

'Dying at the hands of Grandmother Aya'

A complete participant observation of an Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony



Art by: Michael Jacobs, 'Ayahuasca Dream'

Author:

Mabel Mariëlle Brandenburg

s4080416

Advisor: Dr. Thomas Quartier

Paper submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for Ritual Laboratory 2014-2015,
at the Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious studies at
Radboud University Nijmegen, March 2015.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION	2
1.1 INTRODUCTION	2
1.2 CONTEXT, RELEVANCE AND PERSPECTIVE	2
1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS	3
1.4 METHODOLOGY	3
1.4.1 Research methods	3
1.4.1.1 Participant observation	4
1.4.1.2 My role as a researcher	4
1.4.2 Structure of the paper	5
CHAPTER 2 – GRANDMOTHER AYAHUASCA	6
2.1 INTRODUCTION	6
2.2 THE SUBSTANCE AND ORIGIN OF AYAHUASCA	6
2.3 WESTERN USE OF AYAHUASCA	7
CHAPTER 3 – CASE STUDY: RITUAL ACTS OF AN AYAHUASCA MEDICINE CEREMONY	8
3.1 INTRODUCTION	8
3.1.1 Disassembling rituals	8
3.2 PREPARATIONS	9
3.2.1 Schedule	9
3.2.2 Intent	9
3.2.3 La Dieta	10
3.3 AYAHUASCA MEDICINE CEREMONY	10
3.3.1 Circle work - intentions, breathing session and tobacco-juice	11
3.3.2 Preparing the brew	11
3.3.3 Drinking Ayahuasca	12
3.3.4 La Purga and La Limpia	13
3.3.5 Icaros	13
3.3.6 Temazcal	14
3.3.7 Being born, breath and body work, and healing	15
3.3.8 The blowpipe and dying at Aya's hands	15
3.3.9 Integration - sharing in circle, reflection and lessons learned	17
3.4 BREAKING THE FAST, OPENING THE CIRCLE	17
CHAPTER 4 – STRUCTURE AND MEANING	18
4.1 INTRODUCTION	18
4.2 STRUCTURE	18
4.2.1 Internal ritual structure	19
4.2.1.1 Liminality	20
4.2.2 External ritual structure	20
4.3 MEANING	21
4.3.1 Internal ritual meaning	22
4.3.2 External ritual meaning	23
CHAPTER 5 – CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION	24
5.1 INTRODUCTION	24
5.2 CONCLUSIONS ON QUESTIONS	24
5.3 ENDCONCLUSION	26
5.4 DISCUSSION	27
LITERATURE	28

Chapter 1 - INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Ayahuasca has been used in various traditional indigenous cultures of the Amazon regions in South America for ceremonies with healing and ritual aims.¹ The name ‘Grandmother Aya’ is often used to describe the spirit of this hallucinogenic plant potion. Ayahuasca-drinkers experience her as a wise teacher: a grandmother or healer from a higher spiritual dimension, and as an intelligence who provides guidance and loving, comforting, protective support.² In my experience, as well as that of most other ayahuasca-drinkers, comfort is not the first word that comes to mind to describe the whole experience of an *Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony*. In addition to the physical discomfort of what is known as ‘La Purga’ (see Chapter 3.3), the etymology of the name Ayahuasca tells us something about the ‘spiritual effects’ of drinking this potion. Ayahuasca derives from the indigenous Quechua language and translates to ‘vine of the dead’.³

1.2 Context, relevance and perspective

As well as its use by the indigenous people of the Amazon a number of religious, spiritual and cultural groups have integrated Ayahuasca into different non-indigenous cultural settings since the beginning of the twentieth century. Across the world it has taken on a contemporary syncretic context.⁴ Ayahuasca entered the globalizing world through Ayahuasca-tourism, neo-shamanism, its sacramental use by churches and online sales of the ingredients (see Chapter 2.3). It became necessary to address medical, judicial and religious questions surrounding Ayahuasca and its use. The significant confusion and contradiction considering the politics of (inter)national institutions dealing with Ayahuasca has meant that scientific studies are needed. In this way Ayahuasca has migrated into the Western world to become a subject of interdisciplinary scientific studies. Research is being performed in the fields of biology, psychology, religion and anthropology. In order to create a critical dialogue it is also necessary to study Ayahuasca from several societal perspectives like public health, drug-education and freedom of religion. Basic information on the substance and about the institutions, groups and individuals who use it is needed and discussion required on national and international terms.

I think it is important to increase understanding about Ayahuasca for the creation of local policies and to address the stigmatization of its users. This paper contributes by adding an inside perspective of a *participant observation*. Most anthropologists researched Ayahuasca at the place of origin. Like them, I returned to the field, but chose a different perspective

¹ Dobkin de Rios, M., Rumrill, R., *A Hallucinogenic Tea, Laced with Controversy: Ayahuasca in the Amazon and the United States* (Westport, Greenwood Press, 2008), p.24.

² Harris, R., Gurel, L., *A Study of Ayahuasca Use in North America*, *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, 44:3, (2012): p. 209-215, accessed March 19 2015, doi: 10.1080/02791072.2012.703100

³ Beyer, S.V., *Singing to the plants: a guide to mestizo shamanism in the upper Amazon* (Albuquerque, University of New Mexico, 2009), p. 208.

⁴ Seddon, M., *An anthropological analysis of ayahuasca: Healing Paradigmsm, Science and Spirituality* (bachelor thesis, La Trobe University, 2014), p. 22.

through conducting my research from a Western context. Instead of focusing on the participants, I focussed on studying the rituals from the ceremony itself. As well as a qualitative empirical description of the ritual acts of an *Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony* in The Netherlands, this paper also addresses the method of investigation used to obtain the acquired data (see Chapter 1.4) and will share parts of my personal experiences for the broader understanding of the use and purpose of Ayahuasca.

1.3 Research questions

The aim of this qualitative study is to gain a certain insight into the structure and meaning of an Ayahuasca ritual as experienced in the context of a Western participant in a postmodern society specifically The Netherlands. To obtain this inside perspective I participated in an *Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony* hosted by Angel⁵, from October 25th to 27th 2014 in the area of Zaanstad, The Netherlands. The ritual was lead by a shaman Juán from Ecuador and his pupil a Western teacher Angel (she teaches trance-dance, breath and body work and gives mental coaching, which she combines with massage-therapy and craniowork). My experience led me to formulate the main question addressed in this paper:

“What is the ritual structure and meaning of an *Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony* as experienced in the context of a Western participant in a postmodern society specifically The Netherlands?”

The associated research questions are divided into three sub-questions:

- 1. *What is Ayahuasca, where does it originate and how is it being used by Westerners?***
- 2. *Case study: Which ritual acts take place during a cross-cultural Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony as hosted by Angel?***
- 3. *What is the structure and meaning of the ritual acts that take place during an Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony hosted by Angel?***

1.4 Methodology

1.4.1 Research methods

Within Religious Studies, especially in the area of Anthropology of Religion, fieldwork plays an important role when it comes to the study of ritual. What distinguishes anthropology from other social sciences is its methods of investigation. The exact way fieldwork is conducted depends on the personal style, experience and unique background of the ethnographer and also on the nature of the research. The main methods I used to write this paper consist of a literature study and a complete participant observation (section 1.4.1.1). The goal of this type of qualitative research is to gain greater understanding of phenomena from the point of view of the researcher as a participant.

⁵ For privacy and legal reasons, I was asked by Angel not to mention the names of the shaman and of the organization which hosted the ceremony. The names of people and places used in this study are feigned, and revealing contextual information is omitted for ethical purposes.

