Jangwa Pana Vol. 23(1) | 2024 | e-ISSN 2389-7872
https://doi.org/10.21676/issn.1657-4923

Yage and Ayahuasca: A critical history. The Gow's hypothesis in the light of Yage

Para una historia crítica del yajé y el ayahuasca: la hipótesis de Gow a la luz del yajé

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Abstract: This paper compares two forms of traditional Amazonian medicine: the cult of yajé and the use of ayahuasca within vegetalismo, using Gow's ideas as a guide. These ideas are exposed, and a comparative historical approach is adopted to analyze the similarities and differences between both cultural manifestations. Thus, the colonial processes of the mission and the rubber industry are examined in both areas, and a comparative ethnographic perspective is also adopted to complete the contrast between both forms.

Keywords: yage; ayahuasca; Peter Gow; colonialism; chamanism; ethnohistory.

Resumen: En este artículo se comparan, desde una perspectiva histórica, dos formas de medicina tradicional amazónica: por una parte, el culto del yajé y, por otra, el uso del ayahuasca en el seno del vegetalismo, y del chamanismo indígena regional que le rodea. Se usan para ello, las ideas de Peter Gow respecto del ayahuasca, en cuanto forma histórica, social y cultural. Se adopta un enfoque comparativo para tornar comprensibles semejanzas y diferencias entre el yajé y el ayahuasca: ambos términos en este trabajo se emplean no solamente para indicar una misma sustancia, sino también —y sobre todo— dos formas de práctica social desarrolladas en dos zonas contiguas de la Amazonía Noroccidental. De igual modo, se describen y confrontan los procesos coloniales de la misión católica y de las caucherías, en que estas tradiciones chamánicas se desarrollaron. Al final, se realiza un análisis de tipo etnográfico para complementar el contraste.

Palabras clave: yajé; ayahuasca; Peter Gow; colonialismo; chamanismo; etnohistoria.

Review article / Artículo de revisión
How to cite this article: Musalem, P. (2024). Yage and Ayahuasca: A critical history. The Gow's hypothesis in the light of Yage. *Jangwa Pana, 23*(1), 1-18. doi: https://doi.org/10.21676/16574923.5351
Received: 20 /06/2023 | **Approved:** 14/11/2023 | **Published:** 01/01/2024

Editor's note: This article has been translated into English by Express, with funding from the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Innovation (Minciencias) of Colombia.

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Introduction

In this article, the terms "yajé" and "ayahuasca" refer to two known ways of consuming the same hallucinogenic drink in broad Amazonian contexts. As will be discussed, both forms have so many elements in common —historical, political, and cultural— that it is helpful to understand them as two variants of the same historical development.

According to Gow's hypothesis (1994), it is in the colonial relationship structured by the Catholic mission and the rubber extracting activity in the former Jesuit and Spanish province of Maynas —today in the northwestern Amazons of Peru (Iquitos, Pucallpa)— that ayahuasca, as a social practice, acquired the ritual forms and horizons of meaning with which it was captured in the 20th century in the ethnographic studies of authors such as Harner, Dobkin de Ríos, Luna or Chaumeil. Thus, for Harner and Chaumeil, indigenous ayahuasca shamanism would be an ancestral tradition preserved in the jungle's depths despite European colonization. From there, knowledge about the drink would have been transmitted and developed into the mixed form of vegetalism investigated by Dobkin de Ríos, Luna, and other authors, in the element of an incipient urban fabric and urban-rural circulation in the territories of the ancient Maynas.

Gow (1994, p. 90) articulated his arguments explicitly against the ideas comprising the common sense of his time and continued to flourish in popular culture in the wake of new age ideology under the auspices of identity politics, global environmentalism, and shamanic tourism, as seen in the works of Alenha Caicedo (2009). In specialized academic circles, on the contrary, Gow's proposal has kept arousing interest, as shown in the texts of Cristine Callicot (2020), Brabec de Mori (2011b) —who proposed the expression "Critical History of Ayahuasca"— and Glenn Shepard (2014).

This article will review Gow's hypotheses and consider the contributions of his followers to examine, concerning the set of arguments on ayahuasca thus configured, the available data on the culture —or cult or complex— of yajé, developed in the southwestern Amazon of Colombia and immediately adjacent areas of Ecuador.

For authors such as Luna (1986), indigenous shamanism and vegetalism or mestizo shamanism are two different phenomena, although, as shown in his book about the subject, they are closely related. In this publication, the author declares he will not make comparisons; however, he notes the many evident similarities throughout the text, leading to the idea that it is impossible to differentiate one thing from the other.

In his work, Luna proposes as the main differentiating criteria that vegetalism or mestizo ayahuasca shamanism: 1) Occurs in the space of urban-rural circulation, 2) unfolds in the element of a popular Pan-Amazonian culture, where Catholicism occupies a central place, and 3) occurs within the limits of the Spanish language. Concerning this last point, it is worth noting —necessary for the arguments below— that the ayahuasca songs or "ícaros," which are fundamental for healing, are almost all in the Quechua language and that there are, here and there, moments of the ícaros in Cocama, and even in Omagua.

Vegetalism can then be defined, in Luna's terms (1986), as a mestizo shamanic ideology,[1] with indigenous roots.

Gow's proposal places this mestizo ideology as the matrix from which ethnic ayahuasca shamanisms in their contemporary configuration originate, precisely those described in ethnographies such as Harner's or Chaumeil's. Gow proposes a regional historical interpretation of the symbolic and sociological logic embedded in the social practice of ayahuasca shamanism that is Indigenous and mestizo concurrently and originates in the colonial relationship inside the spaces of the Catholic mission and the rubber plantations.

From Gow's perspective, the vegetalism described by Luna and other authors is presented as a particular case, variant, or local expression of a regional mestizo ayahuasca shamanism that encompasses, beyond its local variations and expressions, a set of particular ethnic shamanisms within the area roughly delimited by the ancient Spanish and Jesuit province of Maynas. With this in mind, we will use the terms "ayahuasca shamanism" and "vegetalism" alternatively as synonyms in the present work.

[1] "Ideology," in this context, is a system of ideas articulated to a set of practices.

The yajé type studied here, on the other hand, appears exclusively in the ethnographies of the indigenous peoples of a contiguous area immediately north of the ancient Maynas, in territories formerly part of the Franciscan mission of Sucumbíos, also called Mocoa-Sucumbíos (figure 1). The yajé cult has a constellation of specialists there, such as Chaves (1958), Cipolletti and Payaguaje (2008), Langdon (2014), and Taussig (2021). Concerning this literature, we outlined a systematic comparison emphasizing common elements and differences, allowing us to distinguish yajé from ayahuasca as two variants of the same historical formation and social practice.

It is important to note that we focus exclusively on ayahuasca and yajé shamanism from these two provinces or regions, which border each other and are strongly influenced by their proximity to the Andes. We will not address the many other forms and traditions using the same drink —under the same names, yajé, ayahuasca, or others— while denoting other social and cultural worlds. In this way, the yajé of the eastern Tucano, used in the Yuruparí festivals, is left out of the section, for example.

The term "cult," which has been chosen to refer to the practices involving yajé, was taken from the monograph by William Vickers (1976, p. 165) on the Secoya of Ecuador, a western Tucano group closely linked to the Siona. The purpose of using the term "cult" is to emphasize the mixture or integration that has traditionally existed between Catholic religion and shamanism, which this article places centrally, thus challenging modern and postmodern culturalist notions that conceive the possibility of capturing a pristine or ancestral Indigenous social being, who has not gone irreversibly through the experience of Catholic evangelization, or at least was exempt from the effects of the cosmopolitan social order deployed in the jungle.

