this thesis since it can be grown quite easily. However, as more people are living in the cities and the practice becomes popular in non-traditional healing practices, it is beginning to be sold in the many urban markets.

Tigre Chondur and the Shaman

For many of the indigenous communities in Putumayo, Chondur is a plant profoundly associated with me Ayahuasca ceremony. It is an essential shamanic utensil for managing the ceremony along with the Waira (*Olyra sp*.) fan and some smudging resins. I will explore Tigre Chondur in the following vignette since it is one of the varieties closely associated with

the shamanic powers and is the most commonly used during ceremonial context. Tigre Chondur is quite an interesting variety due to its symbolic and physical association with the Jaguar (*Panthera onca*). This association is continuously reinforced by some of the ways people used this type of Chondur; from increasing the hunter's abilities to helping “espantar al tigre” “scare away the Jaguar” (Cipolletti, 1988).

However, its primary use is in the healing ritual and ceremonies due to the strong relationship shamans have with the Jaguar. Shamans are known throughout Amazonia as having an intimate spiritual link with the jaguars (Friedemann and Arocha Rodríguez, 1993; Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1975; Fausto, 2004; Langdon, 2014). Not long ago the most potent Shamans in Putumayo were thought to be able to transform into a jaguar whenever they wanted. This, however, is changing dramatically as shamans are no longer able to take this form, losing their mythical powers to the ongoing colonial project and contact with the West. As naturalist and modernist perspectives on animals are having an effect on how people relate to the animals in the forest, so is the power of the shaman changing the way they relate to the different hierarchies of beings that exist in them.

In many of the shamanic narratives I collected during my fieldwork, the jaguar is a

Image 19: Tiger oil and Skulls used for healing and shamanic practices

transforming entity, as a source of danger and awe. The symbolic association with the jaguar is everywhere. Before ceremonial activities as well as during political scenes, the shaman will put on a necklace full of jaguar teeth as a means to show his power to protect and to kill. Wearing images of jaguars in glass bead chest pieces, shirts, as well as tattoos are also a common sight in the shamanic circles. On one occasion a shaman told me about his encounter with a jaguar and its cub. As he stared directly to her eyes without moving, he was able to not only make the jaguar see him as something other than a potential prey but as an equal (Kohn, 2014). This capability to establish themselves as on the same level as a jaguar is to symbolically represent the power and closeness to the primary predator of the forest[26].

[26] This highlights the fluid physicality of other animals and animist beings. Their capability to transform by adding to their skin the tools of a jaguar, such as canines, claws and pattern. Jaguars in Amazonian ontological landscapes like most animals had a human form, lived in a home and have pray to hunt and crops to harvest, in this world what the jaguar might see as beer, humans might see as blood (Viveiros de Castro, 2004). They would put on the skin or "piel" of the jaguar which included its tools, such as the sharp teeth and claws.

While in the field, I encountered a set of jaguar canines as part of a complex barter transaction between Lowlander and Highland shamans. During the discussion, one of the men highlighted the power one gets by wearing it in the ceremony, since during the Ayahuasca ritual the shaman had to hunt the disease from the patient. Associating themselves with the jaguar meant getting the traits of that animal: its strength, its stealth and most importantly its capability to hunt in the visible and invisible world.

This symbolic association also plays a vital role in the ceremonial healing even for many of the mestizo shamans. In the narrative of the sacred Ayahuasca ceremony, the Jaguar, the shaman and Yage spirit are continually interchangable. El "Gran Chaman[27]" or el "Gran Jaguar" for some of the mestizo shamans represents a spirit similar to the "Great Spirit" of North American Neoshamanisms (Neihardt, Deloria and DeMallie, 2014). For indigenous shamans, the jaguar is often associated with the shaman himself. The shaman helps hunt down the evil spirits that cause disease like the Jaguar hunts down its prey in the jungle[28].

For Calabrese (2013) leading patients through different symbolic associations is an essential aspect of healing. Therapeutic emplotment uses various elements of a narrative are meaningfully placed to support the healing story. Like the travels to Wirikuta[29] of the Huichol or the NAC[30] peyote rituals (Calabrese, 2013) a Ayahuasca ceremony are weaved with symbolic representations. By doing this, the patients understand their position, the reasons they were hurt and with the help of the spirit of Yage, can heal successfully. This emic explanation is great to analyse the subtle techniques that shamans use to guide people through their experiences, however, as is almost always the case people do not actually know this is

[27] Chamanism is spanish translation of shaman, introduced by anthropology it is not the original name of local experts, but has swiftly become popular

[28] The apparent association with the sun due to its colour also symbolically represents the path in the sky(Friedemann and Arocha Rodríguez, 1993; Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1975). For many shamans, especially those that are heavily influenced by Andean and western spiritualism, the sun as Inti or Varicocha is an essential being in their worldview. The symbolic presence of the Jaguar in its many different forms reinforces the role of the shaman as the person who leads the patients through the various stages of the healing journey.

[29] The main ceremonial parctice of the Huichol, who travel from their hometown to the land of the ancestors and the valley of the blue deer.

[30] Native American Church

happening. Their subtlety permits to be just under the surface of the experience. A good shaman makes this process almost intuitive. An excellent shaman will often guide you without you even noticing what they are doing.

The ritual ceremony is full of underlining details that help add to the wellbeing of the patient, from the smudging effects to the different music that is played. The ceremonial house is also essential as it is usually central to the narrative, especially in lowlands Amazonia (Hugh-Jones, 1988). Subtle mechanisms are used to manifest more *pinta* (visions) and at the same time help control the patient from drifting too far from the desired effect. These methods are exceptionally efficient, since they stimulate the auditory and the olfactory senses (Callicott, 2013). Music is a primary tool to facilitate the experience of the patients, however, smell is also very important as the olfactory sense has a profound effect on the person.

This is where Tigre Chondur plays an invaluable role. Its aromatic characteristics help calm the patient. Like the vignette at the start of this chapter has shown, soothing smell calms patients and helps them concentrate on their work during a ceremony. The overwhelming effect of Ayahuasca is sometimes too much for many thus it is an excellent way of helping patients deal with many of the side effects.

At the same time, as we saw in previous chapter, Ayahuasca is a shamanic being that has an agency and requires careful negotiation, Chondur is an important tool to negotiate with this agency (Callicott, 2013). It allows for constant interaction between the shaman, patient and the plurality of spirits in the ceremony. The shamans use it to guide their patient through the experience and facilitate a more harmonious ceremony. The use of Chondur in the ceremonies and healing rituals is a practical technique that is very effective.

The Ayahuasca Ceremony

In order to observe this technique in more detail I will describe a typical Ayahuasca ceremony. Like any ceremony, healing with Ayahuasca is a strictly structured ordeal. It is made up of several stages that require actions at a particular time and repetition and narrative structure. Medicinal plants, shamanic tools and techniques such as songs are used throughout the ceremony as a way of moving it along and managing the experience. The shaman´s job is to lead the ceremonies in a certain way using the tools and techniques to facilitate a beter experience.

Like many other objects in the Amazonian ontological landscape, these shamanic tools also have a degree of personhood that requires careful observation. Therefore, as the ceremony progresses, the shaman must be conscious of the multiplicity of agencies that are present.

The ceremony is an all-night activity. It starts early in the night more or less 8-9 pm just after the sun is has set. Starting with people gathering in the ceremonial place and waiting for the shaman to start blowing into the Yage brew[31]. Usually one notices when the ceremony is about to begin as people quietly gather together. Typically, during this time, the ceremonial space is cleansed with either the Copal (*Dacryoides peruviana*) or the Palo Santo (*Bursera graveolens*) two powerful smudging agents that burn in a white aromatic smoke. The sweet smell of the smudge quickly invades the ceremonial space, and the shaman gives last minute advice. While doing this, the shaman prepares the brew, smudging it and blowing on it as a means to cleansing it from any contamination. This is where Chondur makes its first significant contribution, as the shaman takes a sip of a bottle that contains Chondur extract with *Aguardiente* (Liquorish spirit) and blows it on the prepared brew in several short but powerful gusts. He beats his *Waira* fan rhythmically while singing or praying to the Yage spirit and or God. The powerful smells of both the smudge and the Chondur and the rhythmic rustling of the *Waira* now flood the ceremonial space. He is not only cleansing the brew but also giving it the breath of life.

[31] As we will see in the discousion of Waira Chondur, breath and wind have a complex symbolic association in the shamanic traditions of western Amazonia.

The first song is sung just before patients drink the brew. The shaman sings in a characteristic melodious and rhythmical tune. After the first song, people then line up, first the men and then the women to drink it from a small cup and the shaman is the last to drink. It takes more or less 20 minutes for the brew to take effect. As time is liquefied by the psychedelic experience and each patient is having a transcendent moment, the ceremony goes quiet. Soon after the shaman would sing again. This is usually the time when people vomit, as the music maximises the effects of the brew, peaking the *pinta* or visions as well as nausea. During this time the shaman and his apprentices also use smudging agents and Chondur to help patients who have a violent reaction to the brew.

Here again, Chondur takes another role, not as a cleanser of evil spirits but as a protection for the people who are in a very vulnerable state. In this ceremonial context, the senses are inverted; sight and touch become less important while smell and hearing take a central role. The shaman and his apprentices use music and the smudging agents to lead the patient through the shamanic journey. The shaman sprays the Chondur extract on each patient as the sweet and musky smell of Chondur mixed with the strong, poignant smell of aguardiente produce a soothing and refreshing feeling.

The shaman must continuously balance the temperature of the patients if the body too warm can harm the liver and cause irreparable damage. This is also balanced by offering water and Ambar or ajo wasca (*Tynanthus panurensis*) to the patients during specific points during the ceremony. Yage is a very warm plant; it feels warm in the body. Chondur is also a warm plant yet when mixed with alcohol it becomes cool and thus helps in this balancing process.

This balancing act is a full-time job as sometimes people have adverse reactions and need a more precise intervention. As a worst-case scenario, when Chondur, Ambar and Copal do not work to soothe a patient, the shaman uses Ortiga (*Urera lacianta*) to whip the patient and "quitar la borrachera" stop the drunkenness.

Drinking the brew is no easy task. The "borrachera" or "chuma" to use a popular Colombian word, is very strong. For some, it is difficult to stand, it might be better to lie down and close

their eyes since nausea and disorientation are difficult to control. Shamans pride themselves over their capacity to withhold the "borrachera", as if it was a drinking match. Some ask how "guapo[32]" I was, other more sensitive to the capacities of a white man from Bogotá do not mention it, but surely think less of you if you show too many signs of being unable to resist the "borrachera". For apprentices, resisting the "borrachera" is almost an act of pride, to show that they are capable of the tough shamanic path and becoming a *Taita*, they have to show how "guapo" they truly are. It is in this context that Chondur makes its third appearance; mixed in the Siete Escencias bottles each apprentice has in their corner. It becomes rubbing alcohol[33], placing small quantities in their hands and rubbing them together, while smelling the powerful essences. Chondur calms the "borrachera", helps the apprentice focus on the task at hand and keeps them from entirely falling into the effects of the brew. Unlike the previous way of using Chondur, bound by ritualised time, the apprentices can use their own whenever they feel it is needed.

As the night progresses, including several sets of songs, moments of silence for personal reflection, and conversations with the medicine and the shaman, the ceremony begins to calm down. The effects of the brew start dissipating, and the shaman might ask the patients if they wish to have another cup of Ayahuasca. Usually, apprentices and the shaman themselves have another go, patients who feel they need to "trabajar" or work on their problems might also drink a second cup. Again, the shaman uses Chondur to cleanse the brew and blow away the evil spirits. The *Waira* fan is used again to cleanse and give it the breath of life. The cleansing wind is an essential metaphysical characteristic of Amerindian shamanism, as we will see in the next section. In general, throughout Amazonia, the breath of the shaman is capable of healing, deeply associated with life and death as well as the vital characteristic of a spiritual agency. By breathing and making sounds, the beings of the forest tend to establish their existence. Thus, the wind produced by the *Waira* or wind plant, is also a way of showing its agency (Hill and Chaumeil, 2011).

[32] Which in spanish means handsome but also bold or daring.
[33] Similar to the smelling salts used in traditional European medicine

As the morning starts to creep up from behind the forest, and the gentle blue light invades every corner of the house, the ceremony arrives to its closure. The shaman does some final songs signalling the end and asking the Yage spirit to let them sleep. People are usually already fast asleep, only those who are still struggling are awake. By the time the first rays of sun come out, the apprentices are back at work; they have to start the healing ritual to close the ceremony. I will talk in detail about the healing ritual further on as Chondur plays a vital role in it and it is widely used outside ceremonial context. This technique is the closing act of the ceremony. Only after the healing ritual that people are permitted to go home.

Waira Chondur and the Agents of Disease

During the ceremony the shaman would use Tigre Chondur, however as I would soon find out, the Chondur used in healing rituals was very different. For healings, Shamans use primarily Waira Chondur. It works as a means to diagnose a patient or as a repellent against evil spirits and witchcraft. It is especially important tool to fight one of the most common folk illnesses in Colombia "el mal de viento" or the bad wind. All Chondur varieties play an active role in the complex spiritual and medicinal landscape of Putumayo, but Waira Chondur is probably the most commonly used to fight off evil spirits. Throughout Amazonia, Chondur roots are worn as charms to protect people who are at risk of being attacked by the evil eye (Ciopelli, 1988; Shephard, 2011). In the region of Putumayo, it is used primarily as an infusion crushed and added to liquorice spirit *Aguardiente*. This liquid is then blown on the patient, and with the Waira fan the shaman might brush off disease and cleanse the patient.

Healing with Chondur is used to help the shaman manage all of these different invisible agents that cause sickness. This healing ritual is called a "limpieza" or cleansing, and allows for a literal cleansing of the soul. By cleansing the soul and blowing the breath of health into the patient, the shaman and healer can remove all the evil forces that may be harming the person (Hill and Chaumeil, 2011). The healing technique of shamanic breath and blowing is heightened by the use Waira (Wind) Chondur, with the shamanic songs and with aid of the Waira fan.

I must highlight that the cleansing and healing rituals are widely different from the Ayahuasca ceremonies. The Ayahuasca ceremony is practised in order to work with the complex agency of Ayahuasca. Meanwhile, a cleansing ritual is a more quotidian practice, done in intimate settings and used to deal with the complex meshwork of beings that can cause illness in the region. Seligman et al.'s (2008) highlight how rituals are not only a way in which people relate to the religious and sacred other, such as the ceremonies of Ayahuasca, but also work to allow people build the conceptual mechanisms to deal with the tensions and ambiguities of life. In this case, the healing rituals allow patients to understand the predatorial nature of illness in the region by giving tools and context to mediate the alterities that can cause harm. In other words, "This is a function of its peculiar way of mediating difference and parsing boundaries, rather than seeking to overcome and absolutize them" (Seligmanet al.; 2008 pg 6). By accepting that the world is full of others that are often uncertain, unreliable, dangerous and ambiguous, the ritual allows for the rhythms and conventions to create some order and certainty in our lives (Nahum-Claudel, 2018).

Illness in general can be attributed to a number of other reasons, from contamination to witchcraft and envy. The source of the illness might vary, as people adapt to new social-environmental phenomena, however as in the case of other Amazon communities, most of the diseases are relational (Lenaerts, 2006). Health in this territory is a meshwork of different interactions, in which the shaman manages and negotiates with various agencies and personhoods that can cause and heal diseases. Sometimes a shaman is not capable of treating a particular disease such as the *susto,* and thus one can go to an Afrocolombian healer who has more experience in helping that type of problem. Other times, shamans will refer the patients to the hospital acknowledging that they are not able to cure western diseases.

As urbanity becomes a significant part of Amazonian social life, the magical and spiritual landscape is changing dramatically and new potentially dangerous interactions have become more common. Like any Amazonian urban area, these centres have become spaces of multi-ethnic exchange and ontological negotiation. The tools once used to live in the forest are beginning to be used to help against the growing problems caused by this complex social urban landscape. In Mocoa, a variety of communities have come together for economic and

political reasons. Most share little except the shamanic practices, and as other ethnic groups arrive, they are quick to incorporate these practices into their healing systems. As distrust towards the other simmers, ethnic and social tensions are released by an active spiritual war, where shamans and healers of all the different ethnic backgrounds are continually fighting for the health of their patient.

The fear of the "el *Taita* de la oscuridad" "dark shaman" (Whitehead and Wright, 2004) is a common aspect of the Amazonian world, and in Mocoa, it is extremely common. The sorcerer and the witch are considered one of the leading causes of disease and death in this region. Traditionally these dark shamans could transform into jaguars to hunt people, could send snakes and spiritual arrows to poison and kill (Langdon, 2014; Whitehead and Wright, 2004). In Mocoa, shamans are no longer the only ones to do magic. Witchcraft and sorcery is a common source of disease here and blaming a neighbour for an illness or in some cases death is quite normal.

Healers and shamans primarily heal illnesses that happen when the invisible world interacts with the visible world. These come in five main forms: *mal de viento* (Bad wind), *malign* (evil spirit), *envidia* (envy), *susto* (scare) and *brujeria* (witchcraft) all of which are widely found in the highland regions of Peru, Ecuador and Colombia (Camino, 1992). *Mal de viento* happens when the body of a person accidentally interacts with a spirit, this spirit influences your internality or soul and in some cases such as babies and old people, can cause severe disease and death. When a spirit is actively hunting a person or is seeking revenge, this is when it is called a *maligno*. These beings are often associated with the devil, and they have much of the same characteristics of some of the spirits found in the highlands and other mestizo regions. In the same way, we have *envidia* and *susto*, which are common spiritual diseases in Colombian folk medicine. When you have suffered a *susto*, your soul has been scared away from your body. *Brujeria* or witchcraft as we saw can be caused by the "flecha" arrow of a dark shaman or by sorcerer who wishes for your harm; there is much more intentionality in this. Shamans who help heal witchcraft often need to know how to do the witchcraft themselves to understand how to treat it. Therefore the shaman is seen with such

suspicion. Witchcraft can also be done by anyone who knows how and has an intention to harm, a common practice is to plant soil of a cemetery to contaminate peoples house.

There is no doubt that Spanish mestizo and African notions of magic and witchcraft have had a profound influence in the way on which illness is percieved in the region. Coming from the Andes, it has had a profound effect on how people relate to spiritual disease. Like in the rest of the country, the colonial power structures are a clear underlayer of witchcraft and sorcery in these territories. People of African descent are continuously considered more prone to "black magic" while mestizo people who practice shamanic arts are seen with suspicion. Shamans have become less "dark" as they gain new political and social recognition. Meanwhile, Afrocolombian and mestizo healers are gaining the reputation of being capable and dangerous sorcerers. It seems that while shamans lose their capability to transform into animals, sorcerers become more powerful. The shaman now fears not only the spiritual arrows of the other shamans who inhabit the forest but also the capable witches who can attack you in the markets and the city streets.

Yet it should be noted that this process is not unidirectional as Chondur is now an important tool in mestizo and Afrocolombian medicine. The ritualised healing technique of using chondur has become useful not only to heal the *mal de viento* but for a wide array of different diseases that are historically foreign. During this fieldwork I came across mestizo shamans who actively use Chondur from Putumayo yet have stay away from Ayahuasca shamanism.

Meanwhile western medicine has had a substantial influence on the local understandings and beliefs of health and the body. Diseases such as cancer, STDs and infections have become increasingly common. These diseases do not fit into local ontological rational, yet these shamans and healers are able to incorporate them into their discourses and acknowledge that they exist. Cancer is an excellent example of this process as it is assimilated into local worldviews. It is often named and spoken about; however, the word is used interchangeably to explain specific internal ailments that might be caused by the invisible world. Yet at the same time, concepts such as pollution are often named as a cause of cancer. Whether pollution is part of the invisible or visible world is hard to define. Pollution from water, air

and trash are visible but their effects on the body are invisible. Often the word *suciedad* is used to describe this pollution, yet in an ambiguous manner.

Similarly, during epidemics, such as the Chikungunya fever, shamans use a multifaceted approach, constantly negotiating with the different causes and reasons for this disease. However, many shamans struggle incorporating the complexities of a disease like Chukunguya. They might have a general knowledge of this type of disease which is caused by mosquitos yet healing it with traditional methods has proven challenging. During this epidemic patients would show up for a consultation, usually due to overcrowded and expensive treatments in the hospital and ask the shaman to heal them. The shaman can do a cleansing first and then would diagnose the patient. However, this diagnosis relies on identifying symptoms such as fevers and diarrhoea and recommending medicinal plants that can help to mitigate them. In order to heal these symptoms, they can use a wide array of medicinal plants such as warm plants to sweat the fevers away or cool plants to soothe it. However these often are not focused to heal but to alleviate.

In most cases due to their lack of experience with these diseases, they often decide not to help. Recommending a visit to the local hospital. Thanks to a campaign of information by the government, shamans knew about the disease, and had adapted it to their cosmological practices shifting their methodologies to treat an incoming influx of people who sought help. On the other hand, shamans who lived in rural communities, where the public campaign was slower to arrive, had a harder time to adapt to this epidemic.

At the same time, when the western medicine is unable to help, these shamans are often even called into the hospital to offer alternative solutions. This is particularly the case of the shaman of the following vignette who is a famed healer and specialist on children. Many mothers, who are not satisfied by the western medicine, visit her.

The Cleansing Ritual

D. was a famed healer in the barrio of Mocoa, and during my time in the field she was also my neighbour. Before I had even met her, I knew she was a healer or a shaman; I had met enough of them to know where they might live. A beautiful Borrachero Anidaqui (*Brugmansia arboria*) with its white flowers and an Ortiga Morada (*Urera lacianta*) grew in front of her home; these two plants are known to protect from evil spirits, which lead me to suspect that she was a healer. My suspicions were confirmed when, feeling sick, I asked around, and people told me to go to the small house with the Borrachero on the doorstep. She was known to be an expert in curing certain diseases that doctors could not. As soon as she met me, she knew she would be able to cure *brujeria*.

She then told me that I had to be more careful when dealing with people who know about plants. Working in areas where many of these herbal medicine practitioners and shamans coexist is a cause of suspicion. The local market with its six different herb stalls had always been seen as dangerous.

This area was not only dangerous because of witchcraft and sorcery; it was a source of much *envidia*. *Envidia* and *brujeria* are similar yet quite different. As D. would explain: "La envidia es cuando uno quiere lo que no es de uno, cuando siente que merece algo de alguien más. La brujeria es maldad, es odio" "Envy is the feeling of longing for something you might not have. Witchcraft is a pure manifestation of hate and "maldad" –Evil-. The healer knew I was in trouble, she told me to be more discreet as I was calling too much attention to myself. For a 1.86m, bearded white male asking about magical plants this was almost impossible. When I asked her what to do, she smiled and said that she would cleanse me with Chondur.

Cleansing rituals are a vital part of Putumayo Shamanism. It is used primarily to fight the many agents of disease that are found in the region. For such a purpose it follows a very particular pattern and Chondur has a central role. The healer led me to her office; it was small with a rickety chair in the middle and a table full of different religious and indigenous ornaments. She was part of the Kametza people from the highlands, having moved down to the lowlands with her late husband, an Inga Shaman. She came from a family of shamans;

however, she always felt that her children did not want to participate in traditional medicine. She would say:

> "La medicina sagrada es nuestra cultura, nuestra tradicion ancestral, y ellos no quieren nada de eso. Dicen que el Yage es muy duro que pega muy fuerte. Pero si uno es del camino él le ayuda a uno." “The medicine is sacred, it is our culture, our tradition, and they don’t want anything to do with it, Yage is too difficult it hits too hard, but if you are part of the path, it will help you”.

Her deep relationship with Yage/Ayahuasca was evident; her husband was a powerful Ayahuasca shaman.

She told me to take off my shirt. I did as I was told and sat in the chair. She took out the Chondur, mashed up and diluted in a bottle of liquorice spirit. Alcohol is a dangerous tool, she said as she looked at the bottle, many shamans who use it as a shamanic tool have the risk of falling into alcoholism, but once the Chondur is added, it can be transformed into medicine. The infusion had the earthy aroma of Chondur. She then asked me to pray, and to believe that I would get better. Only through faith in God and Jesus, can one get better.

She took out the Waira fan. It was a bouquet of long leaves that flowed like a fan. I was quick to ask her if this was the proper Waira, she nodded. *Waira Sachis* (Quechua for wind plant)

Image 20: Waira Sachi fan

is a notoriously tricky plant to find. A small *Poaceae* that grows in heavily shaded areas, the Waira is not easy to identify[34]. The healer swiftly shook the Waira fan and began singing her song. Her tune was a soft melancholic whistle, which I had never heard before. The song was quite definitely Kametza; it was not as fast as the Kofan and Ziona, yet not similar to the Inga at all. Unlike any healer I have ever heard, her melody was wordless. Her breath, with the song, was already capable of healing and yet it was made more potent by the Wind plant (Waira Sachi) and the Waira Chondur.