1.4.1.1 Participant observation

Traditionally, a participant observation consisted of the immersion of the ethnographer in the everyday life of the culture being studied. In addition to the routine activities of social life, it also involves active participating in a wide range of extraordinary activities (like rituals) with people who are full participants in that context.⁶ A strong argument used by ethnographers to choose for this method is that asking questions would impose on the subjects an attitude outside of their ordinary praxis, by which the outcome of the investigation could be affected. However, the method also has been criticized for not being sufficiently objective because researchers are emotionally involved, which confines their ability to write analytically about the phenomena. When a researcher sheds the identity of investigator (*'going native'* or *'becoming the phenomena'*) and adopts the identity of a full participant in the culture, it is generally associated with a loss of analytic interest and often results in the inability of the researcher to publish his/her materials. Kathleen and Billy DeWalt mention in their book *'Participant Observation: A Guide for Fieldworkers'* a review of the work of several researchers using participant observation. The review shows that successful researchers have employed a wide variety of strategies that range between pure observation and full participation.⁷ James Spradley developed a typology to describe a continuum in the degree of participation of researchers.⁸ The categories seem to reflect the extent of participation associated with the degree to which an ethnographer becomes emotionally involved with a community. His categories range from *non-participation* to *passive participation*, *moderate participation*, *active participation* and finally *complete participation*. In complete participation the ethnographer is, or becomes, a member of the group that is being studied. It is important to note that this category is not the same as *'going native'*. With *complete participation* Spradley is referring to a temporary event in which the researcher suspends other roles in order to more fully integrate with the phenomenon, but continues to record observations in field notes and adopts an analytical stance at least partially during the research period and more completely after the period of participation.⁹

1.4.1.2 My role as a researcher

As mentioned above, for this paper I used the method of *complete participation* observation. This means that in addition to being a full participant of the Ayahuasca rituals, I made records and field notes during and after the rituals. Admittedly participating in the ritual did not simplify data collection, however it also did not decrease the quality of the data. I was able to take detailed notes of some of the ritual acts based on my audio-recordings and written notes after the ceremony. It is essential to mention that, in the case of Ayahuasca rituals *'visual observation'* can be problematic as the major part of the ritual is carried out in complete darkness. I recorded my notes between different stages of the ceremony due to this darkness and the physical and/or mental state I was in. In such cases

⁶ DeWalt, K.M., DeWalt, B.R., *Participant Observation: A Guide for Fieldworkers*, (Plymouth, Altamira Press, 2011), p.1.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁸ Spradley, J. P., *Participant Observation* (London: Thomson Learning Wadsworth, 1980), p. 58-62.

⁹ DeWalt, DeWalt, *Participant Observation*, p. 24.

other senses become more useful, empathy becomes central and the anthropologist ends up participating more than observing.¹⁰ It is true that we can never know another's experience (especially when it is mostly internally experienced, e.g., during trance, hallucinogenic visions or mystical experiences), but sharing a ritual space with them partaking in their experience, can facilitate the empathic process. It also provides access to ritual acts and sacred objects to which outsiders are otherwise not allowed.

In this paper the focus of the study is on the ceremony itself, rather than on the participants (and their experiences), who are the subjects in most anthropological studies of Ayahuasca. In order to gain full access to the ritual (and sacred objects), it was important for me to gain the trust of the shaman. This trust is necessary to obtain a complete insider's perspective. Shamans do not easily trust people who just attend a ceremony recording and taking notes. They do not think very highly of people who are not willing to partake in what they are doing, to them a researcher not having visions of his/her own shows a limited understanding of the nature of the shaman's work.¹¹ The methodology of complete participant observation opened up things for me, and enabled me to collect a great variety of data. It also reduced the problem of reactivity and people (both the shaman and participants), changing their behaviour when they know that they are being studied, and it allowed me to ask sensible questions.

1.4.2 Structure of this paper

To answer the main and sub-questions, I performed a literature study and collected data during a field research while attending an *Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony* in The Netherlands. To gain insight into the structure of this paper, I briefly set out the relationship between the research questions and the structure of my research. The main question is divided into a section about Ayahuasca in Chapter two, and in the form of a case study I present in Chapter three in a section about ritual acts of this *Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony*. Based on this case study, in Chapter four I offer my thoughts on the structure and meaning of the *Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony* in which I participated. Finally, in Chapter five, I will answer all the sub-questions, and formulate my final conclusion as an answer to the main question.

¹⁰ Fotiou, E., *From medicine men to day trippers: shamanic tourism in Iquitos, Peru* (Diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2010), p. 70.

¹¹ Ibid.

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I describe my literature study to Ayahuasca. It addresses the substance itself and the ingredients of which it consists. It then looks at the origins of Ayahuasca and the source of its name. Finally, I describe Western use of Ayahuasca. This chapter answers sub-question one:

“What is Ayahuasca, where does it originate and how is it being used by Westerners?”

2.2 The substance and origins of Ayahuasca

Like herbal tea, Ayahuasca is consumed in the form of a decoction. The mixture is prepared by boiling at least two different plants in water for several hours. The variety of plant mixtures for this brew is estimated to range between fifty-five to one hundred and twenty variations.¹² The main ingredient, a vine called *Banisteriopsis caapi* (B.caapi), is combined with other plants. The right amount of a correct combination of plants is crucial for producing the psychoactive effects. The second most important ingredient is *Psychotria viridis*¹³, a bush belonging in the Rubiaceae family, commonly referred to as Chacruna leaf. This leaf contains the active ingredient N, *N-dimethyltryptamine* (DMT). This alkaloid is responsible for the visions in the Ayahuasca experience. DMT by itself is not orally active. A *monoamine oxidase-A* (MAO-A) enzyme found in the stomach oxidizes DMT molecules and renders its psychoactive properties inactive.¹⁴ Therefore it needs to be administered with an MAO inhibitor. B. caapi contains harmine and other b-carboline alkaloids which are potent MAO inhibitors¹⁵, thus rendering DMT orally active.¹⁶ B. caapi is an indigenous vine in the western and northwestern Amazon. The exact place of origin is uncertain, but nowadays it is cultivated throughout the Amazon basin.¹⁷ Archaeological evidence of a drinking vessel of the Pastaza culture from Ecuador, hints that Ayahuasca use was well established in pre-Columbian times. This would date its use back to at least 2000 BC.¹⁸ The term Ayahuasca is derived from Quechua, the language of the Inca Empire, today spoken in parts of Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Chile, and Argentina.

¹² Beyer, *Singing to the plants*, p. 207.

¹³ Tupper, K.W., 2009b, *Entheogenic Healing: The Spiritual Effects and Therapeutic Potential of Ceremonial Ayahuasca Use*, in *The Healing Power of Spirituality: How Faith Helps Humans Thrive*, eds. JH Ellens, Praeger Publishing, Westport, p. 269.

¹⁴ Cavnar, C., 2011, 'The Effects of Participation in Ayahuasca Rituals on Gays' and Lesbians' Self Perception', PhD Thesis, Graduate School of Professional Psychology, Pleasant Hill, California, p. 11.

¹⁵ Fotiou, E., "One Heart"; Personal Insights into Spiritual Dimensions of Participations in Contemporary Ayahuasca Rituals, in *Seeking the Sacred with Psychoactive Substances: Chemical Paths to Spirituality and to God*, ed. JH Ellens, Praeger Publishing, Westport, p. 75.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Rátsch, C., *The Encyclopedia of Psychoactive Plants: Ethnopharmacology and Its Applications* (Rochester, VT: Park Street Press, 2005).

¹⁸ Fotiou, E., "One Heart", p. 74.