On the other hand, some forms of worship have been recorded in Colombia, with vigorous hybridizations of Pentecostalism and yajé culture deployed in recent years. This phenomenon, which does not occur in the lands of Peruvian vegetalism where religious cults based on ayahuasca have not been formed, was observed towards the first half of the 20th century in the confines of Brazil, where northeastern rubber tappers met productively with Indigenous people from Acre, forming mestizo ayahuasca churches such as Santo Daime or Uniao do Vegetal.

Finally, it is necessary to note that the texts of the four authors cited above, who, in Brabec de Mori's words, make a critical history of ayahuasca, mentioned yajé very briefly and superficially, if at all. Gow himself (1994) explained in his text: "I exclude from my analysis the southeast of Colombia, the place where Taussig describes ayahuasca or yajé shamanism" (p. 93). In our work, we seek to include yajé —from Putumayo— in Gow's analysis based on the last thirty years of ethnographic and ethnohistorical production on the subject.

Development of the work

Rivers of history

According to Gow's hypothesis, vegetalism developed during the last 300 years in urban and mestizo environments of the Maynas Province through two fundamental experiences in the colonial relationship: the Catholic mission and the rubber plantations. First, let us discuss what can be understood by "urban" and "mestizo."

The concept of mestizo assumes the meaning of being every Christian Indian (Gow, 1994, p. 106), that is, someone who has taken refuge in the mission from catastrophic pressures such as wars, captivity, forced labor, or epidemics. In the 16th century, despite the early armed resistance of the Indigenous people, their reluctance to take up residence in Spanish foundations, and the violence used to capture them when they fled from these, the settlers and the Jesuits succeeded in placing them into settlements that functioned as multiethnic melting pots (Callicot, 2020; Cipolletti, 2017, p. 15).

In the jungles of Maynas, in the first two centuries of conquest, entire nations collapsed (the Mainas, the Jéberos, the Omagua, the Cocama, among others), and the survivors sought refuge within the missions (Callicot, 2020, p. 88; Gow, 1994). Inside, the ethnic identities of these refugees were profoundly modified, merging through ethnogenesis processes that project their dynamism into the present, like, for example, in the case of the resurgence or differentiation of the Záparo people from within some Quichua groups (Callicot, 2020, p. 186).

In the Maynas of Gow and his successors, the *mestizo is the Christian Indian*, often a *generic Indian* and, later, the mestizo worker, the proletarian of the rubber plantations.

The term *urban* carries the notion of a new type of commercial experience in this argument. The collapses and ethnogenesis just mentioned occur in the cosmopolitan element generated by the Jesuits, who, in effect, manage to intervene, dominate, and extend the trade of certain essential products, such as curare, salt, and tobacco, connecting through the circulation of these products, ethnic groups that were until then very distant and unknown to each other (Callicot, 2020, p. 106-110; Cipolletti, 2017, p. 48). The Society of Jesus introduced new production techniques, creating new needs and forms of exchange, using these goods —salt, tobacco, and curare— as general means of payment and exchange in vast geographical areas (Cipolletti, 2017, p. 25-45). Let us also note that these items are highly valued in the shamanic trade.

Salt, for example, encodes the historical experience in the world of yajé, differentiating Christian Indians from the Aucas (also called pagans), belonging to the tribes of the depths of the jungle, who do not use this product explicitly associated with baptism. Don Manuel, a Kamentzá yagecero taita from the Sibundoy valley, at the end of the 20th century, expressed it this way:

> Since we were baptized as Christians, the baptismal salt took away our powers [the powers of the Aucas] […] Now we can only use the spiritual force of the tiger, of the tapir, before we can turn into animals. That was part of the secret of yajé (Urrea & Zapata, 1995, p. 39).

The trade of these goods, which was intervened, disseminated, and controlled by the Jesuits and circulated through a network of settlements defined by them, opened a new type of experience for the indigenous people, which can be described as urban and cosmopolitan. Here, we follow the ideas of the Spanish philosopher Gustavo Bueno (1971), where the condition and experience of the urban are derived from exchange relations between different settlements, in some way prior to the cities themselves, pointing out the impossibility of thinking of the city as an isolated element, and the need to think of it, instead, as a particularized and non-exclusive concretion of a network of relations.

The Spanish foundations in the Province of Maynas, such as Borja (founded in 1619), Moyobamba (in 1538), Lamas (in 1656), or Yurimaguas (in 1709) and their rapid development account for the early and systematic advance of penetration fronts in the jungles of Peru. In these settlements, stable in their exact locations until the present, Spanish civilians and soldiers acted as main agents, in addition to missionaries. Another shared feature is the formation of multiethnic neighborhoods, where the function of ethnic melting pots is noted by Cipolletti (2017, p. 15).

Maynas was the site of 71 encomiendas, institutions of forced labor carried out outside the structure of the missions. In general, the encomiendas resulted in forms of slave labor and served as legal means of territorial appropriation for the encomenderos. Regarding the fate of the Indigenous encomenderos, Taylor (1999) is categorical: "*According to reports from the time, only one in ten captives remained after a year* [in the encomienda]; *the rest fled or died from epidemic diseases, mistreatment, and despair*" (p. 215).

Here, we have a colonial picture configured by a relationship of competition between civil encomenderos and Jesuits. The latter began to arrive from Quito from 1638 onwards to take charge of the evangelization of the natives, arriving at a terrain of relations already damaged by the previous religious orders' passivity concerning the mistreatments committed by the encomenderos. Evidence shows that the Society took advantage of the situation to project a good image before the natives, agreeing with the civil authorities on the possibility of appearing as protectors from the punishments they mandated. Life in the mission was the lesser evil compared to slavery, a pressure first exerted by the Spanish encomenderos coming from the Andes and then from the east, nearing the 18th century, when the Portuguese slavers of Pará penetrated further up the Marañón River with their "rescue troops."

To the north of Maynas were the mission's territories of Sucumbíos, administered briefly by the Franciscans from Quito and then from Popayán (Cipolletti, 2017, p. 155). The boundary between both missionary jurisdictions was the Putumayo River, where the Jesuits operated briefly before the arrival of the Franciscans. Father Ferrer's mission among the Cofanes in the first decade of the 17th century was the best-known of the Franciscan missions.

The Putumayo and its interfluves, northwards to the Caquetá and southwards to the tributaries of the Napo River, were densely populated by western Tucano groups and also, between the Putumayo and the Napo, by Quichua communities (Figure 2). According to Taylor (1999), Franciscans and Jesuits competed for certain territories through actions on the ground and in the

courts of justice. In places such as the Putumayo and Napo rivers, there were, at different times, both types of missions. The Jesuits generally managed to establish themselves and prosper, while the Franciscans presented much more modest results.

During a period of their work, the Jesuits also implemented forced rescues in Maynas, which were armed expeditions to reduce groups of Indigenous people seeking an independent life in the depths of the jungle. Thus, between encomenderos, military, domination and deep intervention of commercial networks, and the lasting establishment of multiethnic neighborhoods, the Company's missions and the Spanish cities acquired a character and results different from those obtained by the Franciscans, who mainly faced the immensity of their respective challenges alone and with other ideas.

Along the Napo River and beginning in 1700, the Jesuits, who had created mission posts since 1638, founded a series of places known as "new missions," where "it cost the Jesuits an enormous effort to get the local Tucano groups to agree to live on the banks of the Napo, from where they often fled inland to their settlements close to small rivers" (Cipolletti, 2017, p. 18).