Like any other ritual, this was a structural process based on repetition. The healer will use the Waira and brush from the top of the head to the lower body. Blowing the Chondur into the head, the chest, the back, the arms and the legs, the shaman will then quickly brush these extremities with the Waira. The effect is immediate. As the alcohol evaporates and feels cold against the body combined with the rhythmic sounds of the songs and the overpowering smell, engages all the senses. This sensorial process heightens the powerful trance-inducing nature of the ritual.

But why this particular order, why is the head the first to be cleansed? The rhythm of the ritual reveals the importance of the head as the entrance to the soul. During my fieldwork, I had widely seen this phenomenon on various occasions in particular when dealing with *Mal de aire*[35]. This spiritual disease can attack anyone who might walk near them or enter a place

[34] For shamans and merchants, there were only two types of Wairas, female and male. Usually, the best are the female Waira capable of withstanding the constant shaking of the shaman's wrist, while the male with its longer and thicker leaves will fall off. The proper Wairas, she told me, were collected in the wild: paying attention to the deep shades of purple in the base of the leaf.

[35] This spiritual disease has to do with certain types of spirits that are present everywhere. These spirits have many origins, from Invisibles (Invisible forest spirits) of the jungle, to the spirits of unbaptised children, to Aucas (wild Indians) or in some occasions to spirits of those who have been killed violently.

where many spirits congregate. People usually need to put on a hat during the night or should not submerge their head in water, since bad wind enters through the head. Children are particularly vulnerable to this disease because of the open fontanelle on top of their heads. Always keeping a child´s head protected is an essential practice in popular medicine. Using charms and baths can also protect from the *bad wind*, however, even if you are careful you might get it without knowing.

The movements involved in cleansing rituals follow certain repetitions that are reminiscent of brushing and sweeping. This is interesting since for shamans, disease is often visualized as an insect or a poisonous animal associated with putrefaction and the cold. By sweeping the patient with the Waira fan, the shaman brushes the disease off a patient as if it were an insect crawling on the skin. The movement is also associated with cleanliness as sweeping the field next to the house is a necessary activity in Amazonia to actively deter snakes and other potentially dangerous animals.

At the end of the ritual, patients are in the most vulnerable state. Herbal perfumes and essences are used to help the patient get better. An example of this is the *siete escencias* - seven essences- a perfume mixture of seven sweet plants. Sweet plants help to give the patient luck and protection. In some extreme cases cleansing must be done with baths; usually, these are in two stages, a bath of bitter plants, which are there to cleanse, and then a bath of sweet plants to attract good health. Baths using sweet and bitter plants are widely used throughout Colombia, as it is a common practice in folk medicine. This means that throughout the country healers often use to the sweet and bitter plants that are ecological available such as the use of Eucalyptus and Pine in the Highlands.

After the cleansing ritual, the shaman or healer can prescribe some medicine for specific problems that they notice. Other times, when the patient feels low in energy or continues to feel sickly, the shaman might use Ortiga (*Urtica lacianta*). Ortiga is a perennial plant of the stinging nettle family, that can grow almost two meters high and its most particular characteristic are its thick and sharp urticating hairs

Image 21: Ortiga Morada (U. lacianta)

full of histamine that produce irritation[36]. The sight of the plant is quite intimidating, and in cities and semi-urban areas like Mocoa, it is widely used as a living fence, deterring thieves from breaking in. For shamans and healers it is an invaluable tool to help people with rheumatism, muscle pains, low energy, to sober people up from drunkenness caused by alcohol or Yage. It is also widely used to discipline children. Some shamans state that it is an extremely effective and valuable plant. One shaman told me that Ortiga works like acupuncture hitting the energy (qi) spots of the body and releasing tensions.

The Ortiga is cut in the base of the stem where a handle is cleared of its urticating hairs. A softer stem with several leaves on the top is generally preferred. If they do not have their own plant shamans will tell you exactly where to gather them, as they grow quite well in around urban areas[37]. The Ortiga is then swept over the patient, gently beating it to the beat of the song, starting from the top of the head and gently brushing the needles throughout the upper body. This produces a rash that if done right will not itch or hurt. Some shamans have a lighter touch and you barely feel the needles. After a while, the itching feeling will pass producing a sense of wellness. Whether this is due to the effects of histamine in the immune

[36] Unlike the stinging nettle (*Urtica diodica*) in the UK or the White Ortiga (*Tragia volubilis*) from the highlands, the lowland Ortiga does not produce rashes in the same way as the urticating hairs are thick and do not break off when they come in contact with the skin. This characteristic is the main reason it is used so widely since the hairs, like hypodermic needles will enter the epidermis and deliver the painful histamine compound, but will not give the uncomfortable rashes of stinging nettle. Histamine is the main organic compound of Oritga. However, it is already found in the body and is involved in immune responses and other physiological function, causing inflammation as well as itchiness in the skin.

[37] The colour is also important, as local people classify two subvarieties; the male and the female. The female is darker, and almost violet, while the male is greener with pinkish hues in the leaves, it is known to have a stronger punch, which is quite painful.

system or the dopamine produced by the body to counter the pain requires more analysis, yet for the people here the Ortiga helps “espabilar” “wake up” the spirit.

To make this therapeutic tool truly effective, the healer also cleanses the Ortiga with Chondur, blowing it and praying to it. Most, if not all medicinal plants, that are later given by the shaman or healer go through a similar process. It is through this technique that the shaman can access the healing potential of the plant. Their songs, prayers and different invocations are a means of managing this potential.

> “Cada planta tiene el poder de la sanacion ahi adentro, yo la saco, sin mis oraciones la planta no funciona” “Each plant has the power of healing inside it, I take it out, without my prayers the plant does not work” said a shaman in the market of Mocoa.

As we see, this medicinal worldview is a space of predation, where the humans are constantly being attacked as prey (Fausto, 2007). The cleansing ritual is an amalgamation of different techniques that help deal with this aggressive world. In particular, the shaman uses these techniques to combat the many agencies that can cause illness. As such the shaman is communicating directly with the beings that are preying on the human. All of their tools and techniques in the cleansing ritual are meant for this purpose and highlight the multisensory dynamics need to fight these entities. Chondur, the Waira, the sweet perfumes, and the Oritiga all play a crucial role in this ritual, facilitating the communication between the Shaman, the patient and the agents of illness.

The multiple different beings that influence health highlight the complex dynamics in the region. It also highlights the importance of a ritualized practice to give it stability and meaning. To heal is to know the particularities of this multiplicity and the proper techniques to deal with them. For the shamans and healers of Putumayo the cleansing ritual and the Ayahuasca ceremonies offer the proper spaces and techniques to heal.

Trueno Chondur and the Power of the Shaman

Let me thus deviate a little from the main argument of this chapter to explore the role of the shaman. For this purpose I will look at Trueno (Thunder) Chondur, which is probably the most powerful of all Chondurs. This medicinal plant is hard to find since it is used only for specific spiritual and magical activities. As such Chondur is deeply tied to the power of the shaman, and often feared. Its connection with thunder reflects its importance since this is the most powerful of natural phenomena in local cosmology. Thunder is referenced throughout Amazon mythology as a primordial force, usually, an active force to create and construct the universe yet also capable of destruction and death [38] (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1971). The ambiguous power of thunder allows it to be used for evil and good, a clear parallel to the shamanic powers.

Shamans, as we know, are also clearly ambiguous. As we saw the dark shaman, who can send disease or witchcraft, is a constant threat to the lives of the local people (Whitehead and Wright, 2004;Whitehead, 2002). Meanwhile even more ambiguous characters exist in this world. Known as *Auca* (wild) shamans who have not been baptised and do not have Christian morals therefore are often beyond local understanding. Whether these shamans are actual people or are part of the spiritual world is often left open. In any case they have an agency that must be dealt with, negotiate and wage war.

As such Trueno Chondur is the main weapon to fight this war. Shamans can add potency to their breath and spiritual arrows by using this type of Chondur. The spiritual arrows, *flechas* or *zue* in Ziona (Langdon, 2014) are a common shamanic technique. These are tightly associated with the wind, similar to the arrows of a blowgun, and a significant cause of disease, which can easily kill. These arrows can take many forms, such as a glass shard, the barbed stinger of a stingray, thorns and in extreme cases thunder. They can be evoked with or without the Waira and Chondur blowing in short and powerful burst that comes from the diaphragm. Yet those that posess the power of thunder are the most feared, therefore, Trueno Chondur is seen with suspicion.

[38] A direct link between the invisible and visible worlds, thunder is full of sexual energy, capable of destruction as well as of creation (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1971).

The spiritual war is becoming more dangerous with the on-going urbanisation. As more shamans share proximity in the cities, paranoia and resentment have become a major issue in the national and global alternative medicine scene. Trueno Chondur has suddenly become more popular as a growing need to protect against possible spiritual attacks becomes urgent.

The power of the Shaman

The above narrative was told to me on a rainy afternoon in a town near Orito and is about a famed shaman who is still alive. The *Taita* had an interesting youth, having worked as a smuggler, a *raspachin* (Coca collector), and then as a shaman. He quickly became one of the most powerful shamans of the Kofan community, being the master and teacher of many shamans who currently offer the brew in and out of Colombia. His powers were legendary, one of the last jaguar shamans, he was capable of becoming a jaguar and travel throughout the forest and beyond through his spiritual journeys. Many *Taitas* evoke him during Yage ceremonies as a source of their powers, he visits them deep in the Yage visions and helps them diagnose. He was also one of the first shamans to open the Yage ceremony to the white and mestizo communities from the highland cities.

At the same time, he is one of the most political shamans in Colombia, continually dealing with the national government and international organisations. He was an invaluable protagonist in the creation of the local "Plan de vida" or life plan[39]. This made him a target for FARC and Paramilitary pressure, as the warring factions fought for the control of the Coca and oil fields of Putumayo. It is during this time that a guerrilla commander, came to his home to ask him to do witchcraft on his enemies. The *Taita* rejected this offer, and the commander kicked the pot of Yage he had been brewing for several days. Threatening a shaman of this power is not something that can be taken lightly. The *Taita* quickly gathered many Trueno Chondur from his *chagra*; he mashed them up and diluted them in aguardiente.

[39] This is in short the legal system of the community, establishing their desired goals and how to acheave them

He got this bottle of Chondur, took a mouthful and proceeded to blow it into the sky while violently shaking his Waira. The dramatic scene was set, as the thunder rolled in. The *Taita* had thrown a bolt of lightning into the middle of the guerrilla troop killing several soldiers.

Invoking the power of thunder, as they say, is almost as if invoking the power of the jungle. The thunder inhabits the mountains, where the invisibles and the forest spirits live and all the energy was suddenly concentrated into this act of justice. The guerrilla would think twice to meddle with him.

Shamanic narratives are an essential part of the shamanic tradition. In some cases, these narratives are old and mythological, where shamans demonstrate their lineage by talking about old shamans who could transform into jaguars, their journeys, and some indigenous leaders and heroes. Like the previous narration told to me by a Kofan shaman near Orito, most narrations tell stories about powerful shamans, alive or dead, who still have an impact on the shamanic networks today. Stories about the "abuelos" grandfathers, elder shamans who have great power and who taught a whole generation of shamans are quite common.

Most of the shamanic narratives follow a similar structure: a powerful shaman uses their power to deal with someone or something that has offended them (Langdon, 2014). Not only do they talk about other shamans who might be hurting local people but also they talk about the different agencies that coexist in this ecocultural landscape.

It is interesting to note the emphasis on Trueno Chondur during this narrative. Just saying that the shaman had used any Chondur would not suffice, they had to specify which Chondur he used. Linking it with the thunder and lightning shows mastery over the fundamental powers of the forest. Its power comes from deep in the forest, from the place "donde vive el trueno" (where the thunder lives). This seems contrast with the source of the shaman's own power, which is in a sense more complex. Yet it validates his political power and places them in a particular position between the visible and invisible world.

In many cases, the narrations are thinly veiled threats especially as more people interested by the power of Yage have arrived in the territory. Recent political scandals have influenced the political leverage of this *Taita*. As a result many of his followers repeat these stories to highlight his power. Much more is to be said about the political power of the shaman, as Davi Kopenawa and Bruce Albert (2013) have expertly shown, their role as not only negotiators with the spiritual world but with the other human communities have placed them in the centre of the political struggles.

This position has given them a new role as mediators with the nation-state. The changing political landscape has produced the space for shamanism as a political power, as both mediators with the community and institutions as well as with nature and its spiritual inhabitants. As the mining and agricultural frontier expands into the forest, the shamans will play an even more important role categorising the essential biocultural landscapes that must be protected.

Danta and Other Spirits

Image 22: Danta

As I have been stating Medicinal plants exist in both the spiritual and the physical realm. The power of the plant to heal is not only attributed to its ability to offer *alivio* (relief) it is also directly related to the spiritual qualities of the plant.

To fully understand this concept, we must explore the complex spiritual relationships that exist between the medicinal plants and the different agencies that live in the forests and cities of region, in particular the role of medicinal plants as mediators between the spiritual realm and the physical one. For the local communities, the complex meshworks of relationships that constitute an ecosystem go far beyond biological interactions; it is a space

where the spiritual agents and nonspiritual agents coexist. Due to its complexities, the forest is the space where the invisible and visible beings interact. Whereas deep in the jungle, the border between the visible and the invisible world, becomes increasingly blurry. As beings of the forest themselves, medicinal plants have an essential role as middleman; they are physical beings who have a direct link with the spiritual realm.

Traditionally these spirits inhabited certain places, such as mountains, creeks, rivers and forests and when people accidentally or unintentionally come into contact with them it can cause illness or death. The lines between the forest and human realms are continuously being negotiated, causing all sorts of problems. Medicinal plants allow managing these beings and alterities, as they clash with the human world in multiple levels.

To explore these other agencies I will use Danta Chondur, another common variety found throughout Amazonia. First I must introduce the Danta Chondur since it is the "odd one out" among the Chondurs. It is a sedge, however botanically it is a different species, unlike the rest of the Chondurs it has thick leaves, and it is quite easy to identify. However, Danta Chondur is still widely used throughout Putumayo. Like all other Chondures, the rhizome is used for many things, from cleansing to producing powerful purgative effects. This Chondur however, is unique due to its connection with the Danta (Tapir), the largest mammal in the forest. Danta Chondur is an important source of food for this large mammal.

Like many beings in Amazonia, the Danta exists in the forest as an animal that can be hunted for its meat and as a potential spiritual entity with a complex personhood. Like the jaguar and the anaconda, the Danta is a common theme during Ayahuasca ceremonies due to its spiritual importance. In traditional medicine indigenous medicine, Danta teeth, bones and fat were widely used and its spiritual and healing qualities are known to have powerful effect on people. The medicinal properties of the Danta are directly related to its existence in the forest and its capability to exist in multiple worlds. At the same time, the medicinal properties of Danta Chondur are directly related to its relationship with the Danta. This correlated relationship is twofold, as some healers have stated that when the Danta is sick they eat this Chondur, some have even stated that it is the owner of some of the medicinal plants that grow

in the floors of the jungle. This means the Danta must be taken into consideration when using these plants as a spiritual owner.

It is important to note that the notion of spiritual ownership varies tremendously. A spiritual owner or spirit master[40] is a spirit who control and protect a particular place or thing. Owners can be linked to a number of things, such as landscapes, forest, rocks, rapids, mountains animals and plants. Plant owners take many forms, yet they are an essential agency when dealing with health. Most shamans and other people ask the owner of the plant to grant them access to their healing potential (Jauregui et al., 2011). This practice is essential since cutting down or using a plant without asking permission can prove counter-productive and dangerous. Establishing a direct relationship with the spirits of each plant can help to maximise the efficiency of the plant[41]. However, the difference between the spirit of the plant and the owner of the plant is quite tricky to identify[42]. From what I could gather during my investigation, the identification of the plant seems fluid; for some plants, it's important to ask directly to the spirit, while for others it's important to ask their owners.

A shaman once described the spiritual owner he saw during a Ayahuasca ceremony:

> "Despues de tomar yagesito esa primera vez, se me presento un tronco grande donde antes había un gran árbol. Un viejito; un abuelo con corona de plumas estaba ahí, yo sentía que lo conocía. Me hizo señas para acercarme, y me puso todas las plantas ahí en el tronco. Me las mostraba una por una, diciéndome para que servía y para que no servía." "After drinking Yage for the first time, an enormous log was presented before me. An old man, an elder with his feather crown, asked me to come close to him, I

[40] Much has been written on this see: Fausto (2012; 2004) Arhem (1996) among others

[41] For the Shipibo of Peru, this means a complex and strenuous process of *Dieta* where plants are consumed for a period of time until the shaman know it profoundly (Jauregui et al., 2011).

[42] It is helpful to think of spirits as not necessarily immaterial entities (spirit may be a kind of vital substance, like blood; souls may be manifested in animal body parts – e.g. the liver – but they may take the form of an image – e.g. a humunculus). Likewise, the spirit master of a given plant, for example, may be a bird, for instance – so what appears to be an animal/bird etc. may in fact be a spirit master.

> felt I knew him from before. He put all the plants before me explaining one by one what they could be used for and what they could not be used for."

The similarities to the entity described in the previous chapter are surprising. By accessing this spiritual owner they shaman can diagnose and access the medicinal potential of each the plant. As one of my informants explains:

> "Cuando estoy bien borracho con Yage me muestra el jardin botanico del cielo. Me muestra que son las plantas que toca para cada enfermedad, me da un numero como si fuera una farmacia y de ahi busco la planta." "When I am very drunk with yage, it shows me the botanical garden of the sky. It shows which are the plants that we need to use, like a pharmacy he gives me a number, and then I look for the plants to heal."

This is quite interesting since it highlights the double existence of medicinal plants. As if evoking Plato´s archetype, this shaman gives a detailed description of the "Jardin botanico del cielo" where all the medicinal plants exist in spiritual form. The idea of archetype in the visible and the invisible world is not uncommon in Amazonia. The *Maloka* or communal house has been described as the archetype of the world by lowland Tukanoans (Hugh-Jones, 1979). Comparing this garden to Garden of Paradise seems to add a syncretic dimension as in the biblical reference the botanical garden of the sky is a place where all plants are beneficial. All have medicinal properties and are blessed by God.

The botanical garden in the sky is frequently compared to local pharmacies found throughout the city. This comparison highlights how the ideas of health and medicine are continually being made and reinforced as modern transformations have had a profound impact in the way people perceive health. These western and Christian cosmological beliefs are changing how people perceive the world, especially in urban and semi-urban settings. Incoming evangelic churches have accelerated this process. At the same time the social structures that maintain a deep connection with the forest are shifting.

Like most other plants used in Putumayo, Danta Chondur is on an interesting ontological overlap. Due to its undeniable connection with the Danta, it continues to belong to a spiritual universe deeply entwined with the forest. As new religious and cultural notions have entered the spiritual landscape of the Amazonian foothills, it has changed the way in which people understand how a plant has the power to heal. As people lose contact with the forest due to urbanisation, the cosmological notion of spirits also changes. It is here where we come across one of the critical aspects of Amerindian and indigenous cosmological universes, their capacity to change while at the same time continue manifesting the same internal ontological processes. As Aparecida Vilaça (2010) states

Image 23: Chondur in garden

> "Native symbolic systems were able to accommodate these new actors, proving dynamic enough to revise their classifications in accordance with the perception of events" (2010, pg.3).

Waves of colonial influence has continuously transformed the way local indigenous people understand the universe; either to create categories for new others, or to reconceptualize their cultural practices, such as war and cannibalism (Viveiros de Castro, 2002), to incorporate the new God and power structures, capitalist practices (Hugh Jones, 1992), and more recently biological and naturalist ideas on nature. As Christianity, new age, and biomedical beliefs

establish themselves, healing plants become closely associated with other sources of power and health such as the Virgin, God, science and the new age spirits.

The Other Chondurs

As we have seen, Chondur is widely used throughout Putumayo in different cultural and ecological backgrounds. The various ethnic groups that coexist here share not only environmental, and social characteristics but also share a medicinal tradition. In the case of Chondur, it is used by most indigenous communities in Putumayo including the lowland and the highland communities as well as by some mestizo and white residents. As we saw these *Colono* healers have adopted practices from local traditional medicine, such as the use of the Chondur and Waira.

There are many other types of Chondur which I have not named in this chapter due to limited space, but it is worth mentioning as this plant stands out as one of the most diverse of the medicinal repertoire of the shamans of Putumayo and elsewhere (Descola, 1986). Some of the other varieties are *Gente* (People) Chondur, *Coco* (devil) Chondur, *Warmi* (Cattle) Chondur and *Ajo* (Garlic) Chondur. All of these have their particular use, prayers, rituals and relationships with health, materiality and the other beings in the forest.

During this chapter, I highlighted the multidimensional existence of these unique plants. They inhabit a diversity of social and environmental landscapes throughout Putumayo; from the spiritual forest of indigenous cosmology to Christian ideals of paradise to modern capitalist ideals. The power and role of medicinal plants depend on its relationship with other beings that coexist here, having a deep connection with the supernatural and spiritual world. This grants them even more agency since as they are actively communicating with us through our body, they position themselves as essential agencies that must be negotiated with to heal successfully.

Traditional medicine in Putumayo works by accessing this invisible world, bringing together the different realms that exist parallel to ours and dealing with the different beings that inhabit

them. The plants grant not only direct access to the invisible world but also facilitate a multi-layered and multi-sensory communication with the beings that inhabit this world. In the urban landscape of Mocoa, where many shamans are continually interacting with each other, the spiritual landscape becomes a dangerous place[43]. The importance of Chondur as a tool to negotiate with these powers must not be underestimated.

Chondur like many other medicinal plants connects the forest and the body as a space, a living organism and a spiritual being. The complicated existence of Chondur highlights the importance of the forest in traditional medicine. As the transforming forces continue having an immense effect on the local cultural and ecological landscape, traditional medicine is changing fast. They still hold a deep link to local ecosystems, making the forest indispensable for local urban health, but new forces are changing this relationship. In the following chapter, we will explore the attitudes towards the forest and how these are widely connected with local traditional medicine.

[43] Added to this complexity, the violent history of Putumayo is also a cause of disease. The spirits of those who died violently during the most harrowing time of the war are still a very present agent.

Chapter 6 Yoco

Throughout this dissertation, we have explored the different cultural meshworks that make up health in the Andean foothills of Putumayo. I have given a perspective on the historical and cultural processes that have been produced by the interaction between lowland shamanism and highland folk medicine. I have also described how local networks of shamanic practices are interwoven into the overall folk medicine trade, as they establish intercultural connections and offer spaces of cultural, economic and knowledge exchange. In the previous chapter, I briefly analysed the local cosmological and social notions of health in Putumayo shamanism. The following chapter will explore how these medicinal concepts are interwoven into the local ecosystems of the Andean foothills. By doing this, I wish to highlight the cultural exchanges that are transforming how these people relate to the environment. This chapter is thus a culmination of my methodological approach. Exploring some of the relevant themes explored in previous chapters and seek to understand the role of this ethnographic subject in the multi-layered meshwork that is the biocultural landscape of the Andean Foothills.

Before I even started my academic career, I began building a complex relationship with a particular plant that was very foreign to me. This plant grows in the forest of Putumayo and has been used by indigenous people for generations. It was far away from my urban lifestyle. Needless to say, as a student in Colombia it is not difficult to access information on spiritual plants of Putumayo. Tobacco, Coca and Ayahuasca were part of the national discourse in one way or the other, often negatively. It was Yoco (*Paullinia yoco*) that really caught my attention, moving me towards ethnobotany. It was my first introduction to the complex world of the spiritual, botanical, chemical, environmental, and social landscape of Putumayo, fundamentally changing me and driving my career.

I first learned of this plant from a book owned by my late grandfather. He was a physician who had gone from a small town in the highlands to the Caribbean coast and was curious about the medicinal plants used by local indigenous people such as Koggi and Ika. He had managed to get a copy of Hernando Garcia-Barriga´s book Flora Medicinal de Colombia (1974) and he studied it meticulously. When I got this book I noticed that it was full of underlined sentences and small marginal notes. While exploring Garcia-Barriga´s book, a beautiful image of a Ziona shaman using Yoco caught my eye. When I read the description of Yoco, the importance Garcia-Barriga gave to this plant was obvious; he had set aside six pages of his book for a detailed description of the plant. My grandfather had also noticed this; he had highlighted several phrases and wrote notes on the margins, in particular, a note stating the amount of caffeine that the plant contained.

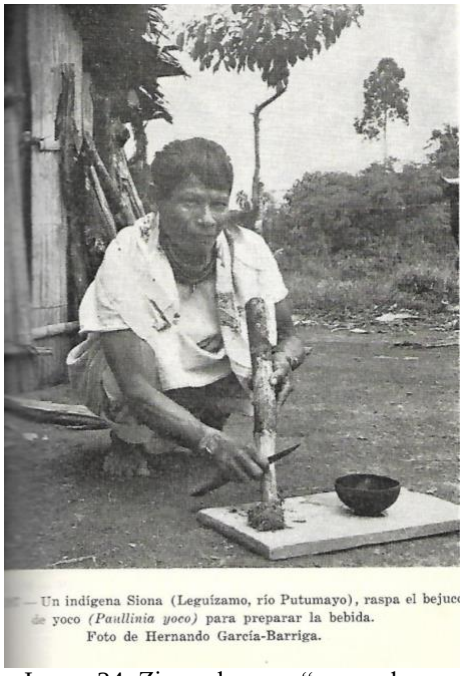

— Un indígena Siona (Leguízamo, río Putumayo), raspa el bejuco de yoco *(Paullinia yoco)* para preparar la bebida.
Foto de Hernando García-Barriga.