2.3 Western use of Ayahuasca

In addition to the use by indigenous people of the Amazon, a number of religious, spiritual and other cultural groups have integrated Ayahuasca into different non-indigenous cultural settings. In 1920 three different churches in Brazil (Barquinha, União do Vegetal and Santo Daime) incorporated the use of Ayahuasca as a religious sacrament.¹⁹ Two of these churches (Santo Daime and UDV) have branches in several countries in the world. Ritual consumption of Ayahuasca in these syncretic churches differs significantly from the tradition-based shamanic use.²⁰ In addition to the ritualistic aspects of their ceremony, such as singing and preaching, Ayahuasca is viewed as a ‘divine gift’ or ‘tool’ that opens people’s receptivity to the spirit world and facilitates their spiritual evolution.²¹ The global expansion of Ayahuasca use within the syncretic churches has led to legal implications and policy issues. The interest in the USA and in Europe for both religious and spiritual purposes of Ayahuasca has created a phenomenon known as drugs- or Ayahuasca-tourism.²² It is claimed that Westerners are coming to the Amazon looking for a psychedelic trip or are ‘purchasing mysticism’²³, but research shows that the range of motivations of participants varies from emotional healing, assistance with substance abuse to personal evolution and life direction.²⁴ In the hope of acquiring an authentic experience, people from postmodern Western countries travel to the Amazon in order to come in contact with original shamanic traditions. Conjointly Westerners are increasingly starting to learn to become healers or neo-shamans themselves²⁵, and bring ‘the medicine’ back home to share in their own spiritual rituals. This form of cross-cultural neo-shamanism, is based on tradition, but is carried out for and by non-Amazonians. Their ceremonies and healing practices often take on a hybridized form in non-Amazonian settings²⁶, and their contemporary rituals merge with several of their own traditions (like shamanic drum journeying, breath and bodywork, Buddhist Vipassana meditation and yoga²⁷). Next to ritual use in churches or by neo-shamans, Ayahuasca is also used in a non-ritual way. The term *psychonaut* is used by Ott²⁸ to describe a ‘voyager’ using entheogenic drugs as a vehicle for exploring consciousness. The psychoactive plants used can be purchased over the counter or online for home-brewing and consumption.²⁹ It is noteworthy however, that it isn’t easy to consume Ayahuasca without the help of ritual. Common effects such as the physical discomfort of ‘La Purga’, or the psychological distress that may be experienced, do tend to discourage casual experimentation.³⁰

¹⁹ Seddon, M., *An anthropological analysis of ayahuasca*, p. 22.

²⁰ Shanon, B., 2002, “*Ayahuasca Visualizations: A Structural Typology*”, *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2, p. 4

²¹ Barbosa, P.C.R., Cazorla, I.M., Giglio, J.S., Strassman, R., 2009, “*A Six-Month Prospective Evaluation of Personality Traits, Psychiatric Symptoms and Quality of Life in Ayahuasca-Naïve Subjects*”, *Journal of Psychiatric Drugs*, vol. 41, no. 3, p. 206

²² Fotiou, E., “*One heart*”, p.73.

²³ Dobkin de Rios, Rumrill, *A Hallucinogenic Tea*, p. 166.

²⁴ Winkelman, M., 2005, *Drug Tourism or Spiritual Healing? Ayahuasca Seekers in the Amazon*, *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, vol. 37, no. 2, p. 211.

²⁵ Seddon, M., *An anthropological analysis of ayahuasca*, p. 27

²⁶ Tupper, K.W., “*Ayahuasca, Entheogenic Education & Public Policy*”, (PhD Thesis, University of British Columbia, 2011) p.15.

²⁷ Metzner, R., *Sacred Vine of Spirits: Ayahuasca* (Vermont, Park Street Press, 2006), p. 36.

²⁸ Ott, J., *Ayahuasca analogues: Pangæan Entheogens* (Kennewick, Natural Products Company, 1994).

²⁹ Tupper, *Ayahuasca*, p.13.

³⁰ Tupper, K.W. 2008, “*The Globalization of Ayahuasca: Harm reduction or Benefit Maximization?*”, *International Journal of Drug Policy*, vol. 19, p. 299.

3.1 Introduction

In Chapter two, we looked into the origins of Ayahuasca and the ingredients of which it consists. Looking deeper we examine the methods of ritual preparation, brewing and consuming. In this chapter I will present the most significant ritual acts of the *Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony* in the form of a case study. First, the preparations are addressed, then I will examine various ritual acts like circle work, preparing and drinking Ayahuasca, La Purga, icaros, temazcal, the blowpipe, and some forms of integration are also discussed. In Chapter four, this summary will serve as a foundation on which we will consider the structure and meaning of the *Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony* as a whole. But above all, this chapter assists to answer sub-question two:

“Case study: Which ritual acts take place during an Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony?”

3.1.1 Disassembling rituals

Like anthropologist Anthony Wallace, I recognise that a ritual is a composite phenomenon. He proposed that rituals are made out of elementary particles, and suggests thirteen different activities: prayer, music/dancing/singing, physiological exercise, exhortation, myth, simulation/imitation, mana or power, taboo or restrictions, feasts, sacrifice, congregation, inspiration, symbolism and symbolic objects.³¹ Any actual ritual could contain any or all of these parts in any combination. In his book *The craft of ritual studies*, Ronald Grimes also writes about disassembling rituals (for artistic or scholarly reasons) into smaller units he calls ‘elements’. While this paper is applying this system of analysis, I want to emphasize that I agree with Grimes’ statement *“Like any whole -a person, a planet, or ecosystem- a ritual exceeds the sum of its parts.”*³² With that in mind, and knowing my research for this paper is limited by its scope, I have to focus on analysing parts of the *Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony* so it may be ‘completed’ by other studies. To put the ritual acts (as described below) in perspective, I wish to provide the hierarchical order of disassembling used in this paper:

1. When I refer to ‘the ritual as a whole’, I speak of the ‘*Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony*’.
2. When speaking of ‘ritual acts’, I refer to different ritual activities as parts of the whole ritual (e.g. ritual purification, preparing the brew or drinking Ayahuasca).
3. When I speak of ‘ritual elements’, I refer to smaller units of a ritual act (e.g. lighting incense to do a ritual purification).

Grimes states that *‘treating rituals as an abstracted whole often displaces detailed descriptions of actual ritual performances because the details can seem infinite, and accounts of them boring or bewildering’*. But he also adds that *‘this is an inadequate reason*

³¹ Eller, J.D., *Introducing anthropology of religion* (New York, Routledge, 2007), p.116.

³² Grimes, R.L., *The craft of ritual studies* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014) p.232.

for circumventing detailed and engaging descriptions'.³³ For this reason I want to offer a mixed genre of narration, description, but also reflection and theory in this paper. While reading other studies on Ayahuasca, I noticed they contained several similar ritual acts as the *Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony* that I participated in. The ritual acts I described below are chosen because they play key roles during most Ayahuasca Ceremonies, including the *Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony* hosted by Angel. They offer a form of 'cross cultural neo-shamanism, which is a ritualistic appropriation of Amazonian traditions. This provides a reconnection to spiritual healing practices, which appears to be emerging into Western consciousness.³⁴

3.2 Preparations – schedule, intent and La Dieta

3.2.1 Schedule

In preparation for the ceremony all participants received an email with information on intention, fasting and the necessities to bring. The email also contained a schedule of the events intended to take place during the weekend. The schedule was short and concise, making it easy to consign oneself to the order and pace of things;

“Schedule:

Arrive Saturday at around 16.00

Saturday and Sunday: Medicine Ceremony

Two nights of Medicine, starting at 20.00, integrated with a sweat lodge

End of retreat at around 16.00 on Monday afternoon

In between there will be various breath and body work”

Shaman Juán works with Ayahuasca as 'a medicine' and tends to focus on the healing properties. To him, the individual healing processes are just as important as the group dynamics. Therefore, the first night is dedicated to build trust and confidence, and will gently build-up. The ceremony is about using the medicine to extract something useful to enhance the daily life of participants.