Among the nations that the conquistadors and the Jesuits dominated, the Jéberos, the Omagua, the Quichua, and the Cocama were recruited as auxiliaries or helpers and acted as intermediaries between the Europeans and other more remote Indigenous groups or those refractory to contact. These mediating groups appear simultaneously as possessors of high knowledge in the history of regional shamanic networks conceived during the twentieth century (Callicot, 2020, p. 106; Chaumeil, 1988, p. 6).

At this point, it is worth recalling this work's introduction: Luna (1986), in his classic study on vegetalism, points out that, according to some of his main informants, the spirits, when consulted in Spanish by the healers, respond in the language of the Omagua or the Cocama (p. 64). In addition, the songs or ícaros that ayahuasca —as a vegetal spiritual entity— teaches to its human apprentices come in the Quichua language, and some in Cocama or Omagua (p. 94), two languages that had long been extinct at the time of these statements. The Jébero (Jibaroans), for their part, although they do not appear in the enumeration offered by Luna, occupied an important place as teachers of ayahuasca shamanism for other Jíbaro groups (Callicot, 2020).

What all these Indigenous groups have in common is that they were swallowed up by the dynamics of ethnocide and ethnogenesis before 1670 (the Mainas, the Jéberos, the Cocama, and, somewhat later, the Omagua), through all the mentioned pressures, the reductions and multiethnic melting pots. They also share prominent places as assistants to the merchants and priests in Maynas and, therefore, they are characterized by having been protagonists of the mediation between the urban periphery (of the city and the mission) and the jungle and its inhabitants, a reconciliation at the heart of the ayahuasca shamanism described by Peter Gow.

Of these nations in the Maynas Province that experienced early reduction, only Quichua groups survive as separate and active ethnic identities. Callicot (2020) presents a history of the Quichua of Lamas in the present-day San Martín Department in Peru and their role as strategic auxiliaries to the Spanish while also highlighting them as crucial agents in the spread of ayahuasca shamanism throughout the Maynas region. On the other hand, to the north, in the territories of the Sucumbíos mission, these roles of collaborators of the Spanish were occupied by certain western Tucano groups, such as the Siona of Putumayo, who remain, like the Quichua, as actively differentiated ethnic identity to this day.

The western Quichua and Tucano groups share the good fortune of having inhabited and circulated between the two mission territories in the Jesuit and Franciscan border zone, participating here and there as auxiliary Indians. Like the extinct peoples mentioned (Jébero, Cocama, Omagua), they also figured as essential intermediaries in the history of knowledge networks and shamanic power, like the case of the Quijo —Quichuas— and the Siona of Putumayo (Chaumeil, 1988).

However, unlike the Quichua, the western Tucano did not submit to urban and mestizo life in the multiethnic neighborhoods of missions and cities. This group remained politically independent until well into the 20th century, waging war and changing settlements periodically, in dynamics of fissions and transfers related to the deaths of their curacas yajeceros (shaman chiefs) and other factors.

Some authors have noted that in the mission areas identified here, Maynas and Sucumbíos, Quichua and Mai Coca (a contemporary native name for the Siona language), respectively, were chosen as lingua franca by missionaries to carry out evangelization among

communities of other languages (Callicot, 2020; Langdon, 2014; Taylor, 1999). These data emphasize the importance of both indigenous groups in mediating between colonizers and other ethnic groups. Quichua, on the one hand, stands out as the language of the majority of the ayahuasca ícaros; on the other hand, Mai Coca, or a derivation of it, Juinjá Coca (see Langdon, 2014), is the main language of the yajé chants.

As for missionary activity itself, in Mocoa-Sucumbíos, there is a different panorama than in Maynas: along the banks of the Putumayo River, towards the lowlands, the Franciscan missions were more sporadic and short-lived than the Jesuit ones, and the mission posts were never stabilized, being quickly abandoned when the stock of metal utensils ran out (Langdon 2014; Langdon and Mongua, 2020). These were not the places where decimated populations were found —to the point of reconfiguring themselves under new ethnonyms, such as the Záparos, or forming a generic Indian identity, such as Maina, Jébero, Omagua, and Cocama— in search of refuge, who in Maynas submitted to multiethnic cohabitation, initially undesired by all indigenous people and generating conflicts.[2]

In Putumayo, there were then ephemeral and monoethnic missions. Even those cases in which coexistence occurred at the beginning of the 20th century at the request of the Capuchin missions between Ingas and Kamzáes —in the Sibundoy Valley— or Sionas and Cofanes —in San Diego— were characterized by an appearance of order and affinity. Thus, in different mission posts in the lowlands, such as San Diego or San José, on the tributaries of the Putumayo River (Chaves, 1958; Langdon and Mongua, 2020), the indigenous people maintained their differentiated ethnic identities and the "melting pot" and ethnogenesis function of the Maynas settlements did not occur.

The Jesuits invested and delegated to specific chosen indigenous people quotas of administrative and spiritual authority, and these carried out their functions without the missionaries. The same occurred in the Franciscan domains, and it is possible that in the study of these relationships and their modalities —not addressed here— helpful keys can be found to interpret, based on the colonial relationship, the differences between the ideologies of yajé and ayahuasca highlighted in this text.

In Maynas, the Jesuits had Spain's civil and military support from the beginning, while the Franciscans did not. Perhaps for this reason, and according to Taylor (1999), in Mocoa-Sucumbíos, the Franciscans resorted to strategies of contact and evangelization that were more respectful of the authority figures and the native forms of sociability, where even "*the presence of the Franciscans led to a considerable increase in the power of the traditional indigenous authorities, whether they were warrior chiefs (…) or priestly leaders*" (p. 227).

In the Jesuits' case, it was a "conventual utopia" (Taylor, 1999, p. 229), characterized by a dismantling of native sociopolitical structures, accompanied by the compensatory conservation of certain cultural expressions selected, fostered and intervened by the priests, in the exercise of cultural identity policies that are curiously contemporary. The soldiers of Christ attempted a separation from other Spanish institutions —from the encomiendas, first of all— with which they rivaled and which, in turn, they used to achieve control over the natives. The Company's fathers sought to establish an "indigenous republic" separate from the European settlers. On the economic side, beyond the local autonomy that the Franciscans sought to exert, they emphasized the creation of regional commercial networks whose strategic goods (curare, tobacco, salt, and forges to repair metal objects) tended to remain under their direct control (Taylor, 1999, p. 227-229).

The Franciscans were decidedly integrationist; they aimed to convert and "civilize the natives" and dissolve them into a larger nationality. Some scholars note how paradoxically the results obtained by each order were precisely those sought by the other.