Image 24: Ziona shaman "raspando Yoco" Source: (Garcia-Barriga, 1974)

Hernando Garcia-Barriga was one of the first Colombian botanists to work with different local and ethnic communities throughout the country. He founded the Botanical Institute of the National University and the first botanical garden of Colombia. His book was the first

Spanish book in the subject of medicinal plants of Colombia, exploring and incorporating plants from the highlands and the Amazonian foothills, including Putumayo.

Like other botanists who worked in the Amazon, Garcia-Barriga started working with local indigenous communities. The popularity of the Ethnological school in the National University and its growing prestige throughout the country had begun legitimising traditional knowledge in academia. This process culminated 50 years later, empowering indigenous movements throughout the country and changing the sociopolitics of Colombia.

Richard E. Schultes was the first to identify Yoco, giving it the scientific name of *Paullinia yoco* as part of the Sapindaceae family (Schultes, 1942). However, he was not the first to mention it, other explorers, missionaries and botanists had previously noted its use by local communities. Schultes was the first to give it a scientific name. He also called it "the most important non-alimentary plant in the natives' economy" (1943). No wonder Garcia-Barriga dedicated so much space to the plant.

As I read more on the topic of Yoco, I was stunned by how this seemingly indispensable plant was ignored by so many authors who worked in this territory, focusing instead on Yage and Coca. These plants shared the same cultural landscape of Putumayo, and yet Yage and Coca have historically been seen as much more culturally significant. In this chapter, I promote a further understanding of the central role of Yoco in the biocultural landscape of the region. Yoco is a great example to see the impact of local ecological degradation in the trade and use of these plants. Yoco is not commonly traded in these networks due to its biological and cultural limitations. I will use Yoco as an introduction to several key elements of Ayahuasca shamanism; such as its close bond with the forest and the way the changing dynamics are having an impact on the use of wild medicinal species.

To do this, I use the term *landscape* similarly to Tilley and Cameron-Daum's materialist approach (2017). Not as an aesthetic western notion, but as a generalising term to understand the culturally established space where non-humans and humans are constantly interacting. Like the plants in this dissertation, landscapes are places where people establish their way of

seeing the world into materiality. In other words, "Persons and landscapes are entangled in a network of material and social relations providing both affordances and constraints for the performance of identities that always occur in particular material and cultural contexts" (Tilley and Cameron-Daum, 2017: pg 6). These relations, as we saw in previous chapters, are defined by local worldviews and ontological values. In it we have a multi-directional dynamic, in which the plant -in this case Yoco- also has a role in determining the nature of these landscapes, and in contributing to the characteristics of local cultures.

This chapter will show how Yoco plays an important role in the different ontological spheres that interact in this region, be it indigenous, mestizo or scientific. In a territory like Putumayo, where different ways of seeing and understanding the world are negotiated, this plant, establishes new ways to deal with the ecosystems and the many different non-humans that inhabit it. They are nodes in the complex meshworks of social relationships that not only define how people relate to nature but also how they relate to tradition, cultural transformation and colonial power structures.

Let us begin by stating that Yoco is a plant that grows and lives in the forest. It also carries the potential for setting off a biochemical reaction effect in our body. It is a spiritual and healing agent and a tool to live in the forest. It is also a source of ethnic pride and identity building as well as a mechanism for the expansion of modern conservation. I am not advocating that each existence is independent, instead, I hope to demonstrate that they are entwined and overlapping, creating conflicts yet at the same time being a source of interethnic negotiation and translation.

I have divided the chapter into four main parts as a means to explore the different aspects of this multifaceted plant.

Firstly, I consider it essential to understand the internal characteristics of the plant. The stimulating effect of the caffeine contained in Yoco has, in many ways, made it a particularly exciting plant since it is different from other medicinal plants studied during this ethnography. Caffeine is probably the most important stimulant in human history; it has

influenced innumerable lives and has been quickly adopted by capitalism for its benefits on productivity and work, establishing itself as the centre of the commodification process and it is a global force (Weinberg and Bealer, 2001). For local indigenous communities, the internal characteristic of Yoco is its spiritual agency, the quality that gives it its importance in the socio-spiritual framework of shamanism in Putumayo. The spiritual and the commodity side, however, do not cancel each other out. Instead, caffeine and its effects on the mind and body are just understood differently, interpreted according to the reality of each person and defined by the cultural relationships they have built. However, they are there enough to make Yoco and other caffeinated plants centres of local, regional and global trade.

Secondly, I will explore how some people, especially those of the Ayahuasca shamanic tradition, reinforce these relationships. Exploring the use of this plant can illuminate several aspects of the close interconnection between humans and plants in these forests. It can show us the close link between the forest's spiritual and healing properties, and the use of these plants, giving us an introduction to the local cosmology and how it defines the way people manage and coexist with the forests. At the same time, it will highlight the profound transformations that the communities throughout Putumayo are living through.

Thirdly, I will explore the ecological and social dynamics of the Yoco plant. Due to its unique growing patterns and particularly tricky domestication, Yoco depends on forest ecosystems to exist. Humans who have historically been part of these ecosystems play an integral role in the ecological links between forests and the Yoco plant. I will demonstrate the intersection or nodal points in the meshwork of existences that constitute the cultural landscape of the Piedmont region of Putumayo.

Finally, this chapter will explore the new roles Yoco is playing in the social and political sphere of environmentalism. Modernist scientific notions of ecology and ecological conservation are having a tremendous impact on the way people relate to the forest. Transforming the way indigenous, mestizo and *colono* communities experience and use these ecosystems. Yoco is becoming a source of identity struggle, land rights and ecological conservation initiatives. Yoco ties together the different stakeholders in the region, becoming

a space of negotiation between different ways of understanding and protecting the local landscapes

An Ethnography of Caffeine

In order to understand the role of Yoco in the overall ecological and cultural landscape of middle Putumayo, we must first understand what makes this particular plant so important - what makes it stand out from the forest and the other medicinal plants that cohabit this territory. Mostly it is its stimulant effects on the body due to its high concentration of caffeine.

The notion of stimulants is not as straightforward as one might think. Instead, it opens up whole ontological perspectives on interiority, where the interior qualities of these beings are relative to one's perspective of the world and the ontological rules that bind it. The split between the external or the physical and the internal or the immaterial is a common aspect of the human experience. As Descola states (2004):

> "The duality of interiority and physicality which is present all over the world in various modalities, is thus not simply an ethnocentric projection of an opposition peculiar to the west between, on the one hand, the body and, on the other, the soul or mind" (pg121).

The various ontological realms define the approach and understanding of the interior and exterior qualities of non-humans.

As we know, for western naturalism view plants as having a widely different internal characteristics than us. We acknowledge that the plants share physical and chemical properties with us, made from matter and bound to the same chemical and physical laws. However, even if plants are considered organisms - thus endowed with life - they are still seen as a lower lifeform. This means that they are not comparable to humans, thus not endowed with any similar immaterial aspects, like culture, a soul or conscience.

For westerners the effectiveness of a stimulant does not come from a spiritual agency, instead, it comes from the effects of the molecules in our body. These molecules are bound to the chemical and physical laws, and its efficacy is the effect on the human body when consumed. The fact that this plant produces a chemical molecule that affects us is not a spiritual or immaterial process, but a result of the physical characteristics of the plant. Drinking coffee is often only, but not entirely, seen as the intake of caffeine molecules that have an effect on our brain.

Indigenous people throughout western Amazonia also drink caffeinated plants as part of their daily routines and many different species have essential roles in their lives. These plants have the spiritual characteristic that allow for communication, albeit to a much lesser degree than some of the master plants such as Ayahuasca. This characteristic gives them the role as mediating tools in the complex landscape of social beings that make up these forests. In this case, for local Ayahuasca shamans, these plants gives them the energy to keep working, hunting or establishing spaces for communal communication.

From the western to indigenous worlds, the consumption of caffeinated drinks is a common activity. Caffeine has established complex networks throughout the world incentivising a profound relationship between people and the species of plants that produce this complex molecule (Roberts and Wink, 1998). The question arises: how do we consolidate two opposing descriptions and understanding of the same phenomena? I have approached this question in the chapter on Ayahuasca. I believe that psychedelics have a complex and nuanced personhood which require a multi-layered approach. However, with stimulants like Caffeine, which have been internalised by western communities for centuries, there is a possibility to consolidate both approaches. In this case, I believe a semiotic perspective will allow this consolidation, as the plant might be communicating as the shamans say, yet in a manner that may lead to misinterpretation. This semiotic approach lets me build a bridge between both ontological perspectives on this plant, offering a new way in which we can understand the perspective of the plant without limiting it to naturalism.

Let me clarify, these relationships would not have been possible without the caffeine alkaloid. The relationship between humans and this plant is possible through this molecule that affects our nervous system. Therefore, the entwined relationship between plant, environment and human, was brought about by a biochemical reaction. If we consider the ontological perspective of the plant, could this be categorised as a type of chemical communication? For Eduardo Kohn (2013) life is a sign process much like language. Quoting Pierce he states that anything that allows for a dynamic in which "something stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity" is alive (2013 pg 74). In this case, the fact that the plants are responding to their environment by producing caffeine, keeping their original form while changing to react to outside influences is a semiotic relationship. Its particular form, behaviour or ecological adaptation cannot be understood without considering what it is responding to. Therefore caffeine is produced to as a semiotic response to the environment.

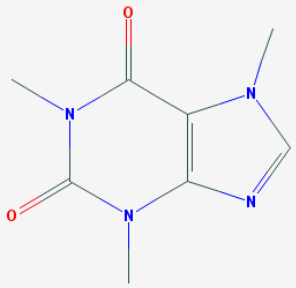


Image 25: Caffeine Molecule C8H10N4O2. Source: Pubchem

Ecologically, Alkaloids, such as the caffeine molecule, are secondary metabolites of plants, which mean that they are not necessarily primordial to the plant's survival. As with other classes and types of secondary metabolites, the plants produce them as the first line of defence against mycological, entomological and other forms of predation[44]. By doing this, these compounds work as chemical deterrents against herbivores. In a way, the plant is communicating --through flavour, smell and effects on the nervous system-- to other organisms to stay away.

For plants, which have little means of short-term adaptation or acclimatization, alkaloids such as caffeine play an integral role in giving them certain flexibility in a constantly changing

[44] As nitrogen-based proteins, alkaloids are also an important by-product of the complex macro-ecological nitrogen cycle that permeates the biosphere. How plants produce these complex molecules is still not well known, yet biochemistry is advancing fast in understanding the process behind this biosynthesis (Roberts and Wink, 1998).

environment (Roberts and Wink, 1998). The quantity and quality of caffeine in each plant depends primarily on both the ecological variables and the internal biology of the plant, making them entirely mutable and diverse even if they are the same species. In other words, the amount of caffeine in each particular specimen depends on the genetic makeup, mutations and individual adaptation to its environment[45]. This includes predation and defence but also the soils, population, climate and a whole set of relationalities that make up the ecosystem.

This offers an interesting analysis if we wish to expand agency to this type of non-human, since the social relationships that influence the caffeine produced by the plant are the sum of all the relationships that make up an environment, including humans. What Kohn calls the "ecology of selves" (2013 pg81). In other words, the agency of these plants and consequently caffeine is the result of the social relationships that define it.

Therefore in the semiotics of life, this biochemical substance is originally there to signal something in response to the environment, in this particular case "stay away!". However, it is our misunderstanding of this semiotic relationship that genuinely defines the relationship between the plant and us. In other words, when they signal, "stay away" we understand "this feels good". It could be stated that through a working misunderstanding (Sahlins, 1982) we have created an interspecies context to establish a tight and intertwined relationship. It is from this misunderstanding, that we have created such a special bond with the several species of caffeinated plants used throughout the world[46].

Caffeine as a Social Agent

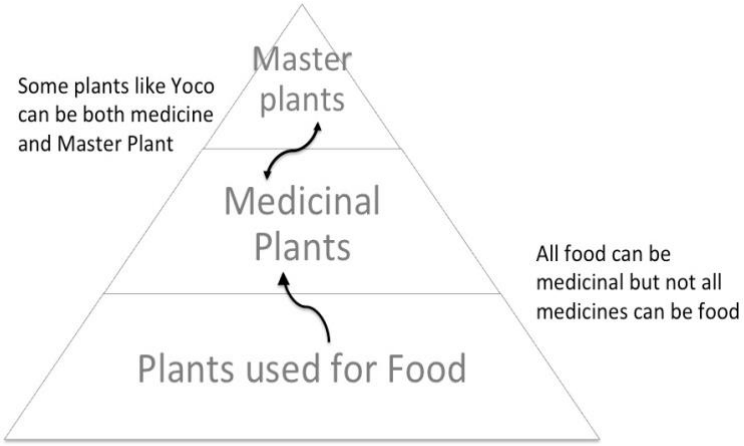
In my search for Yoco I found myself looking for it in urban markets throughout Colombia. I had been frequenting these markets in an attempt to follow some other of the main medicinal plants harvested in the lowland Putumayo area such as Chuchuwasa and Zarzaparrilla. The

[45] This diversity of caffeine might indicate why there are so many different local varieties of Yoc when biology can only identify one species.
[46] However, even this is bound to specific cultural and ontological paradigms, as each plant might contain many active components. For some cultures, individual molecules and biochemicals are emphasised while others might not give these effects any clear priority.

demand for medicinal plants in cities has always been high, especially after the influx of rural people into urban areas. I wondered if people who worked with plants from the lowlands, especially Orinoco and Amazonian medicine would have Yoco.

However, I did not find Yoco in any of the highland markets. As I enquired deeper into some of the indigenous shamanic circles, Yoco was often seen as unsellable by many of the merchants whom I talked to. Thus, slowly I began to realise that Yoco had no value for the market. As I drank the sweet café sold early in the mornings at local markets, I reflected on why coffee was such a valuable commodity if both had the same active compound as Yoco.

The reason why some caffeinated plants are popular and why others are not has more to do with their historical, cultural and ecological relationships. In Putumayo, their use depends on their cultural and traditional use. The Caffeine alkaloid is found in six plants commonly used in Putumayo: Yoco (*Paullinia yoco*), Guarana (*Paullinia cupana*), Guayusa (*Illex guayusa*), Coffee (*Caffea Arabica, Caffea rustica*), Copuazú (*Theobroma grandiflorum*) and Cacao (*Theobroma cacao*) and to a lesser degree Chuchuwaza. However, each one is used differently, belongs to different cultural spaces and establishes a whole set of different relationships both with the humans and with the environment around it.



Graph 3: Pyramid of Plants dynamics

Even if the local communities do not group these plants in the same category as I do here, there is a sentiment that these plants have similar effects on the body. For local shamanism, they are all warm and bitter plants, used primarily “para dar aliento y quitar la pereza” “to give breath and take away the laziness”. Overall, they are considered their own category,

grouped somewhere in-between the idea of food and medicine. While it is true that all alimentary plants are medicines, not all medicines are food. Stimulants are in the middle, showing how these classifications overlap and shift. They are called food and medicine interchangeably, yet they are definitely not "refresco" or refreshing drinks.

That means that they are taken daily to wake up, work and suppress hunger. Yoco is taken in the morning before the sun is out, coffee and chocolate have also become common in morning rituals throughout the region. They are also the central pillars of many social rituals. Yoco, as we will see, is still part of a social ritual in communion with the forest in the upper parts of Putumayo, while Guayusa or Huayusa is taken commonly as part of community building rituals in Runa communities of Ecuador (Kohn, 2013).

As it quickly became apparent after a long day working in the fields, I was surprised how drinking Yoco offered the space for people laugh and talk about the problems and challenges they were facing during that particular working day. Like the Guayusa (*Illex guayusa*) taken by Kuna of Ecuador, drinking Yoco offered a space of communication in the often gruelling work clearing down forests, harvesting and planting. Yoco and other caffeinated drinks offer spaces for communication between different people, beings and substances. In the West and many places throughout the world, do the same with coffee and tea.

Urban shamans know the similarity between these substances and plants, they drink them interchangeably according to the availability. Since living in the city means more access to stores and cooperatives that sell coffee and chocolate, these have become popular daily drinks. Taita J.M. stated once about Yoco:

> “Mis abuelos lo tomaban todos los días, era como tomar café” “my grandparents would drink it every day, it was like their coffee”.

Now Yoco is only available on rare occasions, left for more ceremonial situations and closely associated with the traditional world.

Therefore, its use depends primarily on the traditional practices of each ethnic and racial group. The *colono*s, who have arrived from the highland and have a long tradition of coffee drinking, have little relation with Yoco, classifying it as “bebida de indios”. As Indigenous people move into the cities and abandon many of their traditional practices, drinking coffee has become much more popular. Yoco has become less of an indispensable stimulant and is now associated with a traditional lifestyle.

> "Yo que voy a hacer en el monte, ir a tomar yoco?" "What am I going to do in the forest, drink Yoco?" asked a young man as we talked about his life in the city.

It is important to remember that caffeine plays a vital role in the lives of the people of Middle Putumayo not only as stimulants but also as source of livelihood. Caffeinated plants are the main source of revenue for many small farmers, including indigenous people, connecting them to global trade routes. Chocolate is an excellent example as families depend on the production of small amounts of cocoa beans to add an income into their household economy[47]. Most of my informants had a plantation of Coffee or Cacao and were part of a collective cooperative. Their lives were deeply tied to the global trade of these caffeinated plants. This adds a whole set of complexities. The exponential adaptation of these incoming plants into the ritual life of the local indigenous people is deeply tied to the incorporation into the global markets. Throughout the world, the popularity and adoption of these caffeinated drinks into local cultures is closely related to foreign influence and this market consolidation (Weinberg and Bealer, 2002). Traditional stimulants are often at a disadvantage, especially in urban areas due in part to market and power dynamics. Coffee in Colombia has become such an important economic force; it has defined entire regions, while Guayusa and Yoco have been marginalised[48].

[47] As Amazonian chocolate becomes more popular, due to the importance of Ecuador in this global market, more families are growing Cacao in their land. This has had an important ecological and economic transformation of the region as cacao plantations are growing everywhere.
[48] The shame of being associated with "la bebida de los indios", due in part to the colonial hierarchy, shows the influence of these dynamics on local consumption.

This study has shown how the ecological and biological anatomies of plants limit their popularity. In particular, with those that have, throughout centuries of transformation, become defined by their proximity and dependency to humans. We have subverted the multiple relationships that make up their ecosystem to become their main semiotic relationship. In other words, by becoming the main organism with which these plants are communicating, the plants have come to represent our cultural needs and wants. Due to the semiotic essence of life, the selves -in this case each species of plant- have, through generations, gradually learned to respond to the pressures of natural and human selection by changing their anatomy (Kohn, 2013).

Yoco is still defined by the vast multiplicity of relationships in a tropical forest and not so much by human manipulation. In this case the caffeine it produces is a response to the environment, where humans are only another form of ecological interaction. For Yoco, which is technically still a wild plant, the uncontrolled variables and complex relationships of the ecosystem influence its caffeine quantity and quality. This diversity of caffeine might indicate why there are so many different local varieties when biology can only identify one species.

However, this does not mean human interaction has not had an important effect on these plants. Yoco and its close relatives - as well as Illex Guayusa - are an anthropic plant through landscape domestication. As Clement (1999) states, these plants have been domesticated by "a co-evolutionary process by which human selection on the phenotypes of promoted, managed or cultivated plant populations results in changes in the population's genotypes that make them more useful to humans and better adapted to human intervention in the landscape" (pg189). In this relationship, humans have less control over variability and change. However, through time they have had enough of an influence to have a substantial effect on the characteristics of the plant.

Caffeine plays a more nuanced role in the lives of local people. It can be seen as a form of miscommunication between humans and plants, but its effects on our bodies offer spaces of interaction, negotiation and building social connections. By establishing a deep interspecies

relation, albeit through misunderstanding, we have established a link to the wider meshwork of the environment were these plants exist. This adds to the complexity of how these beings not only exist in their ecosystem but how we understand them. It also allows us to see Yoco not only as a product of the human world but deeply tied to the forest which it inhabits. To explore this further, we must first start by understanding the complex set of practices that involve using and drinking Yoco.

Finding Yoco

Finding a living specimen of Yoco plant was not easy. I travelled throughout the territory actively interviewing people in the different markets, asking about the plant. I felt frustrated by not being able to truly interact with the plant. During my time in Putumayo, I actually came into contact with Yoco several times; however these encounters were superficial often with the dried substance in the markets, as part of people's anecdotes or casually observing it at larger events. Yoco was not as common as the literature made it seem, and was often out of my reach.

As I travelled the marketplaces of Putumayo, I was also exploring how the trade of Yoco in Putumayo worked. The highland territory of Sibundoy, which has a complicated and close relationship with the lowland medicine, does not use Yoco. This was surprising because, as I have been showing, highland shamanism shared a long list of lowland plants traded through the tightly knitted shamanic network that linked the two different biocultural regions. Shamans who live in the lowlands and worked with lowland masters would often know about Yoco even if they had no access to it. Instead those shamans who had only learned in the highlands would barely recognise the plant.

Yoco was practically unknown in the herbal markets of bigger cities such as Pasto and Cali. Surprisingly, the only man who recognised the plant was a white healer in the markets of Pasto who had lived and travelled the forest of Putumayo years before. He travelled this territory in search of luck and riches and discovered his "poder de curacion" healing power soon after. Due to his white complexion, as he specified, he was not allowed to learn from shamans. However, he had spent some time with Inga, Ziona, and Kofan Indians from the middle lands. This is where he learned to drink Yage as well as Yoco. However, he had no Yoco in his stall and I was not able to get detailed description on its use.

Image 26: Market stall in Pasto where Yoco was found

In the Markets of middle Putumayo and the Lowlands, Yoco is more available; it was easy to get some small pieces of dry bark. However, whenever I enquired about this plant, the local merchants were often surprised. They would often state that only indigenous people use it. Those who had access to the dried Yoco stems had gotten it casually, as they often did with many other medicines. Strangers would sometimes approach these markets with medicines they had found in the forest, selling them for some extra cash. In any case most of the mestizo merchants who had these dried stems did not know how to use them and the indigenous merchants who I asked would often give me generic descriptions of their use.

The use of Yoco is widespread throughout the middle and lower Putumayo. However, as the forest has retreated, its use has been marginalised especially in Middle Putumayo. During the interviews, most urban shamans knew how to use Yoco yet only a few commented that they used it continuously. It depended on the availability of the plant. As mentioned for the highland shamans, Yoco was rarely available and on many occasions even unknown. Only

some shamans who have worked and studied in the lowlands knew of Yoco. The fact that when dried it loses most of its qualities, meant that it did not travel well, and was not usually sold in Urban Markets.

White and Mestizo people who had access to the forest were also known to use it but in much smaller quantities. On one occasion as I asked around, an old white *colono* told me about some specimens in the mountains near the town. He was famous in town for his eccentricity, since he lived deep in the forest but he had a profound knowledge of the plants found there.

> "Yo conosco sobre el Yoco, en el monte hay varios tallos pero a mi no me gusta, yo no lo tomo, eso es de indios" "I know about Yoco, in the forest there are several stalks but I don't like it, I don't drink that, it's for Indians".

However, whenever I asked him to take me to the mountains to look for the famed plant he would often change the subject.

During my trips to the Lowlands, near Puerto Leguizamo, I came into closer contact with Yoco. Indigenous communities here are known to continually use Yoco especially the Airo Pai or Secoya (Echeverri et al., 2004). However, Yoco is only used by those who have access to the wild population of these plants. They arenot sold in the urban markets therefore nearly imposible to use without having a direct link with the forest. During several of my interviews I was able to gather that Yoco was still taken daily, yet only on-site or from stalks brought from the forest. Yoco is only available in a higher dry land, thus, finding it requires looking for areas that are not flooded in the wet season. In the lowlands, as documented by Juan Alvaro Echeverri (2004), Yoco is regularly used in the early hours of the morning to start the day, but only indigenous people commonly use it. For mestizos and white people who live in the lowland forest, "Yoco is an Indian drink", "lo toman los indios" or "es bebida de indios" therefore it is often not as popular as other stimulants.

It quickly became apparent that for the young urban Indigenous population of the lowlands of Putumayo drinking of Yoco was also going through a period of unpopularity. This might

be a result of poor access to it and the influence of western culture. Yoco is not disapproved of by evangelical churches unlike other plants associated with shamanism like Yage and Coca; however there is still an ongoing transformation of cultural practices, and Yoco is going out of use. “Ya nadie toma Yoco” complained an elderly man in Puerto Leguizamo when I asked him of this plant.