3.2.2 Intent

In addition to practical information, the email stated: *“it is advisable to build your intent”*. To help participants give their 'journey' a direction, they were asked to contemplate on what it is that they would like to receive from the experience. They elucidated: *“Rather than an idea, a purpose is a call from the heart. It is about realizing the imbalance, and taking responsibility to recover it. The road towards the answer is not necessarily the one you would expect, so try not to build expectations. It will shape itself as you come closer to the weekend. Give yourself the best you have. It will help you in times that may be challenging”*.

Being a complete participant observer I, too needed to formulate an intention for my personal healing. I was still struggling with it, when two days before the ceremony I saw a dying young swan with its parents there providing comfort. I desperately tried to call the

³³ Grimes, The craft of ritual studies, p.64.

³⁴ Seddon, M., An anthropological analysis of ayahuasca, p. 28.

veterinarians, but none of them were available on short notice. Suddenly, I noticed its parents stretched their long necks gracefully high up in the air like they we're saluting or asking for help in doing what they had to do. There I stood trying to fight off death with a phone, while they were in acceptance. Surrendering to death, by drowning their own child. Humbled and in stillness, I witnessed the dying swan. In a raw and intense way, it was very beautiful; somehow it was like witnessing a birth. The swan provided me with an answer when pondering about which intent I wanted to work with during the ceremony, and I said to myself: *"My intention is to gain insight into the concept of death"*.

3.2.3 La Dieta

Known as 'La Dieta' (the diet) the shaman and the participants are to follow abstinences from foods such as salts, sugars and fats.³⁵ Indigenous users of Ayahuasca consider it extremely unwise and potentially dangerous to break this diet. Sexual activity is also prohibited, as it is claimed that the spirit of Ayahuasca can be jealous and breaking the diet may leave one unprotected and vulnerable to malevolent spirits.³⁶ While westerners do not really believe in such spirits, they are still motivated to adhere to the diet because the MAO-inhibitory effect requires adjusted nutrition. In addition, certain substances (like old cheese, tempeh and chocolate) can cause nausea or headaches and are therefore not advisable.

Juñan and Angel recommend the 'Amazonian diet' at least three days before and after the ceremony to deepen the journey and take better advantage of the purification process. They explain that an Amazonian diet brings purity and calmness to the mind, but also point out that *"you should keep your system pure by minding your thoughts, routines and the people and places you visit"*. The diet is not a rigid structure, but serves as a guideline. The rule of thumb is to keep it as pure and simple as possible. This means no meat, salt, fat, sugar or spices, and they advise to steam food, instead of frying or baking. Most fruits and vegetables are allowed, as are sourdough bread, brown rice, quinoa and white steamed fish. The participants are advised to drink lots of water to help detox their body, and to use sexual energy for their purpose or intention. Synthetic and recreational drugs can cause a counter-effect in combination with Ayahuasca. For this reason, Juñan strongly advises not to use any drugs or psychedelics at least one month before and after the ceremony.

3.3 Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony

The following summary of ritual acts are studied and described by means of 'thick description'. Opposed to a 'thin description', which is a factual account without any interpretation, a thick description of a human behaviour is one that explains not just the behaviour, but its context as well, such that the behaviour becomes meaningful to an outsider.³⁷

³⁵ Seddon, M., An anthropological analysis of ayahuasca, p. 17.

³⁶ Andritsky, W 1989, 'Sociopsychotherapeutic Functions of Ayahuasca Healing in Amazonia', Journal of Psychoactive Drugs, vol. 21, no. 1, p. 79.

³⁷ Geertz, Clifford. *Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture*. In *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.

3.3.1 Circle work – intentions, breathing session and tobacco-juice

After arriving participants started to prepare their beds, by placing sleeping mats and blankets in a big circle. The venue where the ceremony took place has a kitchen, two bathrooms, two large rooms to do ritual work, and a small forest behind it. None of the participants knew each other. There were 18 people of mixed gender and age (the youngest person was twenty-three and the oldest fifty-five years old), who live in The Netherlands, Belgium or France. It is custom to wear white clothes during Ayahuasca ceremonies, but everybody -including the shaman- was wearing normal comfortable clothes. Around five o'clock Juán, invited us to sit in a circle where they welcomed us and explained the schedule, and how to use tobacco-juice in order to immediately start at a deeper level of consciousness. Some people hesitated but before introducing themselves to the group everybody had experienced the effect of the tobacco-juice. Sniffing the brown poignant liquid brought me in a state of high concentration, but not before burning my nasal membranes causing a sharp sting for a short but intense moment. Then the sinuses and lungs cleared, and the nicotine and MAOI beta-carbolines started to produce a powerful rush and a sense of clarity, centeredness, a focused strength, and a mild trance. Tobacco-juice, also known as '*Mapacho-water*' after the indigenous name for '*Nicotiana rustica*', is a rainforest plant in the *Solanaceae* family.³⁸ This is a very potent variety of tobacco due to the high concentration of nicotine. The Mapacho leaves are soaked in hot water until the water is dark and strong. After cooling down a teaspoon is poured on the palm of the hand and sniffed up through the nose. Before sniffing the tobacco-juice, Angel emphasized the importance of building intent again and encouraged participants to formulate one even if it was still a bit vague to them. By publicly sharing the intention with the group, it would crystallize and solidify. Like the others I sniffed, sneezed and shared who I am and what my intentions for this ceremony were.

3.3.2 Preparing the brew

Participants did not have the opportunity to partake in the brewing; the preparing of the Ayahuasca was finished before the participants arrived. Juán, Angel and a few apprentices, drank Ayahuasca the previous night to build up the energy and set the intentions for the ceremony. The brewing needs to start early in the morning because this ritual lasts approximately twelve hours. First, the vine is beaten with a heavy wooden mallet to facilitate the release of the alkaloids in the water during boiling.³⁹ While doing this, the shaman and any apprentices are blessing the pot by blowing '*mapacho smoke*' on it. Then the vine pieces are placed in a large pot with Chacruna leaves, and all other plants or barks are added according to the secret recipe of the officiating shaman. By adding the extra plants they incorporate the spirits and the properties of these plants into the brew.⁴⁰ This pot is then filled with water and left to boil for at least six to eight hours. After this, the brown liquid is strained and placed in a different pot to be boiled and reduced to the desired

³⁸ Tupper, *Ayahuasca, Entheogenic Education*, p. 155.

³⁹ Fotiou, *From medicine men to day trippers*, p.266.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.267.

consistency.⁴¹ Then the brew is cooled and just before the ceremony started they transferred it into a recycled plastic bottle. Our brew was made in a large stockpot on the stove, and stood between the pots and pans in which food was being prepared.