Finally, to confirm the contrast, it is necessary to observe that in the lowlands, where the natives developed the yajé cult, the Spanish conquistadors founded only two cities in four centuries: Écija, of imprecise location and linked to a brief gold boom between 1558 and 1632; and Mocoa, founded in 1563 and which remains to this day after being abandoned, destroyed and refounded several times in different

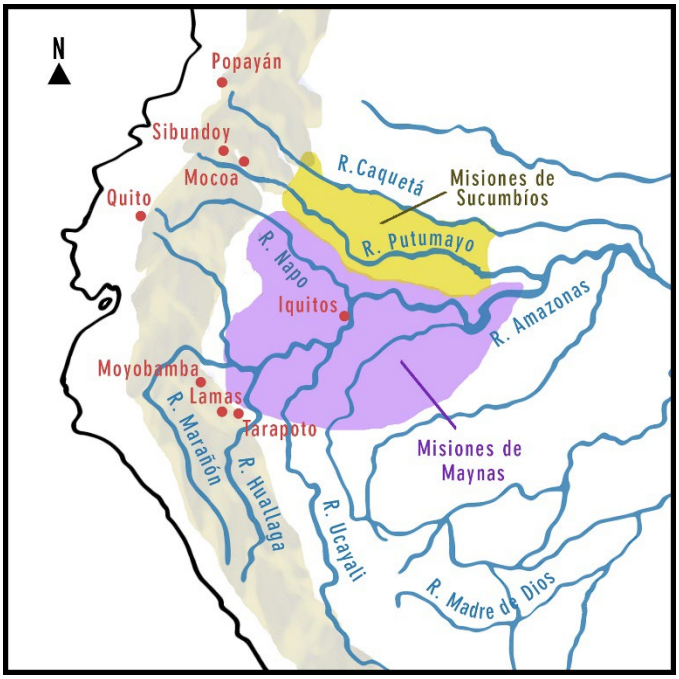
[2] Conflict in the peripheral neighborhoods of Lamas was expressed periodically well into the 20th century through cycles of physical violence and shamanic aggression, especially during the main annual festivals, and according to a pattern of ethnic differences (Callicot, 2020).

locations. In this territory, the encomiendas were scarcer, transitory, and often merely nominal compared to those of Maynas.

There are Christian Indians, auxiliaries, and intermediaries in evangelization and trade in both provinces, but they are not the same type of individuals. While in Maynas, this appellation implied the political submission of the natives, in Sucumbíos, it did not. In the latter, the Christian Indians —of which the western Tucano are of particular interest— could maintain a free and warlike life until the beginning of the 20th century, as shown by the memories of their group movements through the territory, their wars against other ethnic groups, and the cultivation of a sharp epic consciousness until the present (Musalem, 2022).

Figure 1.

Northwestern Amazonia and the mission territories. Conceptual and approximate map showing the Jesuits' activity areas in Maynas and the Franciscans' activity in Sucumbíos.



Source: Own elaboration, drawn by Carolina Camblor Muñoz.

In the rubber plantations

Old Spanish cities, and later Peruvian ones, such as Yurimaguas and Tarapoto, were vital to the beginnings of the rubber industry around 1881. From there, Casa Arana organized its patronages, debts, and permits and planned the exploitation of the jungle downstream, towards the east, to the city of Iquitos, where it set up its main offices in 1889. From that area, the company extended its influence upriver, along the Putumayo basin, preying on "the center's peoples" —Muruyes, Huitotos, and Muinanes, among others— along its way until it crossed the imprecise Colombian national border. At that point, binational frictions arose, culminating in the 1932 war between the two countries.

However, Casa Arana did not extend its dominion far enough up the Putumayo to subjugate the western Tucano, who largely remained free from the experience of indebtedness and habilitation. Colombian rubber tappers did not engage in the massive and systematic forced labor that radiated out from places like Iquitos or Tarapoto. In the yajé zone, the Colombian Casa Reyes established comparatively friendly indigenous labor policies (Gómez, 2006; Reyes, 1986). Western Tucano has firsthand accounts of the rubber holocaust from fleeing survivors and from groups kidnapped on upriver slave expeditions, but they did not experience it themselves (Langdon, 2014).

Along the Putumayo River and up to the Colombian-Peruvian border area, the Colombian State also undertook, through Franciscan missionaries, an explicit task of protecting the Indians (Kuan, 2013; Mongua, 2020). In the war against Peru in 1932, there was also a nationalist identification of the Colombian Indigenous people, who participated in the conflict by collaborating with their country's army.

While the Colombian rubber plantations contrast the Peruvian ones in their scope and methods, both industries have a national character. The respective armies played roles that were, so to speak, reversed. Peruvian soldiers even crushed revolts by the Muruyes Indians, who rose in arms against the Casa Arana on the Colombian side (Pineda, 1989) in an ambiguous border zone where clear lines only appeared after the war.

Here, too, we can establish a contrast similar to that of the previous section. In the cradle of ayahuasca vegetalism, there is much more of a history of subjugation and forced labor, from the encomiendas to the times of Casa Arana. On the other hand, in the area of the yajé cult, experiences such as Jesuit cosmopolitanism, the multiethnic melting pot, and indebtedness or habilitation did not unfold, and if they did, it was only in a more indirect, tenuous, or belated way. Below, we will examine how these historical differences could be expressed in the ideologies and horizons of the meanings of ayahuasca shamanism and the yajé cult.

Yagé and ayahuasca: Ideologies and horizons of meaning

Consider Gow's hypothesis: In Maynas, the spatial configuration of the Spanish foundations —cities and missions) is presented in three concentric circles. From the inside out, successively, there is a central space occupied by whites, the Church and, later, the bank and the rubber-processing office; then, an intermediate zone inhabited by the Christian or mestizo Indians from the urban periphery; and finally, a virtually infinite exterior area, where the beings and things from the jungle depths were located, and the pagan Indians resided, who were also called, both in Maynas and Sucumbíos, "Aucas," or enemies.

In his text, Gow (1994) notes that the Church, situated at the center, carried out the salvation of the soul but not of the body, as it repeatedly failed in the task and was powerless in the face of epidemics. The rubber-mining office, in turn, performed the magic of capital; it established a connection with the international market that allowed converting, according to an inexplicable whim, the infinite resources of nature into constant and resounding riches.

Thus, the beings and elements that existed in the mountains and the jungle depths —from rubber in the 19th century to hides and wood in the 20th century— were, in themselves, indifferent (Gow, 1994, p. 102); only capital could give them meaning and movement in this world order, that of the mestizos. The salvation of the spirit and the formation of wealth into capital were attributes or functions of white men, in which Indians and mestizos did not participate or, if they did, did only as helpers and thanks to their position as intermediaries between the central circle and the outside. Vegetalism or mestizo ayahuasca shamanism as an ideological formation, then, and always according to Gow, reflects and complements these power relations, which operated above all on a horizontal plane, in the mediation between the central square and the outside carried out by Christian, generic or mestizo Indians.

Mestizo ayahuasca shamanism, Gow continues —and it is necessary to see all this in detail to arrive at the conclusions that will be presented later—, from its roots, is conceived as a way of healing the body, as a secular medicine, a task in which the missionaries failed during the epidemics. Moreover, the salvation of the soul in this ideology is either not possible or is of no interest, and the power of the ayahuasca practitioner unfolds on a horizontal social plane from the urban center to the depths of the jungle. Its healing art is not concerned with the vertical journey along the plane that unites heaven and hell, to which only the missionary has access. For his part, the white man, according to Gow (1994, p. 97), does not play any vital role in the shamanic imaginary of ayahuasca, and the protagonists of the representation made are, on the one hand, the Christian or mestizo Indian and, on the other, the infidel Auca.

Just as nature's resources —resins, skins, wood— were transformed into riches thanks to the capricious and incomprehensible magic of capital, in the same way, the spirits from the depths of the jungle can produce evils and illnesses capriciously and randomly, or at the temporary service of some witch. Duly domesticated, attracted, and "amansadas" —a native Spanish term that Gow will emphasize— by the ayahuasquero, these entities can be induced to cure those they have previously made ill (Gow, 1994, p. 95-97). These ideas, prevalent throughout the region, are also present among yajé practitioners; the western Tucano, Siona, or Secoya yageceros, for example, can call and use the Watí spirits —who inhabit the jungle in a multitude of varieties, causing random illnesses— to perform their cures and curses (Cipolletti and Payaguaje, 2008; Langdon, 2014).