Eduardo Bolivar (2005) has outlined some commercial extraction in the lowlands of Colombia near Puerto Leguizamo. This extraction is done on wild plants to supply a small but growing demand for Yoco in the food supplement industry. Its properties as an appetite suppressant have made it attractive for small pharmaceutic companies in the Andean cities. I have come into contact with these products but as I asked around Mocoa, due to the lack of stable populations, it proves impossible to supply the high demand. On the other hand in the lowlands, some men stated that they had actively sold Yoco to middlemen in the city. These middlemen continuously travel through the Putumayo river thus I was not able to interview any of them on the subject of Yoco.

Nevertheless, as indigenous political legitimisation processes are starting to have a significant impact on young people, traditional plants are gaining track. Like some of the other plants of power, Yoco is taking a new political role in the defence and legitimisation of traditional practices. To show their proximity to tradition, some of the politically motivated indigenous people of the Kofan and Witoto groups who I met in a conference were sharing Yoco, Mambe and Tabacco/Ambil. However, I was not able to participate in these political meetings as much as I wished to, instead attending them on the sidelines.

I had to look somewhere else to find someone who would teach me how to drink Yoco. It was surprisingly difficult. It was not until eight months later that a dear friend of mine casually told me about the Yoco that grew in his grandfather’s land. He lives in an indigenous territory to the northwest of Mocoa deep in the rainy valleys of the Andean foothills. He came from a long line of Inga *Taitas* from Yunguillo and had recently become an apprentice, learning to become a shaman. I had met him during one of my first shamanic experiences in Mocoa back in 2015. We had quickly established a friendship due in part to the intense and

challenging ceremony we had just shared. However, during our conversations, we never really talked about medicinal plants. Instead, we would share our experiences with shamanism, and he would comment on his apprenticeship.

He would visit Mocoa now and then to finish his secondary school diploma, and we would meet at the Market. His relationship with Yage shamanism was quite intense, and his story is an excellent example of the ambiguous and dangerous nature of this practice. He had been attacked by witchcraft that had caused sickness, and he would be in a constant effort to counter it. Coming from a family of shamans he soon decided to start learning to drink Yage and heal. However, his father was not a shaman. Therefore he had to look for someone else to teach him about the shamanic arts. Soon after this, the misfortunes began to happen, since, as he told me, his neighbour was genuinely jealous of his family and began practising witchcraft on them. After an extended period of bad luck, accidents and sickness, during which he stopped attending shamanic ceremonies and became increasingly paranoid about Yage, things began to change. Recently it had begun to look better, the neighbour had passed away, and the sickness and misfortunes had begun to change for the better. Due to this, he again started attending Yage ceremonies, in particular, with a mestizo shaman who had learned from the Ziona. This Mestizo *Taita* loved to drink Yoco and my friend would often bring cuttings as gifts. This is when I found out that he had access to the plant.

I was overwhelmed, after I had been looking for this plant for so long, that my friend should have access to it. This Yoco grew wild on his family´s land, and he had been harvesting several stalks to take to the ceremony. The *Taita* would use it as a medicine, giving it to his patients after a ceremony.

I was in luck since as we can tell, in middle Putumayo Yoco has become scarce and its use has almost disappeared. Only in specific areas does Yoco continue to be harvested and used, especially in places where forests are still stable and healthy. Indigenous institutions generally manage these healthy territories, and the use of Yoco is somewhat common. Territories owned and administered by *colonos* have seen quick ecological degradation and much of the old growth where Yoco thrived have been cleared away for pastures. Land

conversion, from forest ecosystems to large plantations and pastures, bears the most responsibility of the diminished use of Yoco. As people lose contact with these forests, they lose traditions associated with it.

Drinking Yoco

The following vignette shows how the use of Yoco is quite complicated. Practices associated with it depend very much on the availability, ethnic background and local tradition associated with the plant. Its use, as with any stimulating plant, oscillates from daily and regular to more sporadic and ceremonial use.

On a wet afternoon in early July, my friend asked me to go to his home in Mandiyaco. His home was going to be spiritually cleansed by his current teacher, and he recognised it would probably be the best moment to see the Yoco plant. We would drink Yage that night, and he suggests that the morning after we should go to the forest and drink Yoco. This, he said was the proper way of doing it.

We headed out to the mountains, about an hour away from Mocoa and a couple of kilometres from the Caquetá River. We were dropped off in what seemed the middle of the road. My friend then quickly jumped into the forest to change out of his city clothes, changing his city shoes for his rubber boots. The path was hidden almost out of sight; only a large rock marked what seemed to be the entrance to the forest. As we walked down the forested valley, the clouds would gently brush the mountains, signalling that it had rained the night before. The path became muddier and muddier, as we descended into the valley until we reached a rickety bridge that crossed the river.

Soon we were at J.´s house. His father received us; he sat next to his fishing net as he welcomed us in. The shaman and his apprentices quickly started setting up the preparation for the ceremony. As the *Taita* worked, I ask my friend's father about how he had arrived at this territory. He explained:

Image 27: J.´s house before the ceremony

"Mi abuelo llego aquí de Yunguillo, allá no había tierra y aquí estaba vacío. Pero aquí antes vivían los Andaquíes, este no era territorio Inga. Donde está la casa había una casa Antigua y unas guacas. Antes enterraban a los cuerpos debajo de la casa, por eso toca limpiar la casa pues yo creo que hay una guaca debajo pues yo vi una bola de fuego."
"My grandfather arrived here from Yunguillo, over there we had no land, and it was empty over here. This was ancient Andaqui territory. Where the house was built, there was an ancient house and some burial grounds. Before they used to bury the bodies underneath the house and that is why we need to cleanse it. I think there are several remains under the house because I have seen a fireball come out of the soil."

One of the primary jobs of a shaman is to cleanse a space from evil spirits. Doing this requires a very similar practice to healing and cleansing rituals described before (see chapter on Chondur). Managing the spiritual entities that cohabit a forest or a home is vital for the health of the community.

When my friend told his father about my interest in several of his plants, he was quick to point out that many of the plants found in these forests were always there and that his father, my friend's Grandfather, had only taken care of them, harvesting and propagating them. The Yoco, Borrachero (*Brugmansia* sp.), Leche de Sandi (*Brosimum utile*), and other fruiting trees had been around since before they arrived.

The next morning, as the sun came out from behind the cloudy mountains we were already packing the ceremonial instruments and getting ready to have some food. J., who had worked all night long with the Shaman, was already wearing his boots and was waiting for us to get ready to head into the forest. We quickly followed him. After about 30 minutes uphill we reached a part of the forest that had been cleared for agriculture. This field was an old one, left to rest for a while. Soon we reached the first Yoco plant, my friend then explained that there were several others; however, this one was near his house, probably planted by his grandfather. He pulled on a piece of liana that seemed separated from the main branch and with a quick flick of his machete cut a piece about 1 meter long and 5 cm thick. The liana had a thick yellowish orange colour and the yellowish sap slowly flowed out and emanating a bitter odour. He then proceeded to cut it into 30 cm long pieces and collected them in a pile. The shaman, who knew Yoco well then started digging under some leaves and placed the pieces under the ground so that they would stay fresh longer[49]. Someone quickly went to the nearest stream to fill up a gallon of water. J. then took a Totumo (*Crescentia cujete*) gourd and a piece of Yoco and with the machete started scraping the cortex, producing yellowish shavings with that characteristic bitter smell. He then proceeded to fill the gourd with water and with his hand pressed the shavings, leaving a yellowish looking liquid. The gourd was then passed from one person to the next, and one was expected to drink the whole gourd-full of liquid in one go. The taste was bitter, tart and intense.

The effect was immediate, as I felt the caffeine rush through my body I felt a nauseating effect, and a cold sweat coming on. I had to sit down, while J. and *Taita* O. scraped more Yoco and drank it. My heart was going a thousand miles per hour and I felt as if I was going to faint, nausea invaded my body and I soon had to go and vomit to the side. The other men began laughing at my reaction, stating that in the next time I should just sip it.

[49] This also helps the plant reproduce, as those pieces forgotten will sometimes sprout and grow.

Image 28: Yoco raspado

I had felt exhausted from the ceremony of the previous night, and the hike had made it worse, however as soon as I drank the Yoco I felt a surge of energy and I no longer felt any exhaustion. After the Yoco, J. decided to take us to see the other medicinal plants that were growing in his family´s land saying

> "ahora que estamos bendecidos vamos a ver las plantas sagradas" "now that we are blessed let's go and see the sacred plants".

***

In his seminal paper on Yoco, Schultes (1943) classified several indigenous groups that drank Yoco back in the early 20th century:

> "the only communities who drink yoco are the Ingas of Mocoa, Umbría, Puerto Limón and other places in Putumayo; the Sionas of Putumayo; the Kofanes of San Antonio, Guamués, Puerto Conejo, Santa Rosa and Puerto Ospina in Putumayo and Aguarico in Ecuador, as well as the Coreguajes of Caquetá" (Schultes, 1943: pg 74).

These are what Bolivar (2005) denominates as "People of Yoco", including several groups in lower Putumayo. These are similar to the other classifications and intra-ethnic groups discussed in previous chapters, however as I have shown they often overlap, as a technique and practice associated with a powerful plant is often adopted and forgotten by the different communities.

Map 9: Indigenous communities of the Andean foothills of Putumayo

Since many of the communities mentioned by Schultes live in the foothill territories the use of Yoco has changed dramatically due, in part, to the ecological and cultural transformations seen in the last 60 years. Out of the several Inga communities who were named by Schultes, I was able to only find Yoco in Yunguillo and Umbria. Mocoa and Puerto Limon has seen a severe ecological transformation, which limites the availability of this plant, therefore changing the way these communities use it. Something similar has happened to communities of Ziona and Kofan throughout middle Putumayo. They have seen severe pressures from colonial forces transforming not only the local environment but the communities themselves. The Ziona of Puerto Asis as described by Langdon (2014) faced a severe cultural disaster when they lost most of their elders in the mid 20th century[50]. At the same time, the Kofan in Orito had seen the forced removal of their territory by oil extraction in the 1960s. Meanwhile, throughout the 20th century Coereguaje of Putumayo lost most of their language and cultural practices due to colonial processes.

This desolated picture was quite different in the lowlands, near Puerto Leguizamo. The groups have experienced profound colonial pressures, but much earlier in the 20th century. They had a period of autonomy that left them isolated for the rest of the century. The use of Yoco here is much more common due in part to its availability and accessibility to the forest. This has been widely described by several anthropologists (see: Paz, Balslev and Valencia,

[50] The Ziona is one of the several indigenous groups affected by the rubber boom of the early 20th century. At the same time, cultural erosion and missionary influence had a huge impact on the social fabric of the lowland communities.

1995; Echeverri et al., 2004; 2008; Bolivar, 2005). However, continual use of Yoco is still seen mostly in Secouya, Kitchwa and some Witoto communities from lower Putumayo.


Image 29: Yoco (P. yoco)

However, all of these communities share the same techniques and practices associated with consuming Yoco. An essential part of Yoco use is figuring out which is the best Yoco to drink. There is a suprisingly large diversity of Yoco varieties, which can be carefully identified. The problem with Yoco is that like other large liana of the *Paullinia* genus, the stems start losing many of the lower leaves once it reaches the canopy. In the canopy botanical identification is practically impossible, therefore most of the local indigenous people classify the plant from its stem, its colour and some other characteristics such as smell and taste. When I asked J. how he knew that it was Yoco, he showed me by cutting a piece which quickly flowed yellow sap. He also stated that some of them had a stronger effect than others. Afterwards, he did show me a young Yoco plant, which had the five leave composite elliptic leaf which I quickly recognized as *Paullinia* however I did not see any inflorescence or fruit. When I asked him how he knew it was definitely Yoco, he stated that he had seen it grow from an old stem he collected from the one we had just used.

During his travels in the XVIII century, Fray Santa Gertrudis came upon two lianas or bejucos used by the indigenous populations of the lower Putumayo. It is possible that the two types of lianas described by Gertrudis were different varieties of Yoco. Most of the people interviewed in and around Middle Putumayo explained that you could find several kinds of Yoco such as the Amarillo (Yellow Yoco), Yoco Rojo (Red Yoco), and Yoco Blanco (White

Yoco). However, when Richard E. Schultes collected Yoco for its identification, he recounted that the Airo Pai Secoyas classified at least five different varieties. In 1950 Schultes described “Verde Yoco”, “Blanco Yoco”, “Huarmi Yoco”, “Taruco Yoco”, “Yage Yoco” among others. A few decades later, Jean Langdon (1973) also described several types of Yoco, each with its particular use by the Ziona. Of these varieties, Juan A. Echeverri classifies four types of Yoco that are used to drink and three varieties that are not used, but classified as Yoco by the Secoya (2008). As we saw with the Chondur, local indigenous classification depends primarily on characteristics such as flavour, colour, size, and ease of extraction. However, in this case, one of the main ways of identifying varieties is by its effects when consumed (Echeverri et al, 2004). Therefore this enormous variability may be caused by environmental reasons, affecting the amount of caffeine in each specimen. I was able to observe this form of identification by colour and by the potency. As an Inga merchant in the market of Orito explained: “Yoco Rojo es mucho más fuerte, el mejor es el blanco que sabe menos amargo y se siente mejor” “Red Yoco is much stronger, but the White Yoco is less bitter and feels better”. Yet, I also suspect that these varieties could be caused by misidentification, since many of the *Paullinias* have similar looking stems and also contain caffeine.

According to several of the authors who worked with Yoco in the lowland communities, each type has a use and a time (Bolivar, 2005; Paz, Balslev and Valencia, 1995; Echeverri et al., 2004; 2008). White Yoco is the most commonly used, yet some of the other Yoco varieties might be used on certain occasions such as hunting or working with chambira *Astrocaryum jauari*, a plant used for rope building and baskets (Echeverri et al, 2004). As with most other beings in the forest, they might have the same spiritual composition, yet the physical form, such as colour and smell, might change. The use of a particular type of Yoco corresponds with the situation, spiritual characteristics of the area, and the internal qualities of each plant.

On one occasion J. who is Inga, and thus comes from a long tradition of Yoco users, was surprised to find a type of Yoco that excreted a white sap. He asked around his territory for information on this but it was his master shaman, a mestizo who had lived and worked with

lowland Ziona who knew about this variety, he was quick to classify it as a Yoco Amargo, a variety which is not used by humans but considered a Yoco used by other beings in the forest.

Due to the scarcity of Yoco in certain places in the foothill area, however, most of the varieties have gone out of use. Consequently, people would know of the different types, but would not have access to them. In the markets, merchants would rarely even know the different varieties that they were selling. These plants were dry which meant that the colour of the sap, often the primary form of visual identification, had dried off. Many western and mestizo shamans also told me that they would stay clear of Yoco due to lack of know-how on the plant, “eso tiene mucho poder, solo los indios saben usarlo” “that has a lot of power, only the Indians know how to use it”. Only some rare meztiso shamans had a mastery over Yoco, such as J.´s teacher.

The technique to extract Yoco, as described in the previous vignette, is common throughout the different indigenous communities of Putumayo. Mostly the extraction of Yoco through scrappings is a widespread method even in the earliest recording by Fray Juan de Santa Gertrudis in 1758. He details the use of Yoco, while he was travelling through the southern regions of Colombia.

“Cogen un trozo y con una concha o con el filo del machete van raspando la corteza, que es de color atabacado. Todo lo raspado lo ponen en un mate o medio calabazo con agua, y a fuerza de refregones y de estrujarlo con las manos, le hacen largar toda la sustancia, que se vuelve el agua casi colorada, y este jugo se lo beben” “they take a piece and with a shell or a machete, they scrape the bark which is of a brownish colour. All this scraping is then placed in the gourd with water and after squeezing and pressing it with their hands to extract the liquid, which makes the water red they drink it” (Santa Gertrudis, 1994 [1760]).

As the active component of Yoco is in the sap, scraping allows for the most surface area to extract it. Unlike other bejucos used in Ayahuasca shamanic tradition, which require boiling pieces for some time until the internal components are diluted in the water, Yoco is soluble in cold water. It is also thought that cooking Yoco breaks down the active ingredient, therefore it is best to be done in fresh stalks. The traditional way allows extracting its internal properties most efficiently. Unlike other *Paullinia* species such as the Guarana *Paullinia cupana*, which produce large red fruit, where most of the Guarana is extracted from, Yoco seeds are scarce and are not consumed at all.

Image 30: Raspando Yoco

After drinking Yoco, J. gathered the remaining pieces and carried them home. He later explained that his father enjoyed drinking Yoco, and he wanted to take some back for him. In his home we drank some more, however, in the house, this practice required a little more preparation as the gourds and the pieces of Yoco were carefully cleaned. The outer layer of the bark was separated, and then they began scrapping them until they had a handful of these to fill the gourd or totumo. Drinking it required sitting in the communal area of the house and passing the gourd and refilling it every time it was empty. Everyone had some, including the mother of the house. The remaining Yoco was left in the garden under some leaves to keep them fresh. Several months later I learned that the Yoco had started sprouting.

Using Yoco

For indigenous people in and around Mocoa, Yoco is still used for several purposes. The primary use of Yoco has always been to wake up, work, and "botar pereza" or "throw away

the laziness" (Echeverri et al 2004; Belaunde and Echeverri, 2008). For the Secuoya (Airo Pay) and Ziona as well as other upper Tukano cultures, Yoco is associated with the making of Chambira (*Astrocaryum jauari*), palm rope made by men in the early hours of the morning. Men wake up first, drink some Yoco and start working with the Chambira fibres. As the morning progresses, the women and children also wake up and can participate in the drinking of Yoco. It can then be used at other hours of the day to help with the daily chores (Echeverri et al, 2004). Unlike the way modernism understands tiredness, for the local communities it is something that invades the body and can be expelled (Londoño Sulkin, 2012).

I later witnessed its use during working periods. In the fields some months later, J. invited me to his home to help him clear out an area, which he had cut several days earlier, mostly from medium trunks and trees that he had cut down. It was hard work and his father and brothers were there. We began working early the next day and towards the mid-morning, his father had gathered several sticks of Yoco to drink. As we took a well-deserved break from work to drink some Yoco, it became a space for interaction, laughter and comradery. I, having learned the power of the Yoco, took a smaller sip, which felt quite nice and did help with the hunger. In this respect its use is similar to other caffeinated plants throughout western Amazonia, in particular *Guayusa* (Kohn, 2014).

For some shamans around Mocoa, the rarity of Yoco has made it so that they use it on special occasions or sometimes after Ayahuasca ceremonies. After a long and strenuous night under the effects of the potent brew, drinking Yoco helps the patient focus on daily routines. It gives the patient a boost of energy, clarity of mind and confidence to work on the different processes that have come out of the Ayahuasca ceremony. As one shaman stated "lo proteje a uno" meaning that it will prevent your soul from getting attacked on the way home when one is spiritually weak. This use is similar to Langdon's description of Ziona shamans using Yoco around Puerto Asis in the 1970 (Langdon, 2014).

In some rare cases, I was told that Yoco is able to give access to the spiritual world. In other words it is supposed to produce some kind of "pinta" or visions. Much like other master plants ingesting large amounts of Yoco, is said to help you see, smell or feel the other world

or “el mundo invisible”- the invisible world. As such it also contains an agency or voice that advises “da consejo” the people who drink it. Beluande and Echeverri have highlighted this in lowland communities from the upper Tikuna linguistic Family (2008). If this is true, the similarities between the effects of Yage and Yoco, such as altered states of consciousness and depuration, are enough to classify it as a Master Plant. Jean Langdon states that used with specific techniques, Yoco is the second most used plant to contact the “other world” (Langdon 1974). I was told of this characteristical use on many occasions but I have not seen it in person. However, from my experience with Yoco it seems plausible. I must state that classifying Yoco as a master plant is not always set in stone, since unlike the clear voice and visions caused by Ayahuasca and the other medicinal plants, Yoco seems to be much more difficult to understand. Due in part to this and to the inaccessibility to stable populations, Yoco, has become less attractive to many shamanic specialists.

Its place in the category of medicinal plant is also difficult to place. The emetic qualities make it an invaluable tool for many shamans and local healers. "Purgar" or depuration is a common aspect form of dealing with diseases in Amazonia and many medicinal plants are used for this purpose (Sanz-Biset and Cañigueral, 2013). Ingesting large quantities of leaves or with the scrapings causes emetic reactions which are often used as a way of cleansing the internal body. Such cleansing techniques are meant to counter spiritual attacks or pollution of some kind in the internal system of the patient. It is not uncommon to see the cleansing as a way to feel better from disease caused by bad behaviour, by eating what should not be eaten or by coming into contact with a spirit. As we have seen in the previous chapter, disease is profoundly tied to spiritual causes. Those plants that cause "purga" act as facilitators to expel "el mal" the bad or evil from the body.

Unlike purging with other plants used explicitly for this purpose, purging with Yoco is specifically done to help the patient to improve the mood or “los ánimos”. This word is a catchall term to describe the general demeanour of someone who is sick. As a local healer explained Yoco

> "se usaba tomado, se tomaba bastante hasta que uno se emborracha y purga. Pero se purga en las manos, se lavan las manos con la purga y con eso se coge el machete para trabajar" "Yoco is drunk several times until you feel drunk and vomit. You have to vomit in your hands, you wash your hands with the vomit, and with this you grab the machete to work".

This shows us how purging and depuration are not only used to get rid of illness but also moods and "animos" associated with laziness.

As spiritual tourism flowed into the foothills, more and more people want to have a "real" shamanic experience. There is a on going renaissance of the use of Yoco around Mocoa. In order to offer something of an authentic shamanic experience more and more shamans are using Yoco. During my time in the Mocoa markets I heard of a young Norwegian man who was also asking about Yoco, he was seeking for someone to teach him how to use it as a shamanic plant.

The profound transformation on the use of Yoco can be traced to ecological changes. Yoco which is biologically entwined with its ecosystem and needs healthy forests to thrive is endangered due to the severe transformations in the region, making it scarcer and challenging to access. Let us thus look at these ecological relationships and the different roles Yoco plays in these forests to further illuminate this point.

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The Multidimensional Ecology of Yoco

For many local indigenous people of Putumayo, Yoco like Ayahuasca plays an essential role in the complex relationality of beings and selves that make up the local forest. Like many powerful plants used by shamanism in Putumayo, Yoco exists both in this realm and in the invisible world. As mentioned before, "invisible" is not necessarily being invisible, as we understand it, but instead, it is a term used to refer to the hidden characteristics, selves and beings that populate this world. Therefore for these shamans, the forests here are spaces

where a multiplicity of different spiritual and physical beings is always interacting with each other. If we use Kohns (2014) vocabulary, the semiotic nature of these forests transcends physical relationships and includes a whole set of different spiritual actors who are also continually affecting one another. As we have seen in previous chapters, the dual form of plants, as both a spiritual agent and a physical being is often fluid. The access to the invisible world offered by Ayahuasca allows shamans to see the spiritual form of these plants and the roles they might have in the overall landscape. In this ontological perspective, the forest is a realm that is separated from our human realm, where the line between visible and invisible worlds is often difficult to perceive. As a shaman once told me

> "Yo volaba bien profundo, bellisimos bosques de oro llenos de colores y llegaba ahi bien adentro a conocer ese reino y ahi estaba lleno de taitas con sus coronas, shush shush hacian sonar sus warias cuando llegaba" "I flew deep inside, to beautiful forests made of gold and full of colour, and I arrived deep inside where the other shamans were with their crowns, and shush shush they made their Waira sound when I arrived".

Yoco is a great example of multilayered existence, it has a spiritual agency and personhood but at the same time it is a plant in an ecosystem, part of the multiplicity of relationships in a forest. As we know Ayahuasca Shamanism in Putumayo, agency is complex; it is a relational multi-layered phenomenon that is continuously changing according to time and place. From the owners to all the other beings that coexist in the invisible realm of the forest, to the visible plants and animals; all of whom have an active agency and personhood which defines how a forest exist.

Beluande and Echeverri (2008) explore this quite well. For the Airo Pai, Yoco is considered to have a community of its own, the people of Yoco, who inhabit the invisible world accessible through Ayahuasca (Beluande and Echeverri, 2008). These invisible People of Yoco do the same daily activities as the Airo Pai, in fact:

> "Según ellos, la vida diaria en sus poblados se inspira en la imitación de las actividades llevadas a cabo por los seres espirituales protectores. O sea, según los airo-pai, el original está en el «otro lado», en el cielo, y la copia en «este lado»""According to them, the daily life of their people is inspired by the imitation of the daily activities done by the spiritual owners. In other words, according to the Airo Pai, the original is on the other side, in the sky, and the copy is on this side." (pg98).

Therefore when the invisible world is accessed, and the different plants and fruiting trees that exist alongside the Yoco are seen, they must be planted in similar order in the physical world. This idea of an archetype is similar to those explored in previous chapters, such as the “jardin botanico del cielo” or “botanical garden of the sky”.