3.3.3 Drinking Ayahuasca

Generally Ayahuasca is taken during group ceremonies, which are usually led by a shaman or an experienced person.⁴² In his book *'Introducing anthropology of religion'* Jack Eller speaks of a shaman as a 'religious specialist'. He writes: "*The unique and important thing about the shaman is that he or she is a spiritually "able" person with unique talent to achieve certain spiritual states and purposes*".⁴³ Despite the fact that Juán doesn't wear special ritual clothing, jewelry or other symbols, it was immediately clear that he is the shaman in our group. This is not only due to his Ecuadorian appearance, but also by his authentic presence, humility and serenity. After several ritual elements and preparations, the time had come for Juán to drink his Ayahuasca and to invite participants to the altar. He and Angel sat side by side behind the altar. This altar consisted of a simple blanket bearing various sacred ritual supplies. The feminine medicine (Chacruna) lay on the left, and the male medicine (B.caapi) on the right⁴⁴, with the tobacco in between. Various herbs, the Chacapa leaves (*Pariana stenolemma tutin*) and a feather of the condor to perform 'La Limpia' (section 3.3.4) lay on the right side. Beside the altar was a fire-bowl containing coals with a small fire burning. On the left tobacco-juice, Agua di Florida⁴⁵, a blowpipe and musical instruments were orderly laid down. Additional ornaments were a large plant and a vase with flowers. Furthermore, there was toilet paper, plastic bags for vomiting and buckets to collect waste. There was no specific order in which the participants went to the altar. They were asked to sniff some tobacco-juice and when they felt 'called', the participants one-by-one sat down at the altar. Beforehand each participant was given some tobacco to sacrifice in the fire. This tobacco was held at the heart, while the participant kept his/her intentions for the ceremony in mind. Everyone was allowed to do this in his/her own way. When it was my turn, I prayed and asked Great Spirit, Grandmother Aya and the Medicine-plants for strength, help and insight. After the tobacco burned in the fire, I made a bowl with my hands so Juán could give me a small glass filled with the Medicine; the Ayahuasca brew. A skilled shaman drinks Ayahuasca in the presence of the participants to determine the appropriate course of 'treatment'.⁴⁶ Juán adjusted the amount of medicine for each person. He told us that he receives the required information from the Spirit of Ayahuasca, but added that he also makes these decisions based on his experience. I closed my eyes and quickly drank the contents of the small glass. It did not taste as bitter as I expected, but I was happy with the glass of water that Angel offered afterwards. After drinking, I thanked them and went back to my bed in the big circle. The ritual continued with the next participant.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.266.

⁴² Kjellgren, Eriksson, Norlander, *Experiences of Encounters with Ayahuasca*, p. 310.

⁴³ Eller, *Introducing anthropology of religion*, p. 72.

⁴⁴ B.caapi is said to be endowed with male energies associated with the typically masculine characteristics of strength and power. And Chacruna leaves are characterised with the feminine traits of light and subtlety. Source: Dawson, A. *New Era- New religions: Religious transformation in contemporary Brasil* (Burlington, Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007), p. 77.

⁴⁵ A cologne used by shamans for cleansing, healing, ritual feeding and flowering.

⁴⁶ Tupper, *Ayahuasca, Entheogenic Education*, p.14.

3.3.4 La Purga and La Limpia

An important characteristic of the Ayahuasca experience is the cleansing process known as 'La Purga' (the purge). Physical and spiritual cleansing is an important aspect of the ceremony and relates to following 'La Dieta', as the plants work to cleanse the person.⁴⁷ After drinking, this initial phase often culminates with vomiting. The entire intestinal track can empty not only because participants experience vomiting, but also intense diarrhea.⁴⁸ Purging may also occur in several other ways. Some shamans suggest that yawning, crying, sweating and fever are powerful ways to purge, especially emotionally.⁴⁹ Three process stages of the purge are recognized. The first is the bodily stage, usually vomiting; the second is psychological, dealing with personal issues; and the third is spiritual.⁵⁰ Cleansing also includes the removal of entities from the participants' bodies, negative energies that are perceived to "possess" the person.⁵¹ Therefore, in *shamanic healing*, spiritual illness requires spiritual healing. In an Ayahuasca ceremony this is often acted out through the shaman's practice of 'sucking out illness' or by blowing the sacred *mapacho smoke* over affected parts of the body⁵² to cleanse, protect and heal the patient.⁵³ This process is called 'La Limpia'. Juán uses a feather of the condor and a bunch of Chacapa leaves to flutter tobacco smoke on a participant who needs help to 'open his/her energy-system'. Another method for this is to take a bath of water containing flowers, herbs or *Agua di Florida*. This mixture is believed to wash away the sorcery that caused it.⁵⁴ Sometimes this cologne is directly applied on the forehead, chest and back of the afflicted participant. This can be done by hand or by the shaman spritzing the cologne with his mouth.

The duration and intensity of the 'La Purga-phase' seems to be determined by the intentions for the ceremony and the personal process the participant is in. Each person reacts differently. Following this cleansing, participants often describe a change in the character of the experience: after the intense discomfort, a sense of euphoria, wonder and deep peace are reported. Sometimes, this state is filled with visionary experiences of various kinds. An Ayahuasca session usually lasts approximately six hours.⁵⁵

3.3.5 Icaros

To make the phase of 'La Purga' more bearable, I laid down in my sleeping bag with my eyes closed. After twenty minutes, as the effects of the Ayahuasca started to take effect, Angel started to sing icaros, sacred songs containing special powers. All the songs were sung in Spanish. Some of the more experienced participants sang along. As an example, I give the text of an icaro as sung by Angel:

⁴⁷ Luna, *Vegetalismo*, p. 149-150.

⁴⁸ Kjellgren, Eriksson, Norlander, *Experiences of Encounters with Ayahuasca*, p. 310.

⁴⁹ Fotiou, Working with "La Medicina", p. 15.

⁵⁰ Seddon, An anthropological analysis of ayahuasca, p. 19-20.

⁵¹ Kjellgren, Eriksson, Norlander, *Experiences of Encounters with Ayahuasca*, p. 310.

⁵² Andritsky, *Sociopsychotherapeutic Functions*, p. 81.

⁵³ Seddon, An anthropological analysis of ayahuasca, p. 22.

⁵⁴ Beyer, *Singing to the plants*., chapter 18.

⁵⁵ Kjellgren, Eriksson, Norlander, *Experiences of Encounters with Ayahuasca*, p. 310.

*“Veng viento bueno para vivir,
da me tu aliento para vivir,
a vis el grande que estoy aquí,
rosa y amores trae a ti ,
a sonancuya nuncamanqui.”*

Translation by author:
*“Come, wind, good for life
Give me your breath of life
Tell the Great one I am here,
Roses and love I brought for you,
Dreaming has never let me down.”*

Apprentices first learn the shaman’s icaros, but later on they receive their ‘own’ from the plants and compose their own songs.⁵⁶ There was one song Angel chanted in Dutch, it was about a smile and a tear. I could hear by the emotions in her voice, that this song came from deep within her and holds a special meaning to her. Traditional shamans may sing icaros for many different purposes; to facilitate healing and protection, to call spirits, to bless objects and endow them with magical power, and to modulate the visions induced by Ayahuasca.⁵⁷ The singing can move or manipulate a participant’s visions or state of mind, the shaman does this by using different icaros at different times or change the overall energy and feeling of the ceremony. It is important to notice, that the dramatic changes are not as a result of the words of the icaro. These tend to be repetitive and variations of the same themes, but the intonation in which they are sung is key.⁵⁸

3.3.6 Temazcal

After several hours in a dreamlike state, enduring La Purga, listening to the icaros and enjoying colourful visions of portals, labyrinths and fountains of flowers, Angel softly started to play a harp-like instrument to let us return to the present moment. It was time to go to the ‘*temazcal*’ for a deeper cleansing of the body and to physically integrate the process. A traditional *temazcal* consists of a sweatbath created in an enclosed space, by pouring water mixed with aromatic and medicinal herbs over hot stones. Although *temazcal* is a Nahuatl name from Mexico for their ritual sauna, the inspiration for this healing ceremony for spiritual development comes primarily from the ‘*sweat lodge*’ of North American’s Plains Indians.⁵⁹ In my research, I could not find any accounts of drinking Ayahuasca in combination with *temazcals*/sweat lodges, except for those on cross-cultural ceremonies offered on retreats for tourists, or by neo-shamans in the West. With a shaman from Ecuador and a teacher from The Netherlands leading this ceremony, it is undeniably a cross-cultural ceremony.