It must be recognized that various authors draw many analogies. For example, Luna himself (1986) establishes these similarities between mestizo shamanism and Indigenous ayahuasca shamanism for the entire region, highlighting various elements, such as the substance of power, which is the "mariri" of the vegetalists, the "tsentsak" of the Shuar or the "dau" or "rau" —and he takes an example from the yajé area— of the Siona and Secoya, among others. He also mentions the character and nature of the auxiliary spirits, or the recognized shamanic specialties (also listed by Chaumeil, 1988), of darts, for example, or of underwater domains and routes, among others. In effect, the presence of a macroregional ideology, typical of the northwestern Amazon, is stated.

It is worth noting, however, that the focus of indigenous shamanism with psychotropics would have revolved around other substances before cultural mixing —such as toé— and the uses of ayahuasca, which are certainly known, would have been more related to war, hunting and collective rites of passage and initiation (Calavia, 2014) than to the forms of healing found in ayahuasca shamanism and registered in ethnographic studies in the

20th century. In this sense, what Shepard (2015) relates regarding the traditional use of ayahuasca among the Matsigenka of the Manu River in Madre de Dios, Peru, an area to the south and outside of those considered here, is very instructive (figure 2). In this region, there is a clear example of an ancient use that has remained outside the influence of cultural mixing, to which Gow attributes the origin of the yajé cult and ayahuasca shamanism, with some important differences to consider.

In the world of yajé, as Taussig (2021) shows, the representation of power occurs as the work of some Christian Indians who, rather than taming the beings from the depths of the jungle, summon them to a situation of ambiguity. In this case, the pagan and wild side is implied as precariously appeased to those present —the yajecero could turn into a tiger, a boa, or something else at any moment or get carried away or possessed by what Cipolletti called "the fascination of evil."

By shifting the discourse, it is possible to capture the spirits from the jungle depths, who, in Maynas and Sucumbíos, are the agents of illness and healing. The Aucas are considered in the same sense, also called, and depending on the area, pagans, savages, infidels, invisibles, enemies, and uncivilized; they are free-living Indigenous people who have not been reduced or baptized, which in vast regions also implies they do not use salt or know of it.

In the theories about illness and healing, these human and non-human beings from the forests and jungle depths occupy central roles. This centrality is manifested, for Gow (1994), in the fact that the mestizo ayahuasqueros refer to the jungle Indians as sources of power, not because the shamanic training is ordered in this way —since the opposite occurs, power comes from the cities, or the banks' inhabitants downriver, as many authors have mentioned and Brabec de Mori recently demonstrated for Ucayali—, but because these individuals embody or represent those infinite riches that the ayahuasqueros, mediators between the jungle and the city, know how to attract, *tame* and use.

Taussig (2021) also captures the role of these beings. According to this author's observations, the yajeceros obtain from their ambiguous dealings with the Aucas or Invisibles a power capable of frightening and curing the mestizo settlers and the whites who consult them and are prisoners of their very own colonial fantasies while fearing the wild realities of the jungle depths.

However, the most notable difference, and one worth dwelling on, is that in the yajé cult, a vertical plane is deployed connecting heaven and hell. To that extent, the yajecero can —or is called to— traverse that space interacting with God and the Devil, achieving that which the ayahuasquero cannot provide, according to Gow: the soul's salvation.

A vertical journey

We will now address the main difference between ayahuasca shamanism and the yajé cult: the distinctive ability of the yageceros —and which is especially notable among some western Tucano groups, such as the Siona of Putumayo, due to their degree of elaboration and historical depth— to travel the vertical plane that connects heaven and hell.

"Appropriation," "allegory," or "mimesis" are some of the terms used to describe the staging of the Catholic sacraments by Yagecero taitas, recorded since the end of the 19th century by chroniclers and ethnologists. Around 1890, it was possible to find them in the Putumayo's tributaries, in the Mecayá and Senseyá rivers, an area of Macaguaje Indians, independently celebrating baptisms and marriages (Gómez, 2006). Notably, Lopes de Carvalho (2016) points out that in the Maynas missions, which include foundations on the Napo River, and some earlier ones, such as those of Father Ferrer, at the beginning of the 17th century (1602) in the rivers of Sucumbíos, the Jesuits annually appointed "fiscals of Christian doctrine" among the Indians, and these were in charge of imparting the sacraments of baptism, confession and marriage during the priest's long absences.

The ethnographer and Capuchin missionary Plácido de Calella describes the activities of the Siona yageceros during the worship sessions as follows:

> The Curaca, in these meetings, goes up to heaven and asks permission to enter; they give him a lovely new dress, and they bring him into the presence of "Diosü" [God], but he cannot get too close to him; he speaks to him from a certain distance. And Diosü tells him his will, his desires, what he must say to the people. He also makes visits to hell. Supaí, the Uattí or main devil, makes him see everything. You need to be a very good Curaca or taker to penetrate the deepest depths of hell because you risk not knowing how to get out of there and staying there […] The Curaca sometimes does like the Father when he celebrates mass: he imitates the genuflections and even the words. There comes a moment when he disappears; he goes to heaven. The people no longer see him but hear him as if speaking in the air. He is in

> communication with Diosü. Afterward, he returns and tells us what he has seen and heard. He speaks of heaven, saying no one can imagine how beautiful it is, especially Diosü's throne or chair, all made of gold (De Calella, 1940, p. 747).

Milcíades Chaves, a Colombian ethnographer, interviewed the Yajecero taita Arsenio Yaiguaje, the last Curaca of the Buenavista village, around 1945. He recounted that on the night of his initiation, he had been with the Yaje people and with God and that in his visions, they had shown him "a large and beautiful church, and he entered it to see the ceremony of how people should be treated" (Chaves, 1958, p. 132).

It should be added that, around 2014, during fieldwork by this article's author, among these same Siona, the Indigenous people shared current stories about visits by the yajeceros to the house of God and disputes with the Devil over the fate of the soul of a seriously ill person. A testimony of this last case was provided by its protagonist: an adult Siona woman who had gone to her distant relatives of the Cofán ethnic group to get cured of an inexplicable state of consumption. At night, during *the taking of the remedy* —or yajé ceremony—, her soul appeared to one of the Cofán yageceros in a vision —or "pinta"— as a parrot inside a cage held by the Devil, which the yajecero was unable to reach, despite his efforts. They had to drink yajé again the following night to continue disputing the parrot with the Devil and finally managed to break it free. In the middle of the task, the face of a Siona yagecero and the sick woman's neighbor appeared to them. He had attacked her out of envy at the success of her husband, who was also a yagecero, in attracting clients. After this healing, the woman, who recounted the events almost a decade after they had happened, recovered her health.

In such cases, the functions of saving the soul and healing the body are united. These two purposes appear separate in ayahuasca shamanism and are absent in specific ethnic shamanisms such as Harner's Shuar, Chaumeil's Yagua, and Brabec de Mori's Shipibo, among others.

In the city of Sibundoy, at the headwaters of the Putumayo, still in the Andes —at the western end of the traditional yajé complex— a Kamzá taita described the exorcisms he had performed in one of the houses in the city at the request of its owner, who was tired of the paranormal manifestations that occurred there: the house was haunted. One night, the taita went with his assistant to drink yajé at the house in the presence of the family, who did not consume the drink. However, after the third sip, everyone saw small animated human figures emerge from under the boards and from the soil in the flowerpots of the indoor plants, which had been planted there with malevolent intentions.