For many of the shamans, Yoco is considered outside the human influence. Yoco is a delicate plant to grow, as it is "celosa" or jealous, it prefers to exist in the forest and will dries out when planted in areas without the proper sunlight, soils and companion plants[51]. This characteristic makes Yoco closer to the forest than to the human gardens. Instead of trying to grow Yoco, people like J. actively protect the places where Yoco is already growing, keeping the companion trees and plants that have produced the right setting for its growth. Knowing where Yoco throughout the territory means being able to access it when they need it, however, it has grown there almost without human interference.

The lack of human management is apparent to such a degree that Yoco is thought to have its own masters, or “Dueños”, owners who need to be negotiated with when harvesting. As seen in and around Mocoa, the owners of plants take many forms and are referenced continuously. However, for urban communities who have little acess to the forest these beings are often shrouded with mistery. In a similar way to the racial realms in the chapter of Chuchuwaza, the forest represents a symbolic realm outside the urban experience which is given all sorts of mystical and spiritual power. To use Taussig´s term, the "epistemic murk" produced by

[51] These are usually large hardwood trees however, it is known that some trees activley deter the growth of lianas such as Palo Negro. Sadly I was not able to identify this species.

distance and otherness is the source of the healing power of the forest. In other words, for the urban communities the deep jungles represent an extreme alterity, an unrelatable experience so distant to their lives that can easily give and take life.

However, in the area around Mocoa, these relationships are changing and much of what I witnessed demonstrated shifting attitudes towards plants and the forest. This transformation is having an observable effect on the landscape, as the modern ideals pushed by neoliberal capitalism, western evangelical religions and even notions of conservation are changing the complex relationships that make up the biocultural system.

The Changing Forest

In my search for Yoco, I came across an elderly Inga female shaman *Doña* M. who gave me a clear and desolate picture of the medicinal forest in the Middle Putumayo. *Doña* M. was recommended to me by neighbours for her ability to heal. We had talked extensively before about healing and the Inga tradition but had never talked about her territory, when I asked for more information she invited me to visit her in the *resguardo*. I soon discovered why. The two-hour long walk from the road to her home was through large grass fields with barely any trees. The forests no longer existed, long ago cut down and transformed into grasslands and cattle fields. The transformation was slow, but it was definitive, ancient forests had been transformed into what reminded me of the Llanos Orientales, the grassy planes to the north.

When I arrived, we began talking about her medicine. She was the rare type of female shaman who was able to lead Yage ceremonies, yet she was more concentrated on the medicinal plant aspect of healing, as are most women healers of Putumayo. She had been taught by her grandmother to heal and later by a Kofan shaman who authorised her to offer Yage. Her relationship to many of the plants came from a long tradition of healers, of personally experimenting with each one and from a deep spiritual connection to them. She used Yage to focus on the spiritual quality of plants, using the brew to access the invisible healing qualities of these plants, learning through their owners what they are for and how they have

to be used. Through a robust spiritual negotiation with the beings of the forest, all those who coexist in this and the invisible world, she managed to heal her patients.

Her territory has suffered from constant ecological degradation, and the forests have retreated. *Colonos* who arrived with specific methods and notions of productivity have transformed the soils and the vegetation of the area around her territory. As she says

> "Llegaron ellos y los bosques fueron desapareciendo, primero que plantaran piña luego que plantaran maíz, luego que dizque palma. Cuando los suelos quedaron limpios, les toco poner ganado." "They arrived, and the forest began to disappear. First, they started growing pineapple, then corn, then palm, finally when the soils were barren they had to put cattle to graze". She also emphasised the impact of Coca, "…uy esto estaba lleno de Coca, pero esas las fumigaron, quedó seco el suelo, nada crece" " this was full of Coca, but it was fumigated, then the soil became dry, and nothing grows".

The medicines she would use required constant contact with the spiritual masters of the plants and other invisible hosts from the forest, which became ever more difficult to access. Diseases became more common, and misfortune took hold of the area in the darkest days of the Colombian conflict. She now depended on the market to buy medicinal plants to supply her needs, but these plants were not the same as those found in the wild. She then complained

> "Aqui viene cualquiera las arranca y las usa, ellos saben para que sirven, por eso las arrancan, no tienen respeto." "Here anyone comes to pluck them out to use them, they know what they are for, and that is why they cut them, there is no respect".

This has been the case of many of the big trees that grow in the forest which produce medicinal resins, they have been cut so many times to access these liquids that they have dried up, only a few individual ones are left. Now her *Chagras* only hold some of the most important plants, as well as some which grow in gardens and prairies. As a result, she has

started using Yage to ask the spirit of Ayahuasca for substitutes of plants she no longer finds in the wild.

I knew that Yoco needed healthy forest to grow and I wondered about the effects of deforestation in the populations of these plants. I was curious if she still used it and how she had access to it. I asked her about it and she replied:

> "Aquí antes había mucho, mucho Yoco, lo usaban mi padre y mi abuelo y mis hermanos cuando eran jóvenes. Lo sacaban del monte, Yoco salvaje, del bueno que crece en la selva. Eso tocaba con mucho cuidado pues tenía sus dueños poderosos. El yoco era muy sagrado, lo cuidaban bien… Los *colonos* no sabían muy bien para que era pero la gente llegaba y tumbaba el monte sin saber, la medicina sagrada que crecía, la tumbaban y se perdía… Ya no lo encuentra nadie, toca ir a la montaña para buscarlo… Era bueno ese Yoco." "Before there was a lot of Yoco, my father and grandfather and my brothers used it when they were young. They took it out of the jungle, the wild Yoco, the good one that grows in the jungle. You needed to be careful because it had powerful owners; the Yoco was very sacred, it was well looked after… The *colonos* don't really know what it is for; they just cut it all when they were cleaning the forest brush. They didn't know it was sacred medicine, they cut it down and it was lost… Nobody finds it anymore; you have to go to the mountains to look for it… That Yoco was good."

With this assertion, the healer had made an important connection, acknowledging the link between the colonial process and the loss of the medicines. She was worried about further degradation and illness that the loss of her medicines would bring to her people. In a similar respect, the disappearance of Yoco is a common theme in the Midlands of Putumayo. As the forests retreat, the sacred medicines that grew in the wild vanish. Yage seems to have escaped this fate as its popularity became global, therefore its two main ingredients are grown frequently; on the other hand, Yoco, which is not domesticated, seems destined to disappear.

The transformation of the relationship between indigenous people and Yoco goes hand in hand with the ecological degradation seen in the last few decades. The changing ecosystem in this territory means not only a disconnection from the primary forms of subsistence, such as swidden agriculture, but also a lack of access to the spiritual relationships and the medicinal plants that work as the foundation for health in this region.

Much of the standing forest of Putumayo is still seen as a collective resource by the local communities be it Indigenous or *Colonos*. They understand the forest as not owned by a particular person, yet bound by some elastic laws mostly those of the non-human –such as owners and spirits -. In other words, these are places that are open for anyone to access for hunting or foraging yet restricted and limited by the non-human "owners". It is the realm of the animals and the spirits and therefore one must ask for permission to access it. Some *colono*s who I would often find during my treks through the forests around Mocoa, would tell me about what to expect if I continued on such paths. They told me how they had spent days deep in the jungle, hunting and sleeping in rudimentary shelters since they are "andariegos" or people who roam the forest. Spending days without seeing anyone else, often encountering different animals that inhabit these forests. For them, this territory was not owned by anyone, " es el territorio de los animales" "it was the territory of the animals".

As the population changes and the government consolidates its power in delineating land use in the periphery areas, this has changed dramatically. What used to be seen as communal territories became a *baldio* or unused land. These *baldios* are there to be inhabited, and therefore anyone who is willing to live in them for a period of time is able to get the right paperwork for ownership.

Image 31: Putumayo Medio

On the other hand, indigenous territories tend to enforce the commonality of the forests through legal institutions such as the Resguardo to a certain extent, protecting them from transforming forces. Resguardo is a legally recognised system of collective land use. It is an inheritance of colonial systems of "tierras de indios" and is now used by most indigenous communities in Colombia to protect and legitimise their land claims and territories. Each indigenous individual might have some land to grow their crops but they share the Resguardo for hunting, foraging and establishing deep spiritual bonds with the forest. An example of this would be the land owned by the Kofan in Orito which, I was told, was the place where they would collectively spend several days out of the month cooking Ayahuasca, having ceremonies, hunting and foraging medicinal plants.

On the other hand, campesinos and *colono*s who do not have the legal system to protect their public land are being fenced out of these territories. Mostly *colono*s cut the entire forest to grow crops such as corn, mandioc, and more recently cacao. However, this method, where the forests are completely cut down and cycles of crops are grown annually is not very productive in this region. Most importantly, due to the thin vegetative cap and erosion, doing this can exhaust the soils quite dramatically. Highland agricultural systems rarely work in these forests, yet for many *colono*s, evangelised Indians and highland entrepreneurs this is the only way to make these forests more productive. Soils are particularly tricky, and the crops harvested in the highlands will have trouble growing consecutively every year. This huge limitation was made evident by the desperate need for fertilisers by local *colono* communities of Yunguillo during the time I was there. Soil exhaustion is a massive problem for the agricultural livelihood of these people especially in those territories that have been poisoned by continuous Coca plantation and glyphosate fumigation (Lyons, 2016). Thus, after a while, the only way to make the land productive is cattle grazing. Sadly, cattle also exhausts local soils and resting periods become longer and longer. Cutting down more forest becomes the obvious solution and the motor of the expanding agricultural frontier. In this transformed landscape cattle ranching has become a vast industry and the few indigenous territories have been fenced out.

Only the widely inaccessible areas, such as the steep valleys of the Andean foothills still contain healthy forests. These mountain slopes are not productive for large-scale plantation, are inaccessible and are not suitable for cattle. The Guerrilla, who have used these forest for 50 years to hide from the government forces have also limited migration and forest degradation through draconian methods. However, as the agricultural frontier expands, the government has taken action, establishing legal systems to protect standing forest . In the territory around Mocoa and Middle Putumayo, the remaining healthy forests have now been fenced into protected areas, National Parks or indigenous reserves. Some of these still are somewhat considered communal by *colonos* but the reality is that they are becoming even more inaccessible.

Due in part to this profound transformation, wild medicinal plant populations has also gone through severe exhaustion. An Inga shaman Taita R. was complaining that the plants that he had started managing such as Yoco and Ambar had been recently cut down during clearing in his territory. Stating that as *colono*s

> "Ellos no saben que estan cortando, todo se lo bajan" "they do not know what they are cutting, so they cut everything".

As population density and ethnicity changes in the middle Putumayo, it is having a drastic effect on the local availability of certain plants.

As we can see, the notions of ownership in Amazonia have changed dramatically in recent years, especially in regions that have seen great ecological transformations. The forest, which was previously considered a collective good, is being fenced out, and the products found in it are being quickly harvested in order to sell them in the local markets. The pressure on the population of these plants has many variables, it is true that deforestation is having a devastating effect; I also consider that the commodification of shamanic practices is also playing a part. One of the main complaints during my fieldwork was about how "people just took their plants".

As a result, local indigenous people are devising strategies to prevent further degradation and the loss of their culturally important plants. In the lowlands where the Kitchwa community has their land, they are now actively hiding the plants to protect them from those who are looking to extract them. Others like J. are managing the populations to keep them close to their sphere of influence. A Kametza shaman and merchant, Taita M., had his plot of land not far from Mocoa where he would grow most the plants he uses and sells, in order to guarantee a constant supply for his business.

Similarly, the limited accessibility to Yoco is changing how people relate to it. As the forest retreats, its availability has diminished, and other stimulants are playing a more significant

cultural role. Yoco, as we saw, is now only used by some indigenous people and by the odd *colono* who have access to it.

As a pushback from these transformations, new ethnic and political forces are pressing to revitalise and protect the traditional use of medicinal plants. Yoco has a new role in the forefront of indigenous politics as a means for balancing colonial forces. These indigenous movements are using the forest and the medicinal plants in it to fight for land tenure, human rights and cultural continuity.

Yoco as a Tool for Policymaking

Arriving at the dusty town of Orito was a little overwhelming. I had been trying to get the permission by Kofan authorities to work in this territory and had been through many different complicated processes that in the long run culminated in nothing. The town of Orito was like another universe, entirely different from what I had been used to in Mocoa. It was an oil town that attracted many *colonos* who had arrived looking for work, either in the extractive economy or the booming Coca plantations of the 1980s. The Kofan had been relegated to small territories around Orito, as their forest quickly disappeared and the agricultural frontier expanded. Unlike Mocoa, where the forest had endured due to its difficult geographic characteristics, Orito was flat, which was ideal for Coca plantations and cattle fields.

I had been applying to work with the local national park for some time. However, I needed the approval of several of the Kofan leaders to get access to the park. Called Santuario de Plantas Medicinales Orito Ingi Ande, "The Sanctuary of Medicinal Plants Orito Ingi Ande" (SMPOIA), it had always interested me, starting with its name. How did a sanctuary of Medicinal plants work? Unlike other types of National Parks, where large extensions of land are protected for the conservation of western ideals of ecology, natural resources and biology, the Sanctuary of Medicinal Plants was dedicated to indigenous cultural concepts of health, territory and botany.

The SMPOIA extended well beyond the borders of the Orito municipality, into the foothill forest of the Andes from 500 m to over 3300m above sea level, protecting various types of Andean and Amazonian ecosystems considered "biological hotspots". Its primary goal was to protect native populations of medicinal plants that had been wiped out in the territories around Orito. In particular, it had been created to protect the wild populations of Yoco, which had begun to be seen as an endangered plant by many scholars who closely collaborated with the Kofan communities (Zuluaga, 2004). Indigenous people, noticing the very real pressure of ecological change on the population of their medicinal plants, decided to create an alliance with the national government. However, due to the role of Yoco as mediator between the indigenous cosmology and western concepts of conservation, it was a constant source of multicultural politics, tensions, compromises, dialogue and exchange. Yoco thus had become a central political figure, the most mentioned plant in conservation throughout Putumayo. This was the reason I had come to this dusty town; I was looking for Yoco.

The legal resolution of 2008 that created the Sanctuary Orito Ingi Ande –SPMOIA-- clearly states the importance of Yoco for the communities that practice Ayahuasca Shamanism. This resolution is very telling about the significance of Yoco as an invaluable species for the local conservationist. By establishing the protection of medicinal plants as central to protect ethnic identity and traditional practices it is seen as a breakthrough in biological and cultural conservation. The protection of ecosystems is linked with the defence of the indigenous communities who inhabit them. We can see this quoted in the text

"Que el riesgo de extinción del yoco y otras plantas medicinales, y la posibilidad, cada vez más reducida de contar con áreas naturales que les permita a los pueblos indígenas desarrollar sus tradiciones, son elementos que impactan la conservación de la biodiversidad medicinal, al tiempo que favorecen la erosión cultural de estas comunidades indígenas" "That the risk of extinction of Yoco and other medicinal plants, and the possibility of having less available natural spaces for indigenous communities to develop their traditions, will detrimentally affect the conservation of medicinal biodiversity, while eroding critical cultural aspects of these communities" (Ministerio de Ambiente, Vivienda y desarrollo territorial, 2008).

The creation of this park was the result of a long and strenuous process of political and cultural legitimisation of local indigenous people. As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, this process had established the indigenous people as keepers of a vast and complex ecological knowledge as well as that of medicinal plants. Colombian anthropology had a massive role in justifying the place of indigenous people and supporting their social struggles at a national level. This process culminated in the established laws of the 1991 constitution where, for the first time in the history of the country, indigenous people gained the right of self-determination, land tenure and legal rights (Ulloa, 2014). However, I must confess that I also believe that this protected area was also possible due to the growing popularity of Ayahuasca medicine and some deep set romantic notions of indigeneity in Colombian popular culture produced not only by the expansion of Ayahuasca in alternative health but also the reach of indigenous shamanism in folk markets throughout the country.

I believe that this process has brought Yoco into the spotlight of biodiversity conservation in Amazonia. Yoco, being a unique species in the local forests and facing mounting pressure by deforestation also peaked the interest of several scientist and conservationist. Therefore, as the ideas of biodiversity became more central for conservation in the Andean foothills, Yoco became the example of the efforts to protect this resource.

The foothill areas were considered biological hotspots, refuges of the Holocene and source of vast biodiversity. As a corridor between the Amazon, the Andes and the Pacific coast, it is a vital place for biodiversity conservation. At the same time, due to the ethnic diversity of the region and their use of local biodiversity, these communities became the backbone of local conservation efforts.

Several projects were made to protect this territory. One of the key projects was the creation of the botanical garden in the CEA or Centro de Estudios Amazonicos in Mocoa that was tasked with establishing stable populations of medicinal plants. However, this type of ex-situ conservation had failed to accommodate several plant species due to their singular ecological characteristics. Yoco was one of them, and one of grave concern. It was particularly

frustrating that all of these efforts to produce a stable population of the plant near the city failed.

Like me, local scientists had direct contact with Ayahuasca Shamanism. Most know how serious the problem of environmental degradation was for Yoco. They knew the value of this plant for indigenous people and were keen on guaranteeing its survival. All government agents, whom I worked with in Mocoa, repeatedly mention Yoco with great interest, although they rarely have direct access to it. This interest in Yoco was the case for the local botanist of the botanical garden who did not hide her excitement when I told her I was looking for Yoco. She said that they would love to have a specimen of Yoco in the botanical garden. However, finding it, getting a seed and even planting it was extremely difficult. She highlighted this by saying:

> "Es muy celosa. Toca sacar el Yoco en luna nueva y sembrarlo en luna creciente. No le puede dar sol y toca que tenga mucho cuidado bajo que arbol se pone pues no le gustan sino algunos. "It is very fastidious. You have to take the Yoco stalk during the new moon and plant it in the waxing phases. You can not give it too much sun and you have to be careful of the tree you are planting it under as it does not like just any tree".

A biologist, who is convinced of the agency of Yoco, as well as the importance of the moon stages, proves that they have an interesting syncretic concept of plant management. The hybrid notions produced by the exchange between naturalism and shamanism facilitates this multi-layered approach to plants.

As a result, the consolidation of the SMPOIA attempted to offer in-situ conservation efforts for many of these medicinal plants. It was established to regulate and provide a multicultural approach to the conservation of many of the culturally valuable plants for indigenous people. Yoco, which, as we saw, requires healthy forests to grow, was the best example to highlight the importance of protecting these forests. It is also not to be overlooked that the resolution based its decision and only cited the paper written by German Zuluaga in 2004 "El Yoco

(Paullinia yoco). La savia de la selva" which clearly states the importance of this plant for local cosmologies while highlighting the importance of the plant's conservation and the need for urgent action in protecting the forest which it inhabits. In a later book, Zuluaga along with other researchers mentions Yoco as an indicator of ecological degradation in a very accurate portrayal of the situation of this plant in and around Mocoa and the middle Putumayo (Giraldo et al., 2005). The central scientific institute of Colombia, the Humboldt Institute, also highlighted Yoco as it is intrinsically bounded to the protection and continuity "culturas del Yage" (Instituto de Investigación de Recursos Biológicos Alexander von Humboldt, 2011).

In the meantime, the leading indigenous organisations especially those of Kofan, Ziona and Secuoyas began incorporating many of these narratives in their governing plan (Fundacion Zio Ai, 2000). Seeing the severe ecological pressure caused by the expanding agricultural frontier as well as the growing Coca plantations in their territory, these communities were the first to volunteer their land to establish the National Park. By sacrificing some of their land tenure to the national government they were hoping that their territory would be protected with the full strength of the state.

In hindsight, the foundation of the Park accelerated many complicated social processes in and around Orito. Most importantly it did not take into consideration the internal politics in the indigenous communities, as well as the tension between the different ethnicities that cohabit this territory.

In recent years as the elders of Kofan community have been ousted due to serious allegations of corruption, many younger people have cast serious doubts on the creation of the Park. The son of an important shaman told me:

> "Les dimos nuestra tierra, es nuestra para trabajar y ahora es del gobierno" "we gave them our land, it was ours to work but now it is of the government".

The tension in the region was one of the main reasons I did not get access to visit the Yoco populations in the park.

At the same time the Awa, who had arrived from the highlands and Pacific coast in recent years, have also stated their disappointment of the multicultural approach to conservation. They have indicated their lack of power in the whole process and most importantly the limited access to these forests and the resources they might need. Stating that some indigenous groups have been given priority over others. Since many of the Kofan shamans have a wide following of western and urban "tomadores" this would not surprise me. This is the same case for other groups of people who have been overshadowed by indigenous groups such as *colono* and mestizo populations. These communities also need access to the forest, yet they have been fenced out.

SFPMOIA

In theory, the Sanctuary of Medicinal Plants is a new and exciting way of applying some theoretical approaches to conservation that have long been in the forefront of the anthropological and ecological fields. However, in practice, it also has many contradicting forces that are worth exploring in more detail.

Map 10: SFM Orito Ingi Ande Source: Google maps

It must be stated that the SMP Orito Ingi Ande is the result of many different modernist projects that include an abstraction of nature as well as the creation of local identity based on the colonial tension. These external narratives produce idealised nature-scapes in which the indigenous people are established as stewards, protectors of the forest and the only ones who could, if done appropriately, live in harmony in the protected forests (West, 2016). These narratives, which are based on long-established colonial discourses, benefit from uneven development since those communities who live in this idealised nature, should live in a state of premodernity. In this case, these conservation narratives have built an idea of a virginal

forest full of potentially useful biodiversity to justify the creation of a protected area. At the same time establishing indigenous people as idealised savages who inhabit them. This heavily influences the images and descriptions in many of the brochures for the consolidation of the Park.

As a result the SMPOIA has produced interrelated modern actors among which I include non-human such as the Yoco plant. By the implementation of national parks to protect local ecosystems, the state is expanding its control to the non-human beings that exist in this territory, while at the same time regulating the interactions between non-western communities with the natural world. In this ontological rationality, the lives of the plants are regulated not by those who have a use for them but by the state. Their use has to be traditional, not because it is an effective way of consuming Yoco but because it is the idealised form of biodiversity use.

Image 32: Images of Kofan shaman Taita Pacho Pajue and his son in the advertisements of the National Parks.

For Colombian policymakers, who work on a foundation of modernist and colonial ideals, Yoco is part of an invaluable but abstract biodiversity resource. The idea of biodiversity was introduced as part of the environmental movements in the 1970s that were interested in genetic diversity as a means to mitigate the global environmental crisis (Escobar, 2008). As the 20th century came to a close and the 21st century began, the idea of biodiversity was reinforced by the global ecological conscience and legitimised by international politics: the loss of biodiversity has become an issue of global proportions fomenting international agreements on the subject (Ulloa, 2004).

Biodiversity in this region becomes an abstract notion, valued for its traditional use or future potential, which is quickly subverted by the power structures to reinforce the colonial system. As Yoco loses its spiritual and relational qualities, it becomes an agent of state power dynamics of control. The state is trying to establish dominance over the different living beings in their territory. Yoco as biodiversity is a discourse of systematization, classifying, categorising and as a policy it is part of an initiative to control the local communities who interact with it, establishing political control over their relationship with the forest ecosystems (Biermann and Mansfield, 2014). It is also no longer associated with the indigenous world; instead this discourse highlights how medicines are now part of a common resource, a resource that should be protected by the state.

In Colombia, biodiversity is a matter of national pride, always thought of as an important resource, highlighting the country´s rank in the global scene. Much in the same way as water, minerals and hydrocarbons, biodiversity is seen as a public resource that must be classified, categorised, abstracted and then rebuilt into valuable "products" which can be sold and commodified (Escobar 2008). This was made painfully clear during the socialisation of the 2016 Bio Expedition in Putumayo organised by one of the top investigation institutes of Colombia. They explained that their future biological investigations would serve to create "bioproductos" for global markets. At the same time, the state establishes the control of local ecosystem through the consolidation of conservation programs, protected areas and the management of trade in multiple levels. Many of the medicinal plants explored in this dissertation have been categorised as vulnerable and their trade restricted. This is the case of Chuchuwaza, which is probably one of the most threatened by overharvesting. However, this restriction does not mean that the trade does not happen, instead, it shows the extent of the discourse in which the different organisms are placed under the control of the state.

For the indigenous communities, subverting the notions of the "good savage" in modern ideas of ecology and conservation has become a tool to legitimise their land and ethnic rights. By using biodiversity conservation, they have achieved greater autonomy and land tenure, by gaining the role as stewards of nature. Using western stereotypes as a means to advance in the political landscape of Colombia, these communities have incorporated and inverted these

ideas to fit anticolonial and resistance discourses. By allowing the protection of their plants through the national park, they are also guaranteeing the protection of the forest against other more destructive forces.