After another sniff of tobacco-juice, we had to walk through the forest to go the *temazcal*. Instead of the ‘igloo-shaped mud dwelling’ of the traditional *temazcal*, we found a Lakota style sweat lodge⁶⁰ made out of branches and blankets. In the fire, which was tended by two apprentices, stones were turning red hot to heat up the sweat lodge. Everybody took off their clothes. Some wore a sarong or a towel around the waist, others wore swimwear or chose to enter the sweat lodge naked. Juñan went in first then Angel and the participants

⁵⁶ Luna, *Vegetalismo*, p. 101.

⁵⁷ Beyer, *Singing to the plants*, p. 66)

⁵⁸ Fotiou, *From medicine men to day trippers*, p.186.

⁵⁹ Bousquet, M.P, Crépeau, R.R., *Dynamics religieuses des autochtones des Amériques* (Editions Karthala, 2012) p. 224.

⁶⁰ For a detailed analysis of the sweat lodge among North-American Indians see Bucko, R.A., *The Lakota Ritual of the sweat lodge*, 1990.

followed. The last apprentice shoved the hot stones out of the fire with a pitchfork, and handed its handle inside the lodge. Juán took over and after blessing them, placed the stones -which he called our ancestors- into a hole in the centre of the lodge. We were then asked to sniff tobacco-juice again, and the lodge was closed with blankets until it was pitch black inside. The tobacco-juice re-activated the Ayahuasca immediately and I was right back in the phase of La Purga, vomiting in a plastic bag I brought with me. During the sweat lodge, there were moments of singing and praying. We were instructed to use those moments to empower our own purposes, and not to talk in the sweat lodge in order to stay focused on our own experiences. In case it gets too hot, you were advised to lie down on your left side and to prepare yourself to drop physical boundaries and merge with the other participants, rather than to stay in the individuality of the ego. I listened to the icaros of Juán, surrendered and slipped into a deep trance again.

3.3.7 Being born, breath and body work, and healing

After the fifth time of hot stones being brought in, we were offered some water to drink. It was very dark and warm in the sweat lodge. I heard my heartbeat so loud, it felt like it was surrounding me. Beating steady, but faster than normal. After a while Juán told us it was time to be reborn, time to leave the womb of Mother Earth who had carried us the whole journey. The door-blanket was lifted, and the light of the fire outside lit up the inside of the lodge, promising new life. One after another we crawled out of the lodge and gathered round the fire. Behind the lodge was a big barrel of water to pour over the body to fully return to the present moment. As I poured a little bucket of the ice-cold water over my head, I screamed and took a big breath. I survived!

The next day, after breakfast Angel worked with the whole group, even Juán participated in the breath and body work. We engaged in several breathing techniques, first causing me respiratory distress and anxiety. I continued, adding different body positions, eased into it until I -literally and figuratively speaking- was able to breath in more air. During the light lunch I got very emotional and quiet. I felt ill, weak and a little disappointed about not having 'extraordinary visions'. All those hardships, for a few visual effects of psychedelic flowers and geometric figures! I was sure not to do Ayahuasca ever again. Most of the participants left for cleaning, doing dishes or to be in nature, while I was still sitting at the table and started crying. Angel, instead of talking to me, asked me if she could give me a massage. She prepared a 'nest' of soft blankets and warm sheepskin for me to lie on. I was so tired, I could do nothing else but to surrender to her motherly care. She covered me with blankets and gave me a pressure massage by pressing her weight down on several areas of my body. Slowly, my emotions calmed down and I could breath more easily. When finished I thanked her, and she told me to stay and rest a bit more.

3.3.8 The blowpipe and dying at Aya's hands

In the evening we sat on our beds again, ready for the second night of Ayahuasca. This second night builds on the first one, with the possibility to drink more and deepen the experience. The massage and a walk in nature strengthened me, the nausea was gone and I

regained the will to continue this journey with Ayahuasca. Sitting in a circle, the participants were told to sniff some tobacco-juice again. Only the smell of it made me lightheaded and as soon as this ‘medicine’ had hit my brain I was in the state of La Purga again. For me this meant nausea and vomiting, I did not suffer from diarrhea. Instead of Ayahuasca, Juán offered all participants a sacred ‘snuff-medicine’, a greyish-green mixture probably made of dry mapacho leaves, with an equal amount of ash from other plants like cacao or the dried resin of the bark of a *Virola* tree.⁶¹ In the traditional way, he applied a little bit of the powder (the size of a pea, 50% for each nostril) with a blowpipe, which connects the blower’s mouth to the participant’s nostrils. These pipes are made from bamboo, bone or plastic. The effects that have been attributed to snuff are that it releases sickness on physical, emotional, mental and spiritual levels. It clears any mental confusion, releases negative thoughts, removes entities, and elevates your connection with Spirit. Sitting at the altar, Juán blew it hard way up into my sinuses, producing an intense burning sensation. For me the effect was comparable to ten times the effect of tobacco-juice and I started vomiting right away, almost losing consciousness. The room was spinning and I felt I was losing my mind. I had no idea how to stand up, or how to find my way through the forest to the temazcal. While I kept vomiting and trying to stand up, all the other participants had already left, leaving only Angel and me. She grabbed the *Agua de Florida* and blew it on my head. It was like a fresh wind swept right through me, providing me with fresh air to breathe and finding my core again. Slowly I stood up and with great difficulty I walked to the temazcal.

I arrived when Juán was starting to hand out the Ayahuasca, one-by-one all participants received another glass. With my last strength I crawled to him and accepted the glass. Before I could finish the glass, I started to vomit again. Juán reassured me and said the medicine would do its work anyway. The rituals in the temazcal were mostly the same, but this time it was much harder for me to endure the heat and the nausea. During the fourth round, stinging nettles were being passed around to beat yourself with, to heal and awaken the body. I felt so sick. It was extremely hot, I felt very weak, and I thought that if I stayed any longer I would die. While the stones were being brought in, I knew I had to stop and leave the temazcal despite the fact we were asked in advance not to do so. At first I hesitated to set my limits at such a crucial moment. I had come so far, and I always push myself beyond my limits to reach my goals. But then it became apparent, I heard a voice clearly say to stop disrespecting my natural boundaries. Suddenly I knew my lesson was to trust in ‘what is’ and to be in acceptance. I remembered the dying swan and firmly decided to stop fighting death. When I told Angel I was going to leave the temazcal, she reacted startled and asked Juán what to do. I explained him why I needed to leave, and he gave me permission to do so if I agreed to stay close to the fire. My mind rejoiced! I was going to be born into the fresh air where I was sure my nausea would disappear. I crawled out of the lodge and sat down next to the fire. Sitting up caused my stomach to turn, and I had to vomit again. I could not sit up anymore, and laid myself down on the cold earth. I kept vomiting, and feeling all life-force leaving my body. I got scared. I was all alone with nothing

⁶¹ Kilham, C., *The Ayahuasca Test Pilots Handbook: The Essential Guide to Ayahuasca Journeying*, (Berkeley: Evolver Editions, 2014), chapter 5.

but my vest to cover me. I was next to the fire, but could not feel its heat anymore. Although the temazcal was very close, it seemed by the icaros sung inside, that they were far away. They were together, inside, singing, warmth, LIFE! And I was alone, outside, silence, cold, DYING! I was shocked. I thought by leaving the temazcal I was going to be reborn. Instead I was lying here, dying. I kept hearing it in my head: “Life is Death, Death is Life.” Over and over again: “Death is Life, Life is Death”, until I surrendered and flowed into nothingness, becoming all... I slowly opened my eyes when somebody softly rocked me and I heard my name. Like a little baby, I was wrapped in thick blankets, and everybody was standing around the fire softly speaking and celebrating their birth.