That night's work was especially difficult, and the neighbors would comment for several days on the noises and lights that had appeared from inside that house throughout the night. He had to drink seven large cups full of yajé until dawn to finally see that it was the Devil himself who was possessing the place and effectively expel him. The taita proudly described this case in his large house, converted into a medical office, on whose walls hung several framed photographs showing him in the jungle, together with his teachers from the lowlands —Sionas and Cofáns— during his apprenticeship years.

It was precisely from Sibundoy that the Franciscans —Catalan Capuchin missionaries— organized the last and most successful cycle of missions, starting in 1896. This cycle resulted in the opening of land roads to the lowlands and the founding of Puerto Asís around 1912, among other things.

Decades later, the opening of roads around the oil industry and the Colombian armed conflict in the Sierra would make the Franciscan project of assimilation and civilization definitive towards the middle of the 20th century. It was not until 1960 that nomadic life ended for the Siona of Putumayo, and it was precisely at this time that the office of chief Curaca disappeared, a type of leadership that combined the main shaman and the local political leader in a single person (Langdon, 2014).

In the Tucano narratives collected, translated, and studied by Langdon over the last half-century, as well as in native discourses known firsthand in 2014, mentions of missionaries and beings from the Catholic pantheon, such as God, the Virgin or the Devil, are a frequent part of ubiquitous imagery that permeates dreams and yajé visions (Langdon, 1999). The figure of the missionaries is prominent and reveals a dense, ancient, and complex relationship. For example, good and bad priests are clearly distinguished, and the latter are often punished by death for witchcraft or by direct physical violence.

A case that illustrates the above is that of a missionary who went mad and, feverish, drowned in the river after being bewitched by several taitas yageceros during

Sunday mass, which they had attended in the front row wearing their feather crowns, in revenge for the priest's bad habit of insisting on shutting himself up alone with the prettiest young women to teach them the Bible. This story, told to the author by taita Juan Yaiguaje, from Mocoa, is set, like most of them, in "the time of the grandparents."

Likewise, among the images of Siona cosmography that Taussig (2021) took from Langdon, there are representations of the heavens visited by the Curaca during his ecstatic and initiation journeys. Thus, there are places such as the House of God (De Calella, 1940; Chaves, 1958; Langdon, 2014) and visions of the Virgin Mary, who breastfeeds the yajecero when he is reborn after going through death during an initiation experience with yajé.

Contrasting these and other accounts, Taussig (2021) goes so far as to propose a hermeneutics of pintas, where the settler's and the mestizo's imaginary are distinguished from that of the indigenous, each reflecting images that respond to different historical experiences and only partially communicate with each other. The settlers and mestizos, that is, the clients of the Indigenous yageceros in the foothills, find in their visions the cannibalistic hells that colonization has projected on the depths of the jungle, and which it has concretized through extreme experiences such as the rubber holocaust. The yageceros, for their part, see God, let themselves be nursed by the Virgin, receive batons of command in heaven, and even participate in the Colombian army (Taussig, 2021), which they have seen perform in the war against the Peruvians, and through whose weapons they carry out their operations on the spiritual side of reality. From this initially irreconcilable superposition, of which the Yage master is nevertheless aware, and on which he manages to balance and operate, Taussig deduces the need to challenge the academic concepts of shamanism and ritual, a debate tangential to this work and which will not be addressed for now.

Another crucial difference is that the Indigenous people of Putumayo, and especially those of the lower foot of the mountain, the western Tucano, claim they are or at have been —or their neighbors or immediate acquaintances— are "the owners of the yajé," because they have preserved a knowledge that was previously shared, as some Siona claim today, about the Cofan: power circulates and is managed among them, and although there are trips to obtain knowledge from other parts, it mainly comes from their own source, from their heritage. A similar awareness has been noted among the Secoya, for example, by Cipolletti and Payaguaje (2008).

It is important to mention here that the cult or complex of yajé includes several peoples, such as the already mentioned Siona, Secoya, Coreguaje, Cofán, and Kamzá, as well as the Inga and others, who migrated during the 20th century and have been integrated into this ensemble. Of the classics just mentioned, the first three are western Tucano; the next two are Chibchas, and the last is Quichua (Langdon, 1981). In this complex's study, carried out mainly by Langdon and Taussig, it has been established that power and knowledge are transmitted from the lowland groups to those of the highlands —Inga and Kamzá.

Unfortunately, a musicology of the Yajé culture has never been carried out to date, but after having lived in the area, participated several times in ceremonies led by teachers from all these ethnic groups, and read all the available material, the impression remains that the matrix of the Yajé songs is some western Tucano language, with Cofan elements, in a similar way to how the ayahuasca icaros come from the Quichua language.

In a map published by Chaumeil (1988), where several ethnic groups appear to be associated with some "shamanic specialty," the Siona are pointed out, without further comment, as the "owners of yajé." Among the mestizos of what was once Maynas, and even among the Indigenous people there, the masters or owners are always others; knowledge and power come from elsewhere: in the discourses of the vegetalistas, from the depths of the jungle, and in those of the Shipibo, Shuar or Piro peoples, among others downriver, or even from the cities.

The place of war and hunting in the yajé complex

Another significant difference between ayahuasca shamanism and yajé concerns war magic, fishing and hunting, and other functions related to forest life, such as climate manipulation, soil fertility, and human site selection, among others. These fields of activity are also found, as is known, among all the ayahuasca peoples of the Maynas area but do not appear integrated into the use of ayahuasca, as is very clearly the case with yajé.

Apparently, only in the yajé area, and especially among the lowland groups (Siona, Secoya, Coreguaje, Cofán), these tasks mentioned are integrated and subsumed in

the ancient element of the yajé cult. As Vickers (1976) observed for the Secoya of Ecuador:

> The logic or "science" of Siona-Secoya thought is based on the cult of yajé […] The yajé complex is closely linked to the ecological subsistence of the Siona-Secoya, as it influences demographic patterns of land use through concepts related to sexuality, population policy, the etiology of disease, and the supernatural control of environmental resources (p. 165).

In particular, the functions related to the regulation of environmental resources and ecology are still alive today as memory and even as occasional social practice. For the Siona of Putumayo, a good part of political activity consists of recreating or staging long-abandoned traditional and jungle ways of life in line with the identity politics promoted by Anglo-Saxon NGOs and the indigenist agencies of the Colombian State.

With curiosity, doubts, and speculative interest, young and old, male and female, often engage in philosophical inquiry into the abilities and powers of their last Curacas, who disappeared half a century ago but of whom they still retain a vivid and detailed memory. The relationship between the practice of the cult and the activities of the ancient indigenous economy, such as hunting, fishing, and climate control, is sometimes evoked and recreated spectacularly during the yajé sessions.

The stories and memories of these activities, as they were practiced in the past, are present among the oldest, and from time to time, during a medicine intake, the most experienced yageceros see and sing the markings of a particular hunting animal. In one case, witnessed by the author, the animals seen and invoked aloud in the night through the yajé songs did indeed appear in the village center the next day, where some men went out to hunt them, interrupting a political meeting. The event was talked about for weeks, and the same taita who took part in it recounted it with pride.

This paper is not the place to discuss these examples in detail, but the same can be observed concerning the manipulation of atmospheric climate and fishing. Thus, all these conscious and intentional recreations and stagings of ancient life undoubtedly constitute activities that have the value of truth for most of those involved.