Medicinal plants play an essential role in subverting the colonial discourse in favour of the indigenous people of Putumayo. The protection of these plants is a vital part of their governing ideals, as a means for the continuity of their cultures. Traditional medicine is the central pillar of their cultures, the source of their identity and the deep connection with the territory and history. At the same time, since these plants are considered biodiversity by the rest of the world, Indigenous communities have emphasised their protection. Medicinal plants are part of the biodiversity in the western sense and sacred medicine in the local sense, and the communities have established them as mediators between two ontological universes. This discourse has become widely successful in Putumayo as local and national governments are actively pushing for biodiversity conservation through community-based systems.

Yoco thus has gained track in the indigenous political struggle. More and more, individuals who have some knowledge about Yoco are willing to use it and ask others about the different varieties. It has become a symbol, along with Yage and Coca, of the resurgence of indigenous identity and postcolonial discourse of local subaltern communities of Putumayo. Its use is still mostly indigenous, tightly controlled by tradition and the biological limitations of the plant. Unable to survive without healthy forests means that those communities who wish to continue using it must protect both these ecosystems as well as those ecological practices that incentivise healthy forests. Carefully the term Umbrella Species comes into mind (Roberge and Angelstam, 2004). This notion has been used by the biologist and conservationist, yet might be appropriate for this discussion.

During this chapter, I explored the role of medicinal plants in a wider meshwork of the living social landscapes that make up this territory. I have explored how Yoco represents not only the indigenous notions and relationships with the forest but also the transformations caused by the overwhelming forces of modernity. As a plant that is deeply tied to the forest, Yoco represents an old world, which is shifting and changing in dramatic speed. It represents the

close interwoven meshwork of relationship between the forests and local communities that has grown to incorporate many new agents and agencies. A process demonstrated by the use of Yoco as a tool in the promotion of conservation practices, as well as a means of legitimising indigenous cosmological worldviews in state policymaking.

Chapter 7 Coca

Throughout this dissertation, I have explored the multifaceted existence of culturally significant plants found in the Andean Foothills highlighting their entwined relationship with social processes and local ecosystems. The diversity of ontological interpretations of a plant defines its existence in the meshwork of beings in the Andean foothill biocultural landscape.

I have also analysed how trade accelerates multi-ontological overlaps by establishing these plants as spaces for cultural hybrids and syncretism. By reviewing these characteristics, I sought to understand how different ontological worlds collide and produce hybrids from ontological tensions. This process defines folk medicine in Putumayo, which is constantly restructuring the power dynamics, spiritual practices and techniques that are vital for healing.

In this chapter, I will take this approach one-step further, using it to explore *Erythroxylum coca,* a plant that is not part of the Ayahuasca shamanic network yet is deeply ingrained in the lives of local people. By doing this I wish to show how this methodological approach can be expanded to other plants, medicines and techniques.

I have also chosen Coca because few organisms have had such an impact on the Andean foothill as this small woody bush. However, I approach this chapter with apprehension, since to talk about Coca without falling into the clichés that commonly surround it seems difficult. Especially knowing that Cocaine is an often ambiguous and contradictory part of the Colombian national discourse and identity.

The multi-layered existence of Coca is no doubt complex. It plays a significant part in the globalised trade, as well as a dominant force in regional politics and indigenous worldviews and ritual practices. To explore these complexities is not to trivialise the wake of blood and death that has come with them.

Coca is a key subject to explore themes such as the integral role of plants in the history of Putumayo, the role of these plants as centres for cultural dialogue, and the tensions that occur as different ontological worlds clash. For this purpose, this chapter will explore the lives of three very different forms of Erythroxylum. They are not necessarily different species but each one inhabits different ontological worlds and webs of relationships that are continuously overlapping. By exploring each version, I will highlight the meshwork of relationships that favour its existence.

I will begin by exploring Coca as a master plant, deeply entwined with indigenous beliefs and personhood, being an integral part of their worldview. I will analyse how the ritualized consumption of Coca is meant to deal with alterity and how it has facilitated new dynamics and multicultural dialogues.

Secondly, I will explore Coca in Colombian folk medicine, which evolved during colonial history, highlighting its ambiguous role in the rest of the country. Finally, I will analyse Coca as a globalised commodity mass-produced yet illegitimate. I will show how this version of Coca has become a complex commodity and compare it to other commodity bonanzas in the recent history of Putumayo.

By giving a general overview of these existences, I wish to demonstrate how the same being can take multiple roles, forms and existences in a multi-ontological universe, existing in parallel yet continuously converging, flowing into each other and then separating. In other words, by examining the nuances of the ambiguity of Coca in Putumayo, I will seek to highlight how it is a source of multiple overlapping interpretations and cultural negotiations.

As such, Coca is an excellent subject to study the complex colonial history of trade in Putumayo. It has facilitated and accelerated the integration of the Amazonian lowlands into the world economy while establishing spaces of resistance and ethnogenesis that have stayed separate from the colonial project. What is interesting here is that Coca already belongs to a complex network of healers, shamans and practitioners, who have been using Coca for generations. The stigma and persecution of Coca have not stopped the traditional use of this plant, and instead, it has become an act of resistance, subverting the one-sided discussion on this plant by reclaiming it as part of indigenous identity and survival.

Image 33: The Ceiba in Puerto Leguizamo

An Ambiguous Role

A friend of mine who worked for an NGO invited me to Lower Putumayo to learn about the experience of local Witoto people in the final stages of the five year Peace Process[52]. Puerto Leguizamo was one of the main epicentres of the war. As an important trading town and one of the largest urban settlements in

[52] The Colombian Peace Process was a five-year negotiation between the government and the FARC Marxist group to end a 50-year-old conflict. During the time of my fieldwork, there were many different NGOs in the area as part of the negotiation, since it was necessary to include a wide diversity of voices, including local indigenous communities. This friend worked for one of these NGOs and was white from Bogota, like most of the NGO experts.

the lowlands it was highly contested. Many of its fifteen thousand inhabitants had been affected one way or another by its violent history. Simlarly, the Witoto people arrived from the surrounding regions, displaced by violent groups. They had established an active community and built a large Maloca or ceremonial house—in the centre of town. This structure was easily seen when arriving at Puerto Leguizamo directly opposite to the gigantic Ceiba (Ceiba sp.) growing on the other bank. We were invited to a Mambe ceremony and arrived just before the sunset. Several elderly men were already in full-blown discussion, their mouths green with Coca, while continuously licking a small smooth stick full of a viscous brown paste.

As we sat with the Witoto elders in the Maloca, to start our conversation, they began passing the Coca around. Here in Puerto Leguizamo, as well as most of lowland Amazonia, Coca is very different from that found in the highlands. Known as Mambe, it is a bright green powder, as fine as dust. We were supposed to take a spoon full and put it in our mouths. For the uninitiated, the technique of consuming Mambe is challenging; many accidentally breathe in the fine green powder which causes them to cough violently. The trick is to place the powder on your tongue while breathing through your nose, gently roll it into a ball and put it on the side of your mouth between your teeth and your cheek. The ball of Coca will slowly disolve, allowing one to swallow its juices in a slow but constant pace.


Image 34: Making Mambe

Little by little those who were invited started to fill their mouths with the powder, which turned their mouths green. Meanwhile, the elders had taken out the other main substance to be used in the Mambe ceremony, the Ambil. This they would not share. Instead, each man

had a container full of this sticky brown substance, which they would proceed to lick from a small plastic stick or bone. Ambil is made by boiling Tobacco with several other plants until it reaches this viscous appearance. For the Mambe ritual to be effective both plants of power had to be used simultaneously. As one of the Witoto elders said, “mambeando sin ambil es mitad del trabajo” "mambeando without Ambil si half the task". Most of the elder men had their own bottle of Ambil. The women, as well as my friends and I, had to do without it.

Once everyone had Mambe in their mouths, the first elders began to speak. Their mouths full with Mambe and Ambil, made it difficulfor them to vocalise, but it did not matter since for them Mambear is to start focusing on the “palabra” or word. We were there to focus on the conversation and knowledge being shared among all of us, including the master plants. For the Witoto, once you have Coca in your mouth, your words are not only yours,; they also belong to the Mambe, two beings speaking through the same mouth. For them, it is often unclear who is talking, the Mambe or the person.

As the elders spoke, they would often go on long tangents and stories, highlighting the importance of the ancestral ways of life, of the constant negotiation with the world spirits, and of the benefits of Mambe and Tobacco. History, myths and life stories often fused together. However, due to the particular complex theme of the night, the air was heavy with uncertainty and worry.

The Mambe ceremony offers a ritualised space for dialogue. It is a space where human and non-human voices can be heard, where history and mythology are both told and re-enacted. It is a conversation space where one thinks with the mind and with the body, communicating with non-human agencies through the effects of Coca and Tobacco. As such, with Coca in their mouth, people are expected to talk truthfully with the help of the spirits.

Often these Mambe ceremonies take all night long as the participants share Coca freely. The dizzying effect of the two plants is overwhelming. However, I have the impression that it was not the plants but the stories of war that made me uneasy. As the night progressed, it became clear that many of the elders still recalled the rubber exploitation of the early 20th

century[53]. However, due to the urgency of the peace process, they tried to focus on the violence caused by the guerrilla, state-sponsored paramilitary groups, drug lords and the army. In a way, the two historical moments, the recent desolation caused by the civil war and the brutal violence of the robber barons, became confused and tangled.

Most interesting for me was how they would talk about the role of Coca in the conflict as they conversed with the spirit of Coca. I wondered how these two worlds merged often violently. This ambiguous relationship regarding the same plant, simultaneously respected, feared and loathed was intricate and full of contradictions. It made the tensions overlapping these ontological worlds become tangible.

Coca has been widely studied and analysed by a range of different authors from all sorts of disciplines. In particular there are several ethnobotanical and anthropological studies on Coca, analysing its role in the culture of many indigenous people from the highlands of Bolivia to the lowlands of Caquetá (See: Plowman, 1981; Pineda Camacho, 1986; Allen, 1986; Echeverri and Candre, 1993; Hugh Jones, 1979; Londoño Sulkin, 2012). There are also several studies on the complex historical and political processes that have facilitated the modern trade of Coca and cocaine in South America (Lopez Restrepo, 2016; Gootenburg, 2003; 2006; 2012: Murra, 1995). However, there are few comparative studies that give a broader look on the different versions of Coca.

Mambe as a Mediator of Alterity

Coca is central to the worldview of the several local indigenous communities in Western Amazonia. It is the main cultural plant of the "Gente del Centro" "People of the centre". The People of the Centre is a category of loosely interconnected ethnic groups that share similar practices, languages and myths. They are constantly interacting with each other and

[53] More on this in future sections. However, here I wish to highlight the impact this rubber boom had on many lowland communities, to such an extent that it has caused significant trauma even to individuals who did not live through this violent process.

participating in ceremonial dances to facilitate the cohesion. The main indigenous communities that make part of this interethnic group are Witoto, Andoque, Nonuya, Miraña, Bora and Ocaina (Londoño Sulkin, 2012).

For the men of the "People of the Centre", Mambear is a key part of their identity and notion of personhood. However, it is only one part of a more intricate process of multiple substances that are constantly interacting in the body. Complete personhood is only achieved through the consumption of multiple substances such as Cassava starch, Cassava beer, Chilli paste, Ayahuasca and for men Mambe and Ambil. As Londoño Sulkin (2012) states:

> "These substances were the main components of well-made persons' flesh and bodily fluids; being agents in themselves, the substances ''spoke,'' and their speeches constituted persons' thoughts/emotions" (pg 277).

As such, the act of Mambear is a very sociable practice. It requires the active ingestion of several plant agencies, particularly Coca and Tobacco. As we saw in the previous vignette, during a Mambe ritual men consume Mambe powder and Ambil to gain the voices of these substances and establish the proper moral personhood to deal with other people and communities.

Tobacco is an extremely important shamanic and spiritual plant in the American continent. In Amazonia, Ambil is just one of the multiple forms that Tobacco is ingested in. It is also smoked, inhaled as a snuff, drunk as a infusion and consumed as a thick paste. For the People of the Centre, who have a complex cosmology of substances and personhood, Tobacco, especially Ambil, represents the original substance, the semen of the creator[54].

[54] Like many of the other processes to make culturally important substances such as Ayahuasca, Curare and Mambe, making Ambil is a complex process. Simply put, Ambil is produced by cooking Tobacco leaves with vegetable salts. These vegetable salts are obtained by burning several plants to produce ash, which is later filtered and crystalised. As a result, it produces several potassium based salts. The ash of many plants species can generate these valuable salts--especially several species of spiny palms from the genus Astrocaryum and BactrisI-- however, many others can be used and it seems that each different species produces a different salt with different qualities and properties. Once mixed with the boiling Tobacco leaves it will endow the Ambil of these properties (Echeverri, Jitdutjaaño and Román, 2001). Therefor Ambil can be highly personalised with symbolical

Image 35: Tobacco and Ambil

Much has been written about the complex interaction of both plants in the worldview of lowland indigenous people (Londoño 2004, 2012; Echeverri and Candre-Kinerai, 2008; Hugh Jones, 1992). In most cases Tobacco and Coca are understood as male and female essences, contra-positioned and yet complementary. In a similar fashion Coca is sometimes understood as "la palabra" the word and Tobacco is known as " el pensamiento" the thought or intention (Echeverri and Candre, 1993). Put together, these two substances complement each other.

The ritual consumption of Mambe offers the proper cultural space to dialogue with alterity. Those who consume Mambe not only entertain a dialogue with other people but through the consumption of Mambe and Ambil, invite the spirit and agency of these plants to participate. Like the Ayahuasca ceremonies, the spaces produced by the ritual consumption of Mambe

characteristics or flavours. However, the symbolic and chemical complexity requires further exploration.

allow other non-human agencies to participate, as forest spirits and ancestors are often evoked. Due to this characteristic it is also a space to deal with other indigenous or non-indigenous groups, often allowing foreigners to participate and consume the Mambe powder.

As such, Mambe plays a fundamental role as a mediator of interaction, establishing the proper ritualised settings to interact with others (Fontaine, 2003). The ritual consumption of Mambe establishes the proper rules for communication, negotiation, and exchange. When used in a ritual setting, Mambe is offered by the head of the house and passed around. It strengthens the social bonds of the community by allowing everyone a space to communicate and diologue. When guests visit, the ritual use of Mambe allows for dialogue mediation between different alterities and ontologies. This dialogue can be extended to non-humans, as spirits, animals and other plants are welcome to interact during the ritual.

For this reason, sharing Mambe is considered indispensable for the continuation of social life. The owner of the house is required to have enough Coca to share with his guest. Exchanging Mambe is common when people from the same ethnic group visit for ceremonial dances, political reunions and ceremonial healings. Mambe is expected to be shared and the person who received it is expected to stay and engage in the dialogue, listen and be heard. It is through these spaces of conversation with the other that knowledge and techniques are shared, political strategies are interchanged, and trade of material goods is established. It is possible that Mambe rituals spread through the lowland territory through this type of exchange systems as other communities saw the advantages of Mambe ceremonies and adopted them into their own practices (Plowman, 1986).

The preparation and use of Coca require alkaline lime, which is needed to change the pH of the mouth to allow for better absorption into the gums. However, the lack of mineral lime in Amazonia required a specific technique to add this alkaline compound[55]. Therefore, in

[55] Throughout Colombia, this lime is derived from burnt rocks or shells. The ashes are stored in lime containers known as “Poporos”, which are an important complementing tool in the chewing of Coca. These Poporos have been found in many archaeological records throughout the country (García Hoyos, 2002; López Restrepo, 2016).

lowland Amazonia, Coca requires a particular ritualised transformation to produce Mambe. This process requires carefully harvesting the Coca leaves, and toasting them in a large pan and pulverising them in a deep hollow mortar while adding a mixture of ashes from a variety of trees, especially the Yorumo (*Cecropia Sp*.). The ashes change the pH of the mouth, and the thin powder Coca is absorbed much faster (Plowman, 1986).

It appears that the technique to produce Mambe facilitates the exchange and spread of these substances in Lowland Amazonia. It is surprisingly similar to the practice of cooking cassava, which is widespread in the region. Cassava flour is toasted in the same large pan as the Coca leaves and requires similar motion and rhythms. While Mambe and Ambil preparation is strictly a male activity and practice, women exclusively prepare Cassava and Chilli paste[56]. The similarity between the two techniques demonstrate the interwoven relationships between the multiple plants and indigenous worldviews [57]. Echeverri and Candre-Kinerai (2008) propose that since the female cassava flour production was already a common practice in Amazonia, the ritualised technique to produce it was translated to fit the characteristics of the Coca leaf. Whatever the case is for the use of this technique, the ritualised practice probably facilitated the reconceptualisation of Coca consumption to fit it in the lowland Amerindian worldview.

This technique spread quickly through the region. Much like the other shamanic networks explored in previous chapters, many the People of the Centre have strong supra-ethnic bonds with other groups, exchanging everything from language, ritualised practices, kinship bonds to crafts and medicinal plants. These networks facilitated the spread of useful plants and the techniques associated with them (Lenaerts, 2006). This has created entire regions that share the use of a particular plant. In the same way, as shamans in the highlands travel to different ethnic communities who practice the same use of Ayahuasca, lowland communities are continuously exchanging and collaborating in ritualised techniques.

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[56] Russel and Rahman (2015) compare the gender dynamics of Mambe and Ambil to those of Cassava and Chilli paste. In the same way that Cassava is complemented with chilli paste, Coca is complemented with Tobacco paste.

[57] Similarly, the sound of the mortar replicates the sound of drums, highlighting how producing Mambe is a vital ceremonial and ritualised practice.

Even though Coca is essential for the worldview of the "People of the Centre", its arrival in the lowlands was quite late. Coca is another example of the porous frontier between lowlands and highlands, which permitted the exchange of a variety of plants from both eco-cultural landscapes. According to Echeverri and Candre (1993) botanical and linguistic features demonstrate its recent introduction into the lowlands from the Andean highlands. It is worth stating that like Borrachero and several other plants described in this thesis, the Amazonian Coca or E. Coca var. ipadu is only propagated through cuttings. This limits its feral populations and genetic manipulation as sexual reproduction is nearly impossible. This means that people have established an intimate relationship with the plant and through this relationship, they have fundamentally transformed its physical characteristics.

It also means that the entire population of this plant might be a single genetic clone that has passed through generations unchanged. Ipadu is a variety of the Southern Andean *Erythroxylum Coca* (Plowman, 1981; 1986), which means that out of the four different species of Coca, the Amazonian Coca is closely related to that found in Peru and Bolivia, arriving in Colombia from the south. This is surprising when considering that the first species of *Erythroxylum* was first domesticated in the mountains of Colombia (Plowman, 1986). Other species of Coca, such as *E. novogranatense* which is widespread in the highlands, did not arrive to the lowlands of Colombia until very recently.

However, the actual date of the introduction of Coca is unknown and a source of extensive discussion (Plowman 1981). The movement of plants through these networks is often murky and unclear, due to constant interaction and mingling between different ethnic communities and to recent acceleration of migrations caused by colonial processes. In particular, the conquest and the rubber boom of the 20th century had a lasting effect on local communities, shifting entire groups and reshuffling the indigenous world of lowland Amazonia

Nowadays Coca is so prevalent that most men have some working knowledge of how to prepare Mambe. Many Witoto men take their own Coca powder in containers throughout the

town, available for anyone to see[58]. When visiting in Puerto Leguizamo, I was offered Mambe several times and I was able to buy it easily. Due to these characteristics, the extensive networks of Neo shamanic practices have adopted Coca and Ambil. The Mambe ceremony is quite widespread in cities around the country. These practices are incorporated into the modern ideas of spiritualism and this is having a profound transformation in how local people relate to these sacred plants. Transforming the ritualised Mambe by negotiating new elements allows for flexible use of these sacred plants.

Mambe in the Alternative Circle

Mambe like other master plants and indigenous technologies were recently becoming popular in urban settings. The same network of people that organised Ayahuasca ceremonies in the cities was also arranging Mambe ceremonies (Caicedo, 2014). It is not hard to find these types of ceremonies in highland cities. In fact, it was in this context that I first tried the Coca leaves.

Image 36: Mambe sold by Fundacion Prosierra in Bogota

Like the Mambeadas of the lowlands in Putumayo, these ceremonies focus on the "palabra" or "the word", often lasting the whole night, while talking and discussing myths and stories to highlight ethical and moral values. They are often advertised in online plataforms as mind opening "Circulos de Palabra" or Circles of the Word. Unlike Ayahuasca, an indigenous guide is preferred but not always required, since anyone can preside and conduct a Mambe ceremony. Nonetheless, there is an enormous effort to legitimise this practice by highlighting traditional techniques and methods. Many similar symbolic elements and techniques from the lowland communities are actively being used in these ceremonies, such as the ceremonial house or Maloca and ritual tools which support a

[58] Unlike other medicines, such as Ayahuasca and Ambil, Mambe seemed to be impervious of dangerous forces such as envy and menstruation.

successful performance. As with the Mambe ceremonies in the lowland, these become spaces for dialogue, negotiation and incorporation of new practices.

It was in this context that my friend S. from Bogota called me to join him in a Mambe ceremony. A Witoto shaman, Don J., was leading a ceremony in a residential house in Bogota to establish a multidisciplinary team to solicit funding for his community, and S. considered I could help them in some ways. When I arrived, many other people were already there. All of them had their mouths green with Coca. Some were talking with each other while others were trying to accommodate the Mambe between the cheek and the teeth, a feat that required some concentration. As soon as I sat down, Don J. offered me some of his Mambe. As I accommodated the Mambe, Don J. began talking about the different problems the Witoto community in Puerto Leguizamo were facing.

It became clear that this was not their first meeting. Don J. had begun offering Ayahuasca for some time and my friend S. had met him at a previous Ayahuasca ceremony in Bogota. I had the impression that the Witoto rarely conducted Ayahuasca ceremonies since it was reserved for severe diseases. However, as I would find out later, Don J. was one of a few Witoto shamans who were oening Ayahuasca ceremonies to white and non-indigenous people. This made him popular in the Neoshamanic groups in Bogota.

Don J. was well known in Puerto Leguizamo as an accomplished healer. However, when he began expanding into the Neoshamanic networks of highland cities, it had produced tensions in his hometown. Nonetheless, it had given him access to an extensive network of people with some economic and political power in Bogota. Don J. would provide Mambe to many of these people, while directing several Mambe ceremonies in the “Malocas” that dotted the city and its outskirts.

With this political backdrop, these networks offer interesting multi-ethnic dynamics that are full of complex contradictions and juxtapositions. For example, there is a significant element

of Indigenismo[59] in these Neoshamanic groups. Often people experiment with Mambe due to its indigenous background, fetishizing the mysterious and spiritual elements of these plants. These circlesoften homogenise what it means to be Native American, flattening complex and nuanced ethnic groups with different ideologies, personhoods and power relationships into stereotypes.

This stereotype of the "*Indio"* as wise and spiritual with a direct link to nature promotes these plants, which gain symbolic power and added cultural value. Coca, as a "medicina ancestral" is often viewed as one of the most important Master Plants in the continent[60].

As Coca as a spiritual tool has spread, one starts finding many Non-Indigenous urban dwellers who have learned how to conduct Mambe ceremonies. They have learned the proper etiquette in its consumption. They have also incorporated political ideology as well as foreign spiritual elements such as codes of ethics and values. As a Neo Shamanism practitioner once told me:

> "El Mambesito sirve para todo tipo de problemas, es como una línea directa al Gran Espíritu. Lo ayuda a hacer el trabajo necesario para resolver sus problemas" "The Mambesito works for all types of problems, its like a direct line to the Great Spirit[61]. It helps you do the necessary work to deal with your problems."

[59] As mentioned before this Indigenismo is a Latin American take on Orientalism. Where romantic interpretations of indigenous people are often evoked and used to highlight power structures.

[60] The indigenous groups in the Sierra Nevada of Santa Marta are a great example. They have a central place in Colombian Neo Shamanism. These communities are often considered extremely wise and powerful. Their use of Coca is considered the reference for indigenous spiritualism.

[61] The notion of the Great Spirit was inspired by North American native mythology. In particular this Great Spirit was popularized by the book Black Elk Speaks written by John Neighardt in 1932. It is an important part of Neo Shamanic lore and key in the notions of a Pan American Shamanic religion that is now becoming increasingly popular.

However, these Non-Indigenous shamans rely on a close bond with the indigenous healers from Amazonia. This gives them a higher status in their ceremonies, since they have a direct link to people who produce Mambe in the lowland forests. It also enables them to distribute iCoca to their friends and acquaintances (Sanchez, 2011). These relationships facilitate the access to this plant, and promote dialogue that fosters further transformation of the Mambe practice.

However, this is not a one-way relationship, since as we saw in the vignette, the indigenous shamans who are in constant contact with the white urban populations have gained a new political position. They can persuade these urban populations to join their political causes, while at the same time legitimising their social status in their own territory. Being in itself a very political ritual, since it promotes dialogue, the Mambe ceremony has become a significant outlet for indigenous frustration caused by subjugation, ecological degradation and cultural erosion suffered in most of the lowland territories. As Don J. said as he introduced the Mambe ceremony:

> "Aquí estamos reunidos para sanar los daños de siglos de explotación. Con los abuelos Tabaco y Coca, vamos a trabajar para ayudar a la gente de mi comunidad"
> "Here we come together to heal centuries of exploitation. With the help of our ancestors Tobacco and Coca we will work to help the people of my community".