3.3.9 Integration – sharing in circle, reflection and lessons learned

The mornings after the temazcal, we spend quite some time sitting in a circle to talk about and reflect upon our experiences, our intentions and integration. Before talking, we sniffed tobacco-juice to speak from a deeper consciousness. Every story was different. Some full of darkness, others filled with rainbows, laughter and relaxation. All processes were deep and very personal. In some cases, Juán and Angel would interpret the visions, and even share any visions or insights that they had the night before. When comparisons were made between experiences and participant's own biographies, new insights were gained. I had remembered the swan, and learned to stop fighting death. Because Death is Life and Life is death. I understood that time is circular and never ending, therefore there is no need to be in a hurry all the time. There is no need to disrespect natural boundaries. I learned there was honour in giving up and falling down. I ended my sharing with a song, an ‘icaro’ which felt appropriate: “*And when I rise, let me rise*

Like a bird, joyfully

And when I fall, let me fall

Like a leaf, gracefully

Without regrets”⁶²

3.4 Breaking the fast, a new life

After cleaning everything up, we let the wind blow away all the odours of La Purga, the tobacco and brewing Ayahuasca. Then it was time to break the fast and celebrate with a big feast. All our senses were renewed and everything smelled and tasted full of life. We thanked the cooks, the apprentices, Angel, Juán and each other. One by one everybody went home to their renewed life. Coming home, it is difficult to share your ‘Ayahuasca-story’, especially with people who have not experienced it themselves. In a way they seem like outsiders, much like after giving birth. You can tell them step-by-step what happened, but as long as they are not mothers themselves, they still won’t understand what it feels like to be a new mommy. The journey with Ayahuasca runs deep and can be quite exhausting. It feels better to leave the stories untold for a while. It is important to reserve time afterwards to rest and process the experience. It is recommended to put the experiences in writing or to make a piece of art around your intent. Working creatively with it helps to own the received lessons and integrate them into life.

⁶² The words of the chant are written by Wendell Berry.

Chapter 4 – STRUCTURE AND MEANING

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters I introduced Ayahuasca, its origin and how Western people make use of it. Subsequently I presented the most significant ritual acts of a cross-cultural *Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony* in the West. In this chapter I will proceed by using this summary to consider the structure and meaning of the *Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony* as a whole. Taking everything into account, this chapter helps to answer sub-question three:

“What is the structure and meaning of the ritual acts that take place during an Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony hosted by Angel?”

4.2 Structure

In order to answer the main question of this research, it is imperative to view the ritual acts of the *Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony* by using the basic properties of rituals. These properties are effectually arrayed in the definition of ritual Quartier presents in his article 'Ritual Studies: an anthropological reflection on liturgy'. He states: “Ritueel verbindt binnen een concrete handeling structuur en betekenis”⁶³ (Translation by author: ‘Within a specific act, ritual connects structure and meaning’). This definition provides the ability to analyse the basic properties of the ceremony. I will clarify this by giving concrete expression to the aspects that converge in ritual: *structure* and *meaning*.⁶⁴ Quartier distinguishes four dimensions of ritual, which relate to the structure and the meaning of ritual action, as elaborated in Table 1.1 and 1.2;

Table 1.1

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| 1 The <i>internal structure</i> | - ritual has a particular structure, an order within itself. |
| 2 The <i>external structure</i> | - ritual can bring about a particular (social) order in human life. |

Structure is not the only thing of importance. In order to be able to speak of a ritual, it must contain a meaning that exceeds the functional meaning of the act itself, see Table 1.2.

Table 1.2

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| 3 The <i>internal meaning</i> | - is recognized by the participants of the ritual, which offers recognizable objects, gestures and texts connected with tradition and also with the cultural context. |
| 4 The <i>external meaning</i> | - refers to a meaning that transcends our everyday reality. Ritual transcends the immanent frame of reference, and establishes a symbolic reality that facilitates a faithful experience (mystery). ⁶⁵ |

In order to answer the research question, I would like to study the ritual acts of the *Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony* based on this model.

⁶³ Quartier, T., *Ritual Studies: een antropologische bezinning op liturgie. Dimensies en discussies binnen een onderzoeksveld*, in *Tijdschrift voor Liturgie* 91 (2007), 219.

⁶⁴ Bell, C., *Ritual, Perspectives and Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 23ff, 61ff.

⁶⁵ Quartier, Thomas, *Liturgical Spirituality in Benedictine Tradition. Ritual Perspectives on Life and Death, Summary Lectures, St. Anselmo*, (2013), p. 2.

4.2.1 Internal ritual structure

Despite the many different ritual acts within the *Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony*, we can still distinguish a clear structure when examining the ceremony as a whole. Because Juán and Angel work with Ayahuasca as a medicine, they tend to focus on its healing properties. With which they make ‘transformation’ its pivotal point. To be able to drink Ayahuasca, various **preparations** outside the daily routines are needed. Then, after **drinking Ayahuasca**, a transformational process in the participant is set in motion. The participant endures a lot of hardships, and by overcoming them he/she acquires experiences and insights that lead to a new worldview. This feels like a **re-birth**, ready for a new life.

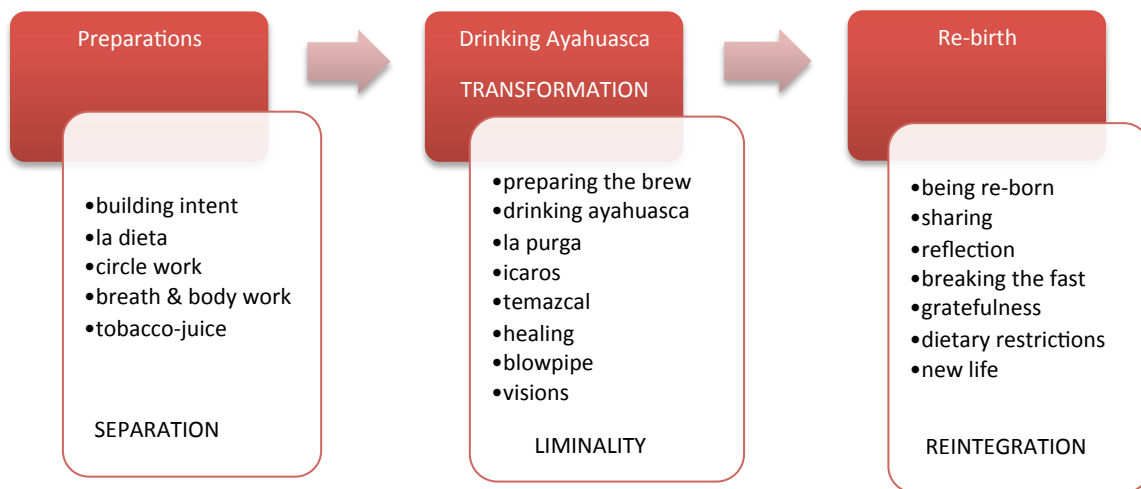


Figure 1: Classical threefold structure of liminality as defined by van Gennep, applied to an *Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony*.