There is also a memory among the Siona of the last intertribal wars. In this way, for example, the exact places where the last battles with other groups —such as the Chufí Bain or Chufí people— occurred at the beginning of the 20th century are pointed out. In these evocations, yajé also plays a vital role as a facilitator of success, both in the prior preparation of the warriors and in the yageceros' role in the course of the action itself.

To these practices evoking warrior life, a whole series of political functions are added, without interruption and in an organic manner, possibly derived from the ancient forms of local leadership associated with the management of yajé (Langdon, 2014). Today, this preparation is used to promote success in political negotiations with government agencies, in Indigenous projects, and by the legal and illegal armed forces that swarm in that part of Colombia (Carrizosa, 2015; Musalem, 2016). Before joining a political demonstration or an important meeting with state authorities, those involved take yajé to consult and obtain a forecast about the event and the convenience of participating (Musalem, 2016). None of these political attributions, ancient around the yajé cult, are developed in the ayahuasca shamanism of Peru.

Returning to this work's main argument, and as an exception to what has just been stated, it should be noted that among the Quichua, as documented by authors such as Whitten & Whitten (2008), the functions of jungle life —garden magic, hunting, and others— appear integrated into shamanism with ayahuasca. This unification is neither recent nor superficial: its density is reflected in a series of cosmological inquiries and openings.

This data is also consistent with the notion, already discussed, that the wide interfluve between the Putumayo and the Napo (Figure 2), where western Quichua and Tucano groups coexist, is the place from which knowledge of the use of these native drinks would have radiated to other regions (Brabec de Mori, 2011a,b; Highpine, 2014). In this way, the mestizo world of ayahuasca shamanism and vegetalism would be formed to the south and the yajé cult to the north and west.

As a preliminary hypothesis, it could be postulated that the greater the distance from this vast and hypothetical nucleus of radiation that would be the Napo-Putumayo interfluve, the weaker or non-existent the integration between the magics of hunting, gardening, war, and others, concerning the use of ayahuasca. On the contrary, as one approaches this central axis, they will be seen to be increasingly aggregated, as occurs precisely between the Naporunas and the western Tucano groups, where

the relationship between the use of the drink and these different functions is more organic and complete.

Thus, and in this order of ideas, among the Shipibo of Brabec de Mori (2011a), among the Yagua of Chaumeil (1983), or among the Shuar of Harner (1972), to name a few, the magical control of war, gardening or hunting appear as activities less integrated with the use of ayahuasca. Instead, and just like in vegetalism, this drink manifests itself above all as a medical or witchcraft activity.

Ideas about diffusion

As already mentioned, in the field of ayahuasca (Peru and Ecuador), power is transmitted from north to south, as in the gradient suggested by Callicot (2020, p. 111) based on the ancient periodic visits of the Quichuas of Lamas to the Napo. In the same sense, one can consider what was documented by Brabec de Mori (2011a and b) among the Shipibo, where knowledge and learning trajectories reveal a downstream gradient (i.e., power comes from downriver) along the Ucayali. These phenomena are similar to those that caught the attention of Gow (1994) among the Piro and to the observations of Harner (1972) among the Shuar, who also indicate that learning comes from the north, towards where the Quichua canelos or quijos, the teachers of the Shuar, are.

The same thing happens, according to Gow, from urban centers to rural areas. However, in this case, it is necessary to take into consideration a dynamic of urban-rural circulation such as that described in Callicot between Lamas, Sisa, Yurimaguas, Tarapoto and their surroundings, and in Luna (1986) between Iquitos or Pucallpa and their respective peripheries. Specifically in Maynas, this image is presented where the Indians who were auxiliaries of colonization, evangelization, and trade articulated an incipient urban fabric, composed of cities and missions, with the depths of the jungle, whose contents were variable and mobile in what had to do with the resources that were extracted from them and with the native groups that inhabited them. These new cities were organized in concentric circles, re-emerging where a foundation occurred and lasted as long as it lasted.

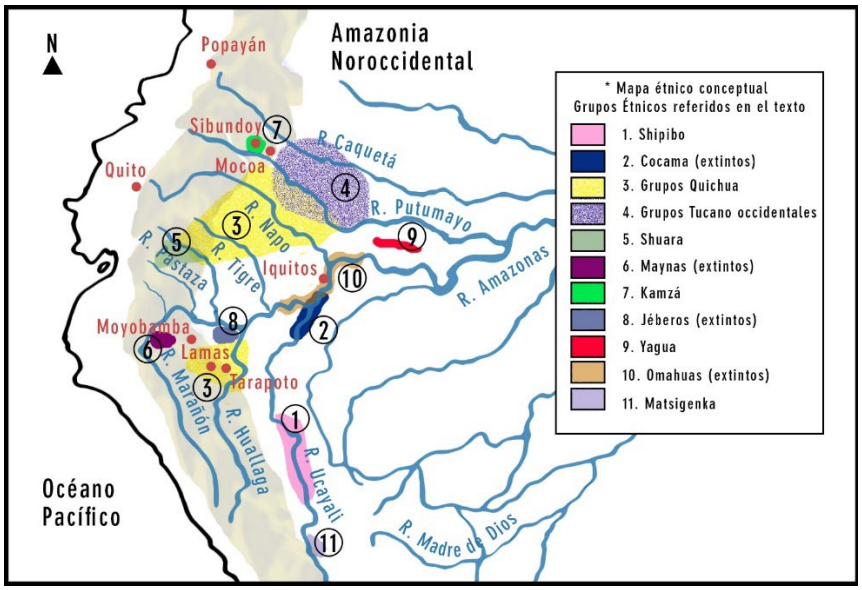
Within these circulations, fleeing from slavers and the contagion of plagues, escaping from the missions, taking prisoners, or being captured in Jesuit military raids to be subdued again, the Indians, progressively Christian, passed through the multiethnic melting pot and progressively mestizo, developed or represented a way of taming the Aucas that is, in addition, a technique of healing the body and a way of occupying subordinate symbolic spaces, opened by the advent and centrality of Catholicism. Creation occurred where this activity was most intense, on the banks of the great rivers and in the neighborhoods of the missions and the incipient cities. At the extremes, for example, towards the south or inland, regions where this whole dynamic was less intense and more distant, knowledge and use of ayahuasca is no more than half a century old, and there are cases of complete ignorance in this regard (Brabec de Mori, 2011b; Shepard, 2015).

Brabec de Mori, studying the icaros or ayahuasca songs, establishes that, with little room for doubt, they are Quichua musical elaborations, which also radiated from the areas inhabited by this indigenous people around the Napo River in present-day Ecuador, where they are found in greater richness and variety, and from there towards the south. A map of diffusion is then drawn in which the Quichua —Quijos, Naporunas, and Lamistas, among others— of Ecuador and Peru play a crucial role, showing a profile of dense and developed ayahuasca use, comparable in several aspects —for example, in the presence of fishing and hunting magic, among others— to that which is manifested among the lowland groups — western Tucano and Cofan, above all— in the area of the yajé cult.

In closing, the contrast between yajé and ayahuasca, which has been the focus of this work, will be observed from some additional aspects. This comparison will be presented as complementary ethnographic notes based on fieldwork experiences and referring more to the ethnographic present.

Figure 2.

Indigenous groups mentioned in this text and their approximate positions in the area studied.



Source: Own elaboration, drawn by Carolina Camblor Muñoz.