As a result, there is a movement to transform Coca as a postcolonial agent. Mambe is being reclaimed and reimagined as the "ancestral medicine of Coca". This is especially pressing, considering the reputation caused by the Cocaine industry. Mambe is taking a subversive position, brought on by the contraposition of the Cocaine industry that has ravaged the nation for the last 40 years. This is the argument of many Neo Shamanic groups who advocate reclaiming the powerful agent from the corrupting essence of the capitalist model. There is a push to vindicated Coca from the drug stereotypes, even if it means using other stereotypes (such as the wise Indian type) to reclaim it.

Coca as Medicine

Most of the Ayahuasca Shamans whom I interviewed did not partake in the Mambe ceremonies, keeping away from this plant of power. They would ask patients who might have gone to the lowlands not to bring it to their ceremonial houses and disapproved of its use during and after the Ayahuasca ceremonies. Most highlighted that it is an agency that should not be mixed with Ayahuasca. “Se deja afuera cualquier otro elemental, aqui en la Maloca lo que es del Yage solamente” “leave anything that is of another master plant outside, here in the Maloca only what pertains to Yage” a Taita said as he scolded a couple of young men who were Mambeando in the early morning of the Ayahuasca ceremony. Therefore, Mambe is considered an agency that has its own time, space and ceremonial practices which might interfere with the intentions of the Ayahuasca ceremony.

Instead, the Coca that I observed in upper and middle Putumayo was primarily used as a medicine. Ayahuasca shamans prefer maintaining a distance from Coca as Mambe; instead, using this plant as a medicine and not focusing on the spiritual qualities it might have in other cultures. Many different shamans would often prescribe Coca for toothaches, “bajadez” or “fatigue” and “falta de energia” or “lack of energy”. There is a sharp distinction between the medicinal and spiritual Coca, manifested in how it is manipulated and used.

Image 37: Coca as medicine

Coca as medicine has a very different form compared to the green powder from the lowland. In particular, it is only found in small bundles of dried leaves, and it is never mixed with the alkaline additives. This Coca is left several days to dry in the sun and is not toasted. This method of preparation allows for simple harvesting and commercialising. However, dry Coca is hard to keep and will go off with humidity.

There is also a large market of Coca used as an additive in creams, gels and some medicinal infusions. Marihuana and coca creams are a common medicine for muscle pains and arthritis. Meanwhile some medicinal infusions contain Coca for stomachaches, as an anaesthetic for throat issues and to calm nerves.

Recently Coca tea is gaining popularity in Colombia. For highland cities where altitude sickness is common, drinking Coca is becoming slightly more fashionable. It is now available in trendy urban restaurants and cafe shops, as an alternative for coffee. More and more cosmopolitan young urban people are open to drinking Coca tea. This use is similar to that of Peru and Bolivia but to a much lesser degree. In the Andean highlands of these countries, Coca is widely consumed as a mild stimulant. It is also an important plant to help with altitude sickness, which is often cured with a "mate De Coca", or tea of Coca.

There is evidence that Coca was used as a stimulating by many communities in the mountains of Colombia (Gootenburg, 2009). However, as Colombia became more European the taste for Coca diminished, and other stimulants started to become popular such as coffee, chocolate and tea (García Hoyos, 2002; López Restrepo, 2016).

In Perú and Bolivia where the use of Coca stimulated the mining industry during the late colonial period, its use was incentivised by the colonial power structures. It was one of the first crops to be monopolised and controlled by Spanish authorities, and its trade was rapidly incorporated into the monetary system imported by Spain (Murra, 1995). In Colombia, however, its use has become reserved for indigenous people, looked down upon by the elites and middle mestizo class. As the Indigenous communities became marginalised to smaller and smaller territories, Coca lost most of its cultural and spiritual significance. It is now only used as a medicine in the Colombian highlands.

Most of the Coca found in Colombian markets is Erythroxylum novogranatense, which is the same one used in the illegal Coca trade. These plants grow well in altitudes from 500- 1500 mt allowing for a vast ecological availability (Plowman 1986). I must highlight that even if Coca is widely accessible because of this illegal trade, people actively stay away from leaves

that originated from this trade. In particular, people agree that the herbicides and fertilisers used to improve the yields of the Coca plantations are dangerous. When asked, merchants would usually make a point of disassociating their Coca from the Cocaine plantations since they consider that these plants have been polluted.

> "No, no, está la crecen orgánica para medicina, la que se usa para la cocaína ya está muy dañada, con todo ese herbicida que le ponen" "No, no, this one is grown for medicine, the one that they grow for cocaine is already to damaged, with all the herbicide that they add" said a merchant to a young lady who was curious about the Coca leaves.

The growing demand for organic Coca has incentivised people to grow their own plants. I have met people who sell Coca to these markets who own 2 or three plants that can be continuously harvested throughout the year.

Yet, the legal ambiguity of Coca has left those who grow it and use it for medicinal practices under the same legal and social classification as those who produce Cocaine. Often Coca is demonised, whole media campaigns against "la mata que mata" the plant that kills are continuously broadcasted on the radio. In the highland urban markets, many curious people would stop and ask about the dried Coca leaves, however, they would soon feel put off due to its reputation. After decades of relentless persecution and delegitimisation, it seems that Coca as a mild stimulant and Cocaine as a hard drug are perceived as the same thing by many urban inhabitants. Due to the stigma of the Cocaine industry, casual consumption of Coca is still rare.

Recently I came across a store, which sold Mambe powder in the city centre of Pasto. During my fieldwork, I had rarely seen Mambe in the powder form in markets. Mambe powder has stayed in the alternative and Neoshamanic networks, due fact that it requires a special technique to consume. The visible characteristic of consuming Mambe is often cited as a reason why people are not willing to try it.

> "Uy a mi esos grupos no me gustan, siempre con la boca asi verde, se ve bien feo"
> "I don't like those groups of people, they always have their mouth green, it looks ugly" a friend of mine said when we were talking about shamanic groups.

This powder was neatly packed, and the front an image of a Quechua Indian wearing a *chullo* (peruvian wool hat) performing the Coca offering to Pachamama. The package had in golden letters "Mambe de la tradicion Witoto del Putumayo", "Mambe of the Witoto tradition of Putumayo". As I asked the owner of the shop about it, we talked about the benefits of Coca, as well as the origins in the sacred Malocas of the jungles of Putumayo. The young man behind the counter told me:

> "Queremos reclamar la Coca sagrada y ayudar a las communidades del Amazonas"
> "We want to reclaim the sacred Coca and help the communities of the Amazon".

The new wave of Coca products are packed and commercialised as an ancestral remedy, a discourse that highlights the often-romantic link between ancestrality, indigenous people, and health. As I have explored previously, the relationship between indigenous and health is a recurring theme in the alternative health markets. Pre-industrialised medicine is given the added value of romantic and mysterious magic evoking colonial relationships and the "Epistemic Murk" produced by otherness. The stereotype of the wise Indian and their secret knowledge have facilitated the reintroduction of Coca in the highland markets of Colombia.

I bought this product while thinking of the many different social and historical processes that made its existence possible: from the highland/lowland dynamic, coloniality, epistemic murk produced, intercultural contact, romantic and stereotypical notions on indigenous people as well as processes of indigenous resistance and reconsolidation.

Coca in Putumayo

While waiting for a bus on a dirt road that leads from Orito to Puerto Asis, I began talking to several young men who were waiting there too. We had been there for a while, and the bus

seemed not even close to arriving. They appeared to be between 20 and 30 years old and had the look of people who had worked under the powerful equatorial sun for a while. As they talked, they seemed to be suspicious of me; I was not surprised since I looked like a foreigner and this was a highly complex territory.

One of the men asked me for a smoke and quickly figured out I was from Bogota due to my accent. He then laughed, "pensabamos que era gringo" I thought you were a gringo", they said in the mostly joking way yet knowing full well what a gringo[62] meant here. We quickly got talking about what I was doing there, and I told him I was visiting a Kofan *Taita* a couple of miles off. He laughed, as he said

> "muy peligroso por alla, eso esta lleno de cultivos", "so dangerous over there, that's full of Coca plantations". I nodded, I had seen the massive areas used for Coca plantations, fumigated by the government aeroplanes and left barren from overuse and exhausted soils.

As we continue talking it became obvious that all had worked directly or indirectly with the Coca plantations. They would talk about how few options they have since they had no land to work in and the only employment available was to work on other peoples land. In the lowlands, the limited opportunities for work meant people would often be a labourer in either a Coca plantation or cattle ranch. However, it seemed that the only realistic option was to "raspar" or collect the Coca leaves. Working as a peon in the Coca fields meant a significant amount of money in a short period of time, enough to start other possible ventures. Yet, they all told me that staying in the Cocaine industry was not sustainable. Often the only other job there was in this commodity chain was transportation. Being a transporter was an even more hazardous activity, which could lead to spectacular failures. As one man told me while we waited for the bus: "o uno lo deja o se lo lleva a la tumba" "either you leave it or it takes you to the grave".

[62] This is not necesarily a pejorative term, but it can be. It is usually used to talk about foreigners.

As the transport arrived, a modified Hylux pickup, we got on. Nobody else was sitting with us in the cargo area and they felt comfortable with continuing the conversation. It quickly turned to the topic of violence, as it usually did when talking about the Cocaine industry. They talked about how back in the late 90s and early 00s the war had become even more gruesome as the government pushed for complete control over the territory. As the government fought the FARC, the paramilitary groups "paracos" quickly overtook this territory, initiating a reign of terror that gave way to a number of massacres of which the most famous was that of El Tigre in 1999. It was hard to know who was 'good' or 'bad' in those times as even the government was involved in extra-judicial killings. The men's graphic accounts of violence and reign of terror reminded me of the Casement report, and the abuse lived in the by indigenous people during the rubber booms in the early XXth century.

It is difficult to talk about how plants move in Putumayo without talking about the Cocaine commodity chain. It seems that wherever you look, the Cocaine industry has had a significant effect on the local communities and their environment. As more and more people grow small Coca plantations, transform it into Cocaine paste and then sell it to supply the massive global demand, the plant moves and changes accordingly. It is in such a constant state of transformation that it is easy to see how Coca has become the ideal for commodity, taking an agency of its own and becoming a force of nature that adapts to different pressures and guarantees its flow.

Curiously, unlike what most of the western world thinks, the Cocaine industry arrived in Colombia in the late 20th century. Unlike Bolivia and Peru, which had a continuous and regulated Coca trade to supply the mountain mining communities, use of Coca in Colombia was marginalised and limited to isolated indigenous communities by constant Spanish persecution (García Hoyos, 2002; López Restrepo, 2016). It was not until the second half of the 20th century that Coca as a commodity suddenly bloomed in the territory where it had been domesticated many centuries before.

By the mid 19th century the technology to extract the alkaloid in large quantities became available and Coca plantations became a huge business in the Andean foothills of Peru and Bolivia (Gootenburg, 2008). Industrially Cocaine was legal and quite profitable, requiring a constant production of the leaves and Cocaine paste to supply global demand for a medicine, tonic and a mild stimulant that was highly praised. By the 1930s the US gained absolute control of the Cocaine commodity chains in the Americas, blocking the European and Asian pharmaceutical companies and monopolising the product. Even though there were some attempts to harvest Cocaine in South East Asia, most were abandoned after the Second World War (Gootenburg, 2008).

The process of its criminalisation has been intensely debated, and I will not go into much detail here. What I wish to state is that, by the time it became illegal, most of the Cocaine production had a complex trade that extended all the way to the global north. The problem of illegalising this commodity was that it made this trade network impervious to state regulation and bound entirely to free market dynamics driven by intense demand and supplied by a very resilient product (García Hoyos, 2002; López Restrepo, 2016). Cocaine production thrived in Colombia due to its complex geography, little state control in rural areas, a history of war and thriving smuggling industry, which had established the right settings for this trade to grow. Ironically it was the war on drugs that instead of eradicating the production pushed it to the Andean foothills and lowlands (Gootenburg, 2006). This is when Cocaine production finally arrived in Putumayo. As prices soared, more poor farmers began growing Coca in the region and the large drug lords established the proper trade links to supply the demand in the northern hemisphere. Soon Cocaine was fueling every aspect of the underground economy of the country.

During this fieldwork, I was not able to visit a processing camp, as none of the farmers would take me there. Therefore I was not able to arrange a Chaîne opératoire analysis with as much detail as I wished, however, I had witnessed the process first hand in another region years before during an undergraduate fieldwork in northern Colombian region of Santa Marta. One of the first things that must be highlighted is that the production of Cocaine is not as it seems in the movies and mass media, instead it is a decentralised process. Large drug dealers are

usually not involved in the initial production of the Cocaine paste. Instead, most of the Cocaine is made in small-scale production labs, owned by the same small landowners who grow the plants.

As a general overview, the process for making Cocaine requires a many kilos of Coca leaves as well as several chemicals. It might take a few hours as people add and filter several of the solvents which include: chlorine, cement, kerosene, gasoline, caustic soda and sulphuric acid, all of which are widely available in agrochemical stores. In the beginning the distilling process would requires the help of illegal groups to guarantee access to some of the more difficult chemical like many of the industrial solvents, especially ether. However, due to the constant pressure of authorities, the process has been simplified and has become quick and straightforward to facilitate production without the need for complex infrastructure. Ether has been replaced with gasoline or kerosene, which, though was much less effective, was widely available. The process has changed dramatically during the past few years and many people might have different recipes yet the basic steps seem the same. It has been perfected to be effectively done in rural areas and to produce as much as possible with little effort.

At the same time, the plants have gone through similar transformations in order to adapt to the dizzying speeds required to supply the demands[63]. The Coca plants have been transformed into this idealised form valued by this capitalist world. This drastic commodification is unique to Coca, as it is through this mixture of plantation methods, artisanal chemistry, external pressure -which include market dynamics and state enforcement- and constant experimentation that Cocaine is able to adapt to changing dynamics and evade the control of the modern state.

Still, Cocaine replicated the similar patterns of other global commodity booms. Facilitating colonial processes and incentivising the dynamics between periphery and centre. It is not very different from any of the many commodity booms that have had an enormous impact

[63] During my time in the field, there was a rumour that many new plants had a higher cocaine percentage that facilitated a more productive extraction. This would not surprise me as these plants are continuously being manipulated.

on the local cultural and ecological landscape of Putumayo, especially those that were outside the control of the modern state, such as the rubber boom.

It seems that the Cocaine commodity boom is just one of multiple waves that has profoundly transformed this territory. These commodity bonanzas are interwoven with the colonial process in Putumayo. Every time a new product from Putumayo was incorporated into the global trade network, it transformed the cultural and ecological landscape irreversibly and shifted the colonial frontier deeper into the lowlands. This was the case of gold with the initial colonial projects (Ramirez de Jara, 1996), the Rubber booms of the late 19th century (Taussig, 1987; Steiner, Páramo and Pineda, 2014) the Cocaine industry (Gootenburg, 2008) and oil (Fontaine, 2007) of the last 60 years.

Cocaine and Rubber

It is important to understand the role of commodities in this colonialization process, not only as objects acted upon but also as agents themselves. This is especially true with plants such as Rubber and Coca, which both have had a significant effect on the way the commodity chain works and on the social realities of the people who live in this region.

Putumayo, unlike most of the highlands and the Caribbean coast, was painstakingly incorporated into the globalised world through a process that is still on going today. During the early conquista, the Andean foothills were never truly integrated into the colonial hierarchy. The first waves of colonial exploration in the lowlands were pushed by the prospect of immense riches in the form of gold, land and spices, however tough access and lack of actual commodities to exploit prevented further consolidation of colonial powers (Casas Aguilar, 1999; Ramirez de Jara, 1996). Even if this area was technically part of the colonial administration, the few manifestations of this power were some early missionaries and trade town but it was often left on its own. The following centuries were not that different, the labour crisis in the highlands due to the massive mortality caused by disease and violence

incentivised the establishment of further control in the lowlands to supply the demand of labour in the highlands (Steiner, Páramo and Pineda, 2014). However, this was quickly abandoned due to the massive population drop caused by disease in Amazonia and the newly established African slave markets.

By the late colonial and early republican age, botanical extraction of spices, medicines, and stimulants, incentivised a new wave of colonial control of the lowlands. Expeditions by European scientist in the lowlands happened more frequently, seeking the next fashionable product for commercial exploitation (Casas Aguilar, 1999). These forests became a source of botanical potentiality, increasing the interest of entrepreneurs to control them. It is at this time that botanical products such as Quinine, Vanilla, Cacao and Coca became part of the global markets, however, these markets did not manage to transform the landscape to the same degree as other lowland territories in Colombia (Palacio, 2006).

Instead it was during the Rubber bonanza of the 19th and early 20th century that the region saw massive transformations opening it to the central powers in the highlands. This bonanza accelerated the state-building project of the recently independent Colombia, which consolidated its power in the region and facilitated migrations of Non-indigenous communities from the Andean highlands. This process culminated in the war against Peru of 1932-1933 (Taussig, 1987; Steiner, Páramo and Pineda, 2014; Casas Aguilar, 1999; Palacio, 2006).

Even if commodities are central to the colonial project equating Cocaine to other the colonial commodities risk oversimplifying the whole process. However, some similarities can facilitate a comparison. Cocaine like other commodifies requires easier access by roads and trade routes, encouraged the migration of highland populations into the lowlands and transformed the hierarchy and power dynamics between the local communities and those in the centres of power. In the last 40 years, Cocaine has been a significant force in lowland Amazonia, helping to consolidate the power of the market system and has become a major source of ecological and cultural change.

Even more interesting similarities can be appreciated between the Cocaine bonanza and the Rubber boom. As socio-political processes, they had an enormous impact on local communities, causing havoc in the local native populations as well as accelerating migrations from the highlands. They have facilitated the consolidation of geopolitical borders and military presence of the Colombian central government. Linking the central powers in highlands cities with the lowlands physically and politically. This consolidation of power is not only for the state but also for other groups and centralised power structures such as the guerrilla, the multiple drug dealers and the Rubber barons.

The production in both cases was an uncentralised practice dominated by a market dynamics. In other words they depended on the local labour of campesinos and rubber tappers to produce large amounts of the primary product. However, they also required complex trade networks to further transformed it into the industrial commodity and supply it to international markets, these were often controlled by powerful men who had complete political and social control over large territories.

Finally, both cases also triggered complex violent processes, first to control the supply of the commodity, then to guarantee its trade. When the local tensions were unsustainable, they both triggered a snowball effect of violence and terror, which had a horrible effect on local communities. The uncentralised nature of both industries aided this violence.

However, even if they might seem very similar each had particular characteristics that made them more or less unique. Like many Amazonian plants, the Hevea rubber tree was deeply integrated into complex ecological relationships that limited its commodity form. By this, I mean that the rubber trees would not be able to grow as a plantation since they were susceptible to a fungus, a type of leaf blight (Taussig, 1987; Steiner, Páramo and Pineda, 2014). It required a particular technique to harvest. The “caucheros” would move through vast territories accessing small pockets of rubber trees. This was labour intensive, as rubber trappers could not access many trees and the rubber barons required a large labour force to tap into these extensive territories.

The ecological limits of the Hevea are an essential feature to understand the violence that affected the territory in the early 20th century and set it apart from the violence which we see today. As mentioned, rubber requires a large labour force for its continual exploitation. It would not be difficult to correlate this scarcity of labour as the main reason for the forced labour and slavery seen in the Casement Report. However, as Taussig (1987) has shown, even if this scarcity of labour might have been the catalyst for violent recruitment and forced labour, ironically it was a direct cause of a decreasing labour force. As Taussig puts it in his analysis of Casement´s report, the lack of labour seemed more like an excuse instead of the main reason for the violent attitude towards the native populations. Feeding on the myths and fears of colonial interaction, what was already a tense situation between native people and the incoming foreigners attracted by the rubber boom, manifested in the horrors seen during this time.

When the seeds of the rubber tree were successfully smuggled to Asia, they were separated from their ecological context limiting the effects of leaf blight. Plantations began growing all over Southeast Asia, which completed its transformation into a commodified organism. As the Amazonian monopoly dissipated, the big rubber houses disappeared and the local populations were left to their own accord. State control began to wane and the towns that were once important rubber and trade centres were abandoned by the central powers (Casas Aguilar, 1999). It was not until oil was discovered in the Andean foothills around 1960 that a new commodity boom attracted a further wave of migration and state intervention[64].

[64] Oil accelerated state control of the lowlands of the Llanos areas and the Amazonian Foothills. Many highland migrants arrived to the region attracted by this Oil rush permanently changing the population dynamics of Putumayo (Fontaine, 2007). Roads and ports were built to facilitate the fluid communication and transportation between lowlands and highlands. As cities began to grow, state presence became commonplace (Casas Aguilar, 1999).

On the other hand, when it was introduced there in the 1950s Coca was not native to the Amazonian lowlands; it had few natural predators and diseases. Its sturdiness and adaptability, both of which were painstakingly produced by centuries of human-plant interaction, had already transformed it into a commodified organism facilitating its integration into the globalised markets. Unlike rubber, Coca was easily grown in plantations; it had a strong defence against natural diseases, it was widely adaptable and grew quite quickly, all of which are preferred characteristics for this type of intensive production. Selective breeding had accelerated its transformation into a commodified being, and as I showed, even the extraction process has been simplified to guarantee constant supply. As a plantation, it requires much less labour to produce high yields, which were needed to produce considerable amounts of the alkaloid.

As the war on drugs intensified, this adaptability and sturdiness allowed farmers to move deeper into lowland forest or mountainous regions making it hard for state control and reduction efforts. This phenomenon was also augmented by the traditional way of using land in Putumayo. Due to the acidic soil of these territories, agriculture has always been mobile, thus when the soil "se agota" is exhausted, one moves to other parts, making eradication nearly impossible (Lyons, 2014).

Like the other commodity booms, Coca has become a central agent in the globalist system. Not only has is it been transforming the local biocultural landscape to fit the global markets and ideals of commodity extraction, but it has also been physically modified to be a globalised commodity. It also has been an effective tool in the consolidation of power structures, both from state and extra-state agents. Control over the commodity production and trade routes have been central in the War on Drugs so eagerly proposed by the global north. However, as demand for Cocaine is guaranteed and supply is ensured by the biological characteristics of the plant, it seems that the only limitations for this commodity are land availability and control over trade routes. No wonder that these are the main sources of violence in the region, as people are expelled from their land in order to grow more Coca, and trade routes are violently fought after.

Due to the risk of reductionism, it is crucial to understand that this functionalist approach to the commodity cycles allows us to explore these phenomena and compare them. This must be carefully proposed as it could point to determinist arguments on the relationships between Coca plants and violence and these are all complex and multifaceted phenomenon. A simplified explanation of the violence in Putumayo through the commodity booms would ignore different types of social tensions that are rife in this region. However, it is an intriguing thought experiment and allows us to give Coca an agency when talking about the colonial process in Putumayo. Coca has generally been considered a passive agent, which as I have been stating from the beginning of this dissertation is not the case. There is no doubt that the complex interactions between colonial categories of people (Taussig, 1986), the social tensions caused by inequality and lack of opportunities (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1999), to fundamental characteristics of Colombian society as well as socioeconomic factors all play a major role as decisive in accelerating the cycle of violence in the region. Here I argue, to include the role of materiality when exploring the colonial process of the Andean foothills.