The internal structure outlined in this diagram reflects the classic structure of rituals developed by Arnold van Gennep when discussing ‘rites de passage’.⁶⁶ This should not come as a surprise when knowing that the indigenous people of the Amazon use Ayahuasca-ceremonies for a special kind of rite of passage also: the initiation to become a shaman. Van Gennep distinguishes three phases in all rites of passage: *separation*, *liminality* and *(re)integration*. Victor Turner continued his work and applied this threefold-structure to a much wider range of rituals.⁶⁷

In Figure 1, I have added the various ritual acts as discussed in the case study of Chapter 3. This way it is easy to recognize and understand the purpose of the ritual acts in relation to these phases. Following La Dieta creates a first **separation** between the participant and his environment. Like this fasting, the building of intent, the circle work with tobacco-juice, and the breath and body work, all these acts are focusing the consciousness of the participant on his own inner-life. The participant leaves his daily routines and living space, creating more distance between himself and his regular social life. Then during the phase of **liminality**, the participant stays with a shaman and equivalent participants, to devote himself entirely to his transformation. The ritual structure of preparing and drinking the brew,

⁶⁶ Gennep, van A., *The rites of passage*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

⁶⁷ Turner, V.W., *The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company USA, 1969), p. 126.

the challenge of La Purga and receiving teachings in nonverbal ways through visions, seem to present the perfect context for transformation. After experiencing a type of re-birth, participants share their experiences and reflect on their lessons to *integrate* their transformation. To close the ceremony and share their gratitude, they break the fast together and celebrate their new life as a transformed person. The effects of Ayahuasca and the transformation lasts for weeks, therefore the *re-integration* at home can be experienced as quite intense. The *Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony* is then integrated in the participant's life history in a variety of ways and often it occupies a pivotal position in it.⁶⁸

4.2.1.1 Liminality

The concept of liminality derives from the Latin word *limen*, which means 'a threshold'. Victor Turner refers to a moment where participants are "betwixt and between", as a transitional or liminal phase. During this moment the person is suspended in time and a place, and is "symbolically outside the conventional sociocultural order".⁶⁹ Participants of an *Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony* experience liminality in two ways. To begin with, the heart of the ritual is a transition in itself. The ceremony provides the liminal space, during which the normal perceptions of their life and the world are being challenged. Secondly the entire endeavour is a liminal stage, during which participants are separated from their daily life, undergo a radical change and then return home to reintegrate into their lives. One could also identify the preparation period of strict dietary prohibitions as a *pre-liminal* phase. The drinking of Ayahuasca -with La Purga and its visions- as the *liminal* stage, with afterwards a period that could be seen as *post-liminal*, during which participants are expected to continue their dietary restrictions while continuing to work on their transformation and the integration of their experience.

I would like to state that I agree with Ronald Grimes, who warns against the erroneous imposition of this three-phased scheme like it is a formula in how-to manuals.⁷⁰ We have to be careful not to let Van Gennep's model for male initiations serve as the model for all rituals, and not to oversimplify its analysis by imposing an austere beginning-middle-end structure. As suggested by Grimes, I considered whether or not I was imposing Van Gennep's model, instead of discovering the three phases in the *Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony*. Due to the fact that this ceremony was used by the indigenous drinkers of Ayahuasca as an initiation ritual for men, I think it is safe to apply the structure -that Van Gennep had recognized therein- to the *Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony* also.

4.2.2 External ritual structure

External ritual structure refers to the structure, i.e. the particular (social) order in human life, a ritual can bring about. An example of this is the new identity and social role of a bride after the wedding, or the new identity and social role of a shaman after his initiation. Often, this change of identity concerns not only the individual, but also the community as a whole.

⁶⁸ Fotiou, "One hearth", p. 81.

⁶⁹ Bell, *Ritual*, p.36.

⁷⁰ Grimes, *Deeply into the bone*, p. 105.

Émile Durkheim emphasizes in his work '*Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*' that ritual promotes social cohesion and thereby reinforces social structure. He argued that "religion is a set of ideas and practices by which people sacralise the social structure and bonds of the community",⁷¹ while ritual is what brings people together as a collective group. Durkheim's theoretical framework is not adequate in the case of analysing an *Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony*, because we are investigating a ritual that causes the opposite: participants temporarily leaving their community and their social roles, and challenging social order by intentionally 'stepping outside culture' by ingesting an entheogen that defies their presupposed cultural norms and values. Because this is a case of anti-structure, Victor Turner's model of anti-structure and liminality⁷² is more useful than the Durkheimian model of ritual reinforcing social structure. Examples of such anti-structure and liminality within an *Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony* are: keeping La Dieta, where the participant suddenly does not take part in family meals anymore, and leaving their regular life (family and pursuits), to temporarily submit to a new social structure. It is in this context of liminality, that the participants experience *communitas* and personal transformation. Turner formulates *communitas* in opposition to structure,⁷³ and with it refers to an unstructured state in which all members of a community are equal, allowing them to share a common experience. Contrary to rituals that wish to indicate clear boundaries between groups, Turner⁷⁴ argues that in certain situations, "rituals may be performed in which egalitarian and cooperative behaviour is characteristic, and in which secular distinctions of rank, office, and status are temporarily in abeyance or regarded as irrelevant." During times of liminality, this *communitas* may spontaneously emerge between the members of the group, and they may wish to temporarily "do off the masks, cloaks, apparel, and insignia of status".⁷⁵ It is exactly this what happens during an *Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony*. Due to the vulnerability caused by La Purga and loss of normal consciousness -which is endured by all members of the group-, participants bear an ambiguous identity or status, are equal, past shame, and feel like that they have lost everything that identifies them within society.

4.3 Meaning

In order to be able to speak of a ritual, an act must also contain a meaning that exceeds the functional meaning of the act itself. When linked to religion, rituals are about ideas and beliefs, but even more about power and effectiveness. Eller explains that in order for it to have this power and effectiveness, transcendent or abstract rituals must be made immanent and concrete. Objects, actions, places and people can serve as manifestations of, or conduits to transcendent beings and forces. Sometimes these manifestations are symbolic, standing for a reminder of other, non-natural and nonhuman phenomena. But for believers they can mean much more than that. To them they can serve as real containers, products,

⁷¹ Bell, *Ritual*, p.24.

⁷² Turner, *The Ritual Process*.

⁷³ Turner, V.W., *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975)

⁷⁴ Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, p. 238.

⁷⁵ Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, p. 243.

or presences of supernatural power also. Clifford Geertz called symbols vehicles for meanings, but at least in some cases they are vehicles for actions, vitalities, and effects.⁷⁶

4.3.1 Internal ritual meaning

To be able to speak of an internal ritual meaning, it is a prerequisite that it must be recognised by the participants of the ritual itself. On the one hand, this concerns the meaning of the ritual itself, and on the other hand it is about the meaning of symbols. As previously made clear, the *Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony* revolves around 'transformation'. It is this transformation, which gives meaning to the ritual itself. And when it occurs, it does not only include life-changing decisions, but also means a shift in one's personal paradigm in the way that they perceive themselves and the world, which often includes ceasing to see themselves as distinct from other beings by dissolving self boundaries.⁷⁷ The ritual acts of the liminal phase lead to the visions, which especially stimulate transformation within a participant. These visions bear a personal meaning, which are shared during circle work for reflection on their meaning. Sometimes the shaman gives his interpretation of the meaning of the vision. The shaman -as a religious specialist- is considered a bridge between the transcendental and the human world, which he reaches in trance.⁷⁸ In this way the shaman serves as a conduit to transcendental beings and forces, and in this manner bears meaning himself. By making the transcendent immanent and concrete, his words gain more power and effectiveness, and participants take his interpretation seriously.

Next to the shaman, there are also objects in an *Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony* that bear a meaning recognized by the participants of the ritual. These objects are connected with tradition and also with the cultural context. As symbols, they are often a source of inspiration and motivation to the participants. 'Grandmother Aya' is probably the most central symbol, when it comes to the internal meaning of an *Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony*. Her persona is the symbolic prototype of the ideal wise teacher