Notes on shamanic training

When the ayahuasquero is training or is going to cure another person —another person who can then, typically, train himself as an ayahuasquero, configuring a characteristic trajectory of vegetalism, where a patient is cured and, while doing so, usually becomes a disciple, and after a few years, if he deserves it, he becomes a master— the body of the subject —patient, disciple or master— must be assimilated to a vegetable and smell like a plant. Retreating physically to the depths of the jungle, at critical moments of the healing/training, he will have to feed himself with a special diet that will make him lose the human smell so that the spirits of the depths, capricious owners of health and illness, can access the communication sought.

In addition, the ayahuasquero will orient himself metaphorically toward the jungle depths each time he carries out his practice through the ícaros directed at the plants. Ayahuasca shamanism is, above all, about singing to them and seeing the plant spirits in them. It is also about domesticating and taming the beings of this area. This orientation to appease is evident in the character of the music, in the melodic forms of the ícaros, and even in the tones of voice that the ayahuasqueros use. Their intention to appease them becomes evident in their verbal games during worship nights.

On this side of musicology —so well developed for the vegetalist zone by Brabec de Mori (2011a), through a thesis that still remains confined to the German language— we are not even close to having a similar record regarding the rich sound world of yajé. However, the aesthetic difference is so evident for those who have participated in both varieties of the cult —that of yajé and vegetalism— that it is not fanciful to think that, perhaps, the comparison in this area would be the one that would most easily produce the impression, which this text has sought to substantiate, that these are two cultural manifestations —yajé and ayahuasca— well differentiated in ideological terms.

Today, however, there are samples of both musical worlds on the Internet, and anyone interested can easily compare and form their own impression. It seems that the verbal and musical art of yajé contains a more hermetic esoteric element, and its orientation is more warlike and geographical, with songs that mention specific territorial landmarks.

The Siona also speak of "the people" who live inside the plants. However, other kinds of entities —the yajé, who live in the sky— are the most important for advancing on the path of knowledge and power in processes of interaction with beings from the cosmos that authors such as Langdon (2014) for the Siona and Cipolletti and

Payaguaje (2008) for the Secoya, have studied and detailed for decades. Perhaps even the very impossibility of carrying out a musicology of yajé —despite the richness and variety of its contemporary expressions— speaks of the more bellicose nature of its practitioners: in the field, there were repeated refusals to make recordings that, without a doubt —and as occurred with others who did make them—, would later have been a source of endless disputes, quarrels, and gossip. One of the yageceros was categorical: to have the songs, you must learn them by practicing and drinking yajé. On the other hand, the study of the Icari has been undertaken more than once with success, the most notable case being that of Brabec de Mori (2011a).

Although the intimate relationship with vegetation —retreat to the depths, solitude, diet, acquiring a fibrous, vegetal-like consistency in one's own flesh, and impregnating one's body with the juices of the plants— is also basic in the yageceros formation stories and other classic prescriptions are shared with the vegetalists, such as that of long sexual abstinence, the trajectories of learning in yajé refer to much more than an individual circumstance. The ideal learning stories frequently involve a child or adolescent's early and close relationship with a close relative who is already an accomplished yagecero, ideally the father. Going back to older times, it is clear that the tribe's ideal was that every male would learn as much as possible about the craft of the cult. This situation presents a marked contrast with ayahuasca shamanism, where the normal thing in the tradition is that only the ayahuasquero uses the drink.

Notes on the ethnographic present

If only briefly, one can see the shapes of the ritual as they are presented today, despite —and through— the destructive pathos of shamanic tourism. Both scenes —the yajé and the ayahuasca— occur at night, a fact often attributed in the literature to a physiological convenience to facilitate visions, as well as to a need to hide the activity from daylight, that is, from public space and scrutiny. The analogy with the Catholic mass has also been raised several times: a sacrament involving a sacred drink and the ceremony of its ingestion, as in the Catholic communion ritual.

In the yajé cult, the similarity with the Catholic religion is even more noticeable: it is not uncommon for the yagecero to recite the Holy Father prayer, utter other formulas alluding to the Catholic pantheon, and make the sign of the cross over the drink before distributing it, or over those present when they are going to be cleaned and cured. On the other hand, once the drink has been consecrated and distributed, in vegetalism, the meeting is usually limited to the orderly deployment of icaros by the master or masters who guide the session in complete darkness while the participants remain seated with their backs straight, in the same position, and often with a bucket or basin within reach, to perform, when appropriate, the oral purge.

In the yajé cult, not only do the yageceros sing, but anyone who wants to join in can do so. You can distinguish leading voices, choirs, and spontaneous entrances by musicians who play the harmonica without using their voices. There is a sense of relaxation and openness in the yajé evenings expressed through conversations that, between periods of singing, can sometimes extend for hours until almost becoming the main activity. These dialogues fall on a great variety of topics and go through stages of humorous and jocose routines where explicit mockery referring to the bodily manifestations of the purge among those present is not infrequent. On the other hand, in the practice of vegetalism, none of this has been seen to take place.

Finally, in yajé, candles are commonly lit throughout the night. It is also usual for those present to attend the ceremony lying in their hammocks, tied to the house's crossbars under an implicit and shared order that assembles a human group that rarely emulates a circle.

Conclusions

In conclusion, it can be pointed out that the two cultural manifestations studied —vegetalism or ayahuasca shamanism and the yajé cult— respond to two different histories of contact and colonization, synthesized in two critical moments of the colonial relationship, which are the missions —Jesuit and Franciscan, respectively— and the rubber plantations. In the case of the Jesuit mission, this was accompanied, in Maynas, by a civil and military deployment unknown in Sucumbíos. Where the Indigenous people were decimated and politically subjugated, and where the religious were able to impose a stricter dominion, dismantling the native political forms, a shamanic form of popular medicine centered on ayahuasca emerged —vegetalism—, elaborated in an incipient urban and mestizo environment, and which seems to acquire full form and meaning in the relationship between mestizos and wild Indians, during

the expansive process of proletarianization and indebtedness of the rubber era.

The yajé cult, for its part, is presented by the western Tucano as the product of an indigenous world that preserved its independence and freer and more warlike ways of life until well into the 20th century. This tradition integrates elements of ancient Indigenous shamanism linked, on the one hand, to the esoteric regulation of forest life and, on the other, to the cosmopolitan experience of the mission and the proletarianization of rubber. In this context, the Tucano successfully appropriated the powers of the priests.

However, much remains to be said about how these practices —vegetalism or ayahuasca shamanism and the yajé cult— moved, around the last quarter of the 20th century, towards worlds foreign to their original Amazonian contexts. To that extent, one could evaluate how these rites' Indigenous and Christian matrix was altered thanks to tourism and identity politics, to "new age" and global environmentalism, through which they have perhaps become something other than what they were during the last three centuries. This discussion, however, belongs elsewhere.

Declaration of ethical aspects

This review text has been based on literature known by the author, which is cited in detail according to academic usage. On the other hand, regarding the author's field work, it should be said that it was carried out between 2013 and 2014, with the support of the Plural Brazil Institute of the Federal University of Santa Catarina, within the framework of a doctorate in Social Anthropology. These activities were carried out in common agreement with the leaders of the Siona people who, in Mocoa, Puerto Asís, Buenavista, and other nearby places, opened the doors of their homes and organizations in exchange for a series of secretarial tasks for their projects with the Colombian Government, international agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These exchange experiences are detailed in Musalem (2016).

Author's contributions

Pedro Musalem Nazar: Research and writing.

Acknowledgments

To Jean Langdon for her work, support, and guidance over the years. To the Instituto Brasil Plural for financially supporting my fieldwork. To the Siona people for welcoming me and allowing me to participate in their daily and spiritual life. To Carolina Camblor for the maps and her flowers, especially one of them.

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