A Multidimensional Being

As we have been seeing, a plant such as Coca exists in multiple forms in the cultural pluriverse of the Putumayo region. How people consolidate the parallel existence of one plant is complex and multi-layered. Even if these plants might be the same botanical species or at least categorised as the same plant by local classifications, they exist in a web of social relationships that define its existence. Reconsolidating the capitalist version with the traditional and animistic approach to spiritual and medicinal plants seems to be very difficult even for my informants. A contradiction that Taussig (1980) explores:

> "The fetishism that is found in the economics of precapitalist societies arises from the sense of organic unity between persons and their products, and this stands in stark contrast to the fetishism of commodities in capitalist societies, which results from the split between persons and the thing they produce and exchange. The result of this

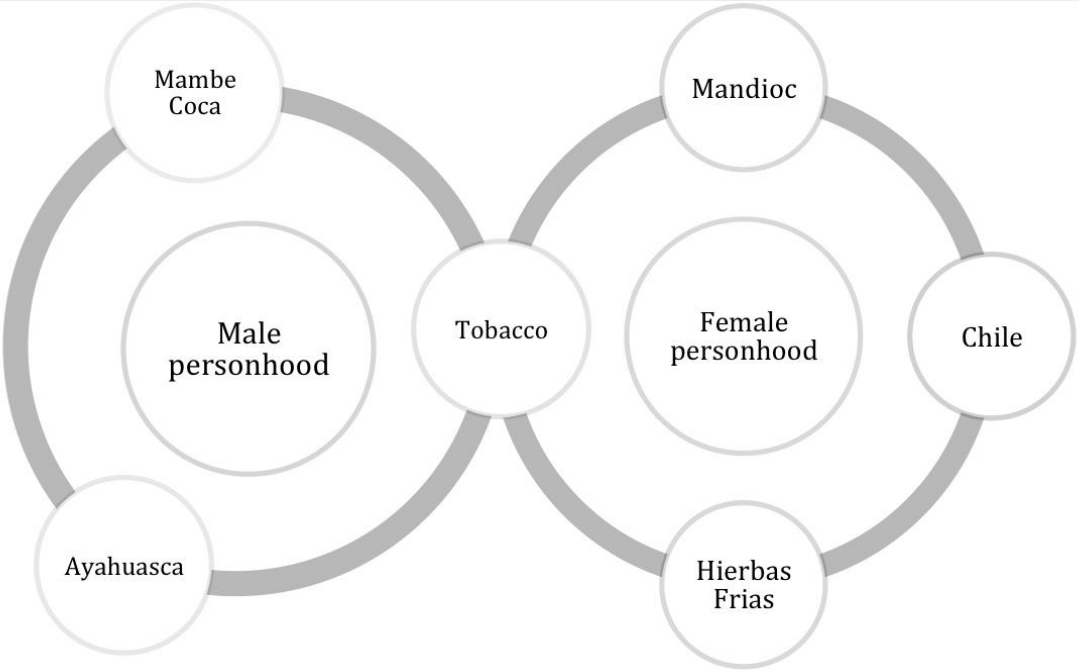
split is the subordination of men to things they produce, which seems independent and self-empowered"(Pg 37).

For the Witoto who use it for ceremonial purpose, harvesting Coca for the Cocaine industry seems to be a paradox. The sacred nature of Coca as Mambe appears to contradict its value as a commodity. However, many people continuously chew Mambe while at the same time participate in the industrial Cocaine system. Since the end of the rubber boom, indigenous people from throughout western Amazonia have depended on the collection of Coca to gain the income necessary to participate in the merchandised economy of Urban Amazonia.

Hugh Jones (1992) had stated that for the Barana of Caqueta, this paradox is often dealt with separating both the plants and the leaves, indicating that selling only leaves to the white man would prevent them from controlling the plants. This, however, is not what I saw. Instead, I believe that this situation has changed dramatically. To maintain a steady production of Coca leaves the drug barons have incentivised anyone with land to grow the crop. They have also introduced the E. novogranatense from the highlands into lowland Amazonia, adapting it to lowland weather and soils. Since this species produced much more yield than the *E. coca*, it became the preferred species for Cocaine industry.

This seems to highlight that distinction between the Coca used for personal ceremonial practices and that that is used as a source of income. The Coca used for Mambe is still grown in the chagra, kept, harvested, processed, and exchanged through strict ritual practice. The variety they have used for generations, often cutting and growing the same plant of their ancestors. Meanwhile, most of the Coca utilised to supply the Cocaine industry is harvested in small and medium plantations deep in the forest of the foothill area. Herbicides and pesticides are regularly used to achieve maximum yield, inviting labourers to come from various places and backgrounds to work in these fields.

The methods of preparing Mambe and Cocaine also highlight their extreme differences. The ontological world that produced them defines these techniques. For the indigenous people of the lowlands, Mambe is tied with the perception of personhood and substances. The ritualised making and consuming of Mambe powder enhances the idea of multiple agencies making up a moral human (Londoño Sulkin, 2012).



Graph 4. Witoto personhood (Londoño Sulkin 2012)

In other words, personhood was "intentionally and materially fashioned by their parents and other kin out of key substances of divine origin" (pg 277). Therefore the voices and consciousness of the different substances were the ones that made them into a moral person, a person who was capable of sustaining tradition, planting crops and continuing kinship relationships. The production of Mambe and Ambil meant staying on the right path to be a real person. Consequently, "processes of producing and consuming these substances are analogous to the processes of reproducing both individuals and the social structure"(Hugh Jones, 1979: pg 169).

On the other hand, the history of Cocaine as a commodity shows how this highly industrialised production is capable to adapt to constantly changing dynamics. Its production is only possible through western and naturalist notions of chemistry that have been untethered

to become replicable in mass with little effort. The actual chemical reactions do not really matter as much as the concepts such as solutions, cohesion, evaporation and fractional distillation, all of which are needed to separate the alkaloid from the plant, yet seem abstract and difficult to fathom.

As a young mestizo man told me when I asked him about the process:

> "Uno machaca las hojas, y eso se llena de quimicos. El quimico saca la base de las hojas... Cuando se tiene la base se pone a secar y esos quimicos se evaporan y esa base queda tiesa" "One can crush the leaves, and then put all the chemicals. These chemicals will take out the cocaine base… once you have the base you put it to dry and the chemicals evaporate then the base will be hard".

These plants and substances exist in parallel, one a truly commodified organism the base for the capitalist markets of Cocaine, the other, the sacred agency, an inalienable part of the indigenous worldview. Thus Coca for Cocaine industry and Coca for Mambe are entirely different ontological beings and require distinct attitudes, practices and negotiations. Therefore it seems that Coca exists simultaneously in both ontological worlds, the capitalist and the animists. Nonetheless, there are interesting similarities. Both of these processes are there for maximising the interior potential of the plant, be it chemical or spiritual. Both of them highlight the interior voice of the plant, how it speaks to us.

For those who work with it, these two different ontological beings intersect. They are both sacred and powerful beings. It is not the plant that is potentiality evil, instead, it is polluting nature of the illegal capitalist system, distilling the spiritual essence of this plant to make one addicted. Its transformation, with all the added chemicals, is extreamly symbolic.

Tobacco was often used as a comparison, as it is also a sacred plant yet once capitalism took over, the same qualities that made it spiritual made it destructive. There is a widespread fear that Ayahuasca is also in danger of this as well as it is beginning to be sold to foreigners and there is an on going process of marketisation. As one shaman said to me

"para que la vuelvan destructiva en ves de constructiva" "to make it destructive instead of constructive".

An apprentice of a mestizo shaman told me how he tried the processed component of Ayahuasca –DMT-. It had caused a severe damage to his relationship with the plant. He asked me if DMT was common in the northern countries. When I told him that it was beginning to become popular he warned me that it was not the true spirit of the plant, it was deformed and horrible. “Eso es pura corrupcion” “That is pure corruption” he said angrily.

It is by negotiating these contradicting existences that we also create hybridity. Animist approaches to medicinal plants, mestizo humorism and temperatures, Afrocolombian saint and orishas, capitalist fetishisms and biological notions of medicine and biodiversity exist in parallel yet intersect. Different ways of understanding the world, the body and these plants are continually being negotiated, mixed, adopted and reinterpreted. As commodities which flow through networks that converge a diversity of ontological worlds, their shapeshifting nature, both symbolic and physical, allows them to be the mediating force.

Yet for those Witoto whom I talked with, there is a resignation to the idea that their sacred Coca is being used to fuel the violence. Many even participate due to the lack of genuine income opportunities in this territory. However, it seems that Coca, as an integral part of the indigenous cultures, has also been in the centre of the indigenous cultural revival. Like all of the plants that I have mentioned before, Coca has a new political role, A role that can easily be adapted to a semi-urban lifestyle and facilitate a revival of traditional practices and knowledge. As we saw the ceremonial use of Mambe is already quite political, by incentivising dialogue, so it is no surprise that it has become popular in regional politics, offering spaces of legitimisation through traditionality, cultural exchange and reconceptualisation of notions of identity and the power dynamics of the region. In this manner, Coca is political in more ways than one, since it is also the basis of a ritual that favours political dialogue. This is perhaps ironic given the violence -a breakdown of dialogue- that has been associated with Cocaine.

I attended several political rallies, advocating not only the use of traditional practices such as healing, spiritualism and forest management but also advocating for an indigenous way of doing treaties and politics. Mambe was the ideal for these spaces of political negotiation even though they could take all night to finally agree on something. These meetings, attended by men and women of different ethnic backgrounds as well as politicians and NGOs, would often go on long tangents as everyone was given the opportunity to speak their mind. Mambe was the catalyst for this conversation and as the night progressed more and more of the powder was consumed, the conversation often turned into the retelling of essential myths, spirit relations, and personal experiences which were contextually crucial for the discussion.

The political significance of what was happening there was not to be taken lightly, as they had allowed for all external agencies to come in and be part of this negotiation. The multiple ontological universes that made up the forest around them was a central aspect of this negotiation. The receptiveness to different points of view, due to the cosmological openness of the Mambe ceremony and the acceptance by Amerindian worldviews to perspectives of others (Viveiros de Castro, 1998), permits and facilitates this multilevel negotiation.

I believe this is the notable role of the Mambe ceremony, as it highlights the effectiveness of indigenous wordlview. People who live in cities and towns, now separated from the complex ontological interactions of forest ecosystems, will have to use the same strategies to deal with the multiple ontologies of urban living. It has proven beneficial for the political movements of local indigenous revivalism, as it legitimises their heritage and their cultural way of seeing the world, and allows for tolerance and acceptance of the diversity of cultures, political motivations and perspectives in the regional and national politics. As more and more people attend these ceremonies, including mayors, administrators, and government employees, Mambe ceremonies become ever more important as spaces for negotiation between perspectives and alterities.

Conclusion

The approach taken for this dissertation offers a distinct perspective on the complex and multi-layered processes of Folk medicine in Colombia. It not only facilitated placing the plants at the centre of this multispecies ethnography, but also gave me the tools and spaces to explore the intercultural exchange and ontological overlap that define these practices. Enabling this study to include indigenous shamanism, but also mestizo and afrocolombian healing, western biological sciences, my personal perspective and even, to a certain extent, the perspective of the plants themselves. I hope I have done justice to these complex nonhuman agencies. Respecting not only the shamans who work with them but also the many different communities who are in many ways related to these plants.

Initially, this dissertation was meant to analyse the trade of medicinal plants in western Amazonia. However, it soon became apparent that this research required a much larger scope

than I thought. Unlike other non-timber forest products, in order to understand these plants it is essential to study their cultural context. By this, I mean that to truly comprehend how these medicines are effective require understanding the complex cultural structures that allow them to work. It is often not suffice to classify them as medicines and explain that this is due to the chemical composition or to placebo effect. Instead, to truly analyse how people interpret the internal characteristics of these plants, we need to observe how they understand nature, how their bodies work and the how they perceive the relationships that affect them through illness and health.

In addition, Putumayo is a multicultural region with a diversity of indigenous communities and other cultural groups. Each community experiences the plants differently, because they interpret them based on their understanding of the world.

The sheer scale of this study required an experimental approach. As such, I decided to use medicinal plants as primary ethnographic subjects in order to maximise my reach and at the same time limiting my field site. By focusing on specific plants I wanted to explore how different ontological worlds interpret them as they move throughout the region by observing how they are harvested, used and exchanged. I soon came to understand that these plants offer spaces for ontological overlap, where different ways of experiencing the world are constantly negotiated and hybrids are produced.

At the beginning of this study I was inspired by the shamanic way of relating to medicinal plants. For shamans, these plants are important social actors, who not only have a strong spiritual agency, but also define how people relate to the world. The role of these plants for local shamanism highlights the complexity of these ethnographic subjects. They often are more than just plants and medicines; they are spiritual beings who have multidimensional personhoods that require constant “consulta” or consultation through a complex ritual dialogue.

My main challenge was to consolidate the multiple ways of relating with these plants. It is through this perspective that we can appreciate how they are not idle or passive subjects.

They are vital to the overall social, ecological and historical characteristics of the region. By exploring the plants, I found myself in the borders of ontological worlds, as they are exchanged through different cultural and ecological networks.

I worked with many different trade networks all of which flowed through diverse ways of understanding health, the body and the environment. However, this approach has its advantages and disadvantages. It offers a general overview of this meshwork of complex relationships yet limits my analysis on the nuances of each ontological realm. To observe such a complex field site, I needed to first understand its macro dynamics in order to explore its more intimate characteristics. Hence, this study is a stepping-stone for a more comprehensive analysis of these trade networks, potentially opening the doors for in depth analysis of a wide range of objects, material culture and tools used in Colombian folk medicine.

By following these plants, I was able to see the way they are transformed and incorporated into different ways of dealing with health, knowledge and worldviews. As they move through trade networks, I was in a privileged position to observe how they are given new characteristics, powers, values and agencies.

Chaîne opératoire or operation sequence (Lemonier, 1992; Coupaye, 2014) facilitated this type of analysis. It helped me explore the process of becoming as well as the techniques of making. It offers the tools to analyse the rationales, limitation and ontological rules that go in the making and transforming something.

Through this dissertation I provide a inclusive overview of the complex meshwork of existences and ontologies that exist in Putumayo. By exploring the different interactions with plants I manage to get a birds-eyed-view of the *pluriverse* (Escobar, 2008) of ontologies in the region. I was able to highlight the spaces where these ontologies are continuously clashing and overlapping with each other, producing not only tensions but also hybrids and syncretisms. From this macro perspective, several key themes should be concluded.

Most importantly, these plants are mediators of alterity. It seemed that as I explored these trade routes, these plants connected distinct communities and provided spaces for different ways of understanding health. Medicinal plants could be translated to fit different ontological realms.

For example, for the local indigenous people of Mocoa, the role of medicinal plants as mediators is tied to the overall ecological and cultural landscape of the region. Their mediation reveals how influential the spiritual world is to the physical one. The spiritual world is full of predatory beings, which are actively or passively getting people sick. Therefore shamans and healers are continually negotiating with these agents, trying to heal them with the help of these medicinal plants. In this interconnected landscape, the spiritual world extends all the way to the forest where other hosts also exist and require careful mediation. Since many of these plants grow in the forest they are constantly interacting with the multiplicity of beings that inhabit these ecosystems.

This mediating role goes far beyond dealing with the spiritual agents. For example, Chuchuwaza is used to heal a number of different ailments by adapting to different emic terms. Ayahuasca mediates not only with the spiritual world but also between different ways of relating to the internal qualities of non-humans.

One of the main ways that these medicinal plants mediate alterity is through ritual consumption. Rituals offer a space and technique that facilitates the reconceptualisation of difference. In this respect, rituals can be understood as a form of communication. In fact, it is a multilayered form of communication between patients, the healer, the plants and the environment. Given that these plants and the ritual associated with them exist in the borders between different worldviews, they are not only a form of communication and negotiation but also of miscommunication. In other words, when people use different plants, they are not only willing to partake in the ritualised use but also partake in the act of communication which is often misinterpreted and misunderstood. Through this misunderstanding, new dynamics arise, syncretism happens and hybrids are made.

Folk medicine in Colombia is a result of this syncretic process on a broader scale. During most of its recent history, Colombia has had a colonial society, which was built on the coming together of different worlds, as was the conquest of the Americas and the slave trade. My project required strict hierarchical categories in order to propagate the colonial power system. This system would treat these distinct racial categories as entirely separate beings, often highlighting their ethnic and racial differences. The epistemic murk (Taussig, 1987) caused by difference gave these racial categories superhuman abilities to inflict harm or heal disease. Ritualised healing often uses these colonial categories to guarantee miscommunication as a way to restructure the colonial power structures. The stereotypes and fear evoked by the racial differences has given power to people who have been historically in the lower levels of the colonial pyramid.

Afroamerican Santeria and indigenous shamanism depend on the hidden power of difference, to harm and to heal. Therefore, plants and medicines associated with these groups were also given similar powers. An example of this is Chuchuwaza. Although it is sold in urban markets has maintained its power and efficacy because of its symbolic link with indigenous people and the mystical power of the Amazon forest.

For the mestizo healers who live in the urban centres and are part of the broader traditional folk medicine of Colombia, health has been built upon not only the power of racial categories but also on the multiple notions of health that have arrived to the country through global trade. Folk medicine is the result of European Humoral medicine, Andean mesas, Afrocolombian Santeria, Spanish herbs and Amerindian shamanism that have come together and influenced the way these healers work and deal with disease.

Those healers are continually interacting with otherness, coming into contact with different tools and medicines, worldviews and beliefs through global trade networks. This is especially true in the markets of the highland cities. Trade routes facilitate the creation of spaces for overlapping ontological realms, where people are continually negotiating, leaning and building their interpretation on health. This is how new age medicine has become popular in these markets, as they start selling and reconceptualising different notions to fit those of local

communities. As products and people move through different regions, they establish the ritual spaces for miscommunication and negotiation.

In Putumayo these trade routes helped mould the multi-ethnic networks of experts who practice unique healing techniques. The networks of shamans, healers and patients who actively participate in the use and exchange of specific master plant have used the trade routes to expand dramatically. Historical trade between the highlands and the lowlands connected the different ecological and ethnic regions, encouraging the flow of products, knowledge and practices. In this particular case, these trade routes facilitated the expansion of shamanism, based on the use of Ayahuasca in the highlands and beyond.

As these shamans, apprentices and patients travel, they not only exchange Ayahuasca but also exchange knowledge on medicinal plants, shamanic tools and even cosmological concepts. Medicines flow through these networks as the constant experimentation allows them to be incorporated and adapted to fit new cultural values and ontological rationalities. As mentioned, the ritual use of Ayahuasca facilitated spaces of interaction and communication, as well as exchange. This ceremonial use is particularly interesting, since it has spread beyond the region and into many of the highland cities and urban centres of the global north due to the intensity of its effects and relatively safe use. This has connected the local shamans with global networks of alternative health. Due to its ease for syncretism and hybridity, the link between New Age and Neoshamanic networks has fundamentally changed the way local shamans relate to the forest and the master plants. The shamanic networks are therefore rapidly expanding beyond the local and into regional and global dynamics.

All of this is happening in a moment during which there is an accelerated transformation to the ecosystems and cultures of lowland Amazonia. As the forests in this region disappear, giving way to modern landscape, the source of many medicines is at real risk of disappearing. However, due to the particular characteristics of these medicinal networks they have the capacity for adaptation and resilience. The changing cultural and ecological landscape brings new challenges, such as the flow of spiritual tourism, as well as the cultural and social consequences of history of violence and ecological degradation. Yet, even in an age of

modern landscapes, these medicines will continue to guarantee the relationship between different ontological realms.

Epilogue

Image 38: P. cubensis

I found myself in a fields that had been used for Cocaine plantation, where the soils, the vegetation and the water all showed signs of degradation and pollution. They grew in the old patties of the cattle that lived in this field, little bright yellow almost golden caps that poked out like shy children from the field. We jumped the fence to reach them and quickly spread out around to pick as many sporocarps as possible. After we picked several handfuls we jumped back into the road.

Psilocybin Cubensis was first identified in Cuba, however, it probably originated from the African savanna. It is one of those cosmopolitan organisms, unintended passengers of human expansion. The mushrooms only grow on cow dung; their life cycle requires the animal´s digestive system for the initial gestation period.

As soon as it associated itself to the *Bovinae* it had guaranteed its success. Cows had become a mayor part of the Anthropocene, and as we humans sent cows to the furthest reach of the world the little mushrooms followed in their footsteps. Slowly the mushrooms arrived in the Amazon. Their existence is thus directly related to the colonial project, as ecosystems are domesticated to fit the modern world.

These mushrooms were foreign, almost immensely so, like the cows or those motorcycles that had brought us there. They arrived form other worlds, often far removed from the indigenous people who live here; making part of a different web of relationships, different ways of relating to the world and different ontologies. Like the matsutake (Tsing, 2014) these little fellows grew from the desolation caused by the capitalist system. They were growing there only because the forest had been cut down, the Coca plants fumigated and the little vegetation permitted some thin looking cows to survive. They were the result of the capitalist landscape, however, they grew in the discarded remains and in the literal faeces of this world.

However, for the young men who had brought me here, these organisms were considered more than mere mushrooms, they had a complex personhood closely related to the other powerful master plants. They were capable of “pinta” visions, of a “voz” or voice, and to heal. This was surprising since like the rest of the Country fungi are still considered

dangerous. Colombia has a strong aversion towards fungi. These organisms do not have a place in our tables or our medicines. Folk medicine does not have any recorded Fungi and wild mushroom foraging is extremely rare.

Nonetheless those young apprentices had begun experimenting with the little mushrooms to see if they could incorporate them into their pharmacopoeia. By experimenting with them and "consulting" with the Ayahuasca spirit they had reached the conclusion that these could be used as an ally in their fight against illness. Experimentation is a common attribute and encouraged by those who are knowledgeable in the plant medicines. Shamans, apprentices and other members of this web or relationships are continually experimenting with these medicines and master plants to see what they can learn from them.

However, these young men did not learn of these "honguitos" "little mushrooms" from experimenting with all the mushrooms available in the region. They had to learn how to use them and, maybe more importantly, how to identify them, from someone else.

Unlike some of those other master plants, mushrooms have limited shamanic use worldwide. It is true that in the mountains of Oaxaca and Chiapas of Mexico the use of mushroom is practised in healing ceremonies, for the most part, the shamanic use of these mushrooms is relatively new. Instead they have become increasingly popular in New age and psychedelic groups who have adopted and modified it to make it their own, often separating it from the guidelines and dogma of Mexican shamanic use (Letcher, 2006)[65]. At the same time, these groups have a close link to the psychedelic movement of the 20th century who created a deep know-how and relationship with the sacred mushrooms, as well as a diversity of spiritual and shamanic practices throughout the world.

[65] This could be due to a number of reasons. For one, most of the mushrooms are consumed as soon as they are harvested, as they do not stay fresh long especially in humid areas, which limits the transportability. Secondly, mushrooms do not need the preparation or the guidance of an expert shaman and can easily be used by individuals. I believe this has facilitated its rapid popularity in the second half of the XXth century. Finally, the abundance of these active mushrooms throughout the world has allowed many people to experience them personally without the need for shamans or specialist.

Therefore, in a similar way to the spread of Ayahuasca throughout the world, these mushrooms arrived to lowland Amazonia through New Age and Neoshamans groups who established close links with Amazonian shamanism. Neoshamanic groups facilitated the integration of Ayahuasca shamans into this larger network of new age spiritualism. As part of this network, the Putumayo shamans were able to interact with a diversity of different shamanic practices from the US, Peru, Chile and Mexico. Practices such as the lunar and solar dances, sweat lodges, and other entheogens like San Pedro, Peyote and Psilocybin mushrooms are now a common aspect in lowland shamanism.

The young apprentices learned to use these mushrooms from foreigners, quickly incorporating and adopting them into their worldview. Since all of these entheogens have similar characteristics and effects, they were not only easy to associate with the plant medicine of their ancestors but also had pre-established techniques for there ritualised use. For them it was without a doubt sacred medicine, which could be used to heal people if used correctly.

Here I was, gathering psilocybin mushrooms with the young apprentices of the shaman. Many of these young apprentices had extensive knowledge of the other master plants that coexisted in this territory. Many were actively using them, having gained permission either from other shamans or from the plants themselves. Some had gone so far as to travel to other countries to learn to use these substances, extending their networks beyond international borders, connecting shamans from different ethnic and cultural traditions.

Even thought these mushrooms represent the end of the Amazonian forests, folk medicine and shamanic arts are becoming ever more popular. It seems that in the end of the world shamanisms has come back into fashion. People have flocked to the upper Putumayo, Napo and Marañon in search of vegetable illumination and more foreigners are learning the shamanic arts, as Ayahuasca becomes an international phenomenon. The Yage vines are now growing in faraway places such as Florida, Central America, Hawaii and even Asia, each with their own complex communities of healers and practitioners.

In Putumayo, profound transformations are happening in alarming rates. The Path of the Medicine that used to connect the lowlands and the highlands in Putumayo is getting paved and becoming a major international trading route; connecting the Atlantic, the Amazon basin, the Andes and the Pacific. At the same time, Coca fields are growing throughout the forest of Latin America. European rivers are slowly being contaminated by Cocaine from so much use (Capaldo et al., 2018; Zuccato et al., 2008). Glysophate is making a comeback as the government desperately tries to eradicate it, pushing the Coca deeper into the forest. As the forest retreats so will many of its medicines. Wild populations of Chuchuwaza and other plants will suffer even more from overuse, while only those that can grow as crops or weeds become more relevant in folk medicine.

In this anthropogenic world, forests become islands, protected by the state. Yoco, with its unique link to the forest, is relegated to national parks quickly forgotten, becoming just another plant in the catalogue of university herbariums and an interesting anecdote in doctoral dissertations.

Others like Chondur and Borrachero grow well in the expanding urban landscape. They have become important tools in the spiritual war, where illness, pollution, envy and witchcraft are increasing more dangerous. Meanwhile, European herbs, brought here by the Spanish, are thriving as crops and have already become the main source of folk medicine in Colombia.

As we walked the fields looking for the mushrooms, I kept thinking that this was how the new Amazon shamanism looks like. My friend yelled and signalled with excitement that he had found another “familia de honguitos” family of mushrooms. They grow from decay, growing from the remnants of the modernist world where the disenfranchised make their homes. It seemed like the obvious next step, since these mushrooms are the waste of this world they cannot be commoditised, prosecuted, destroyed or overharvested.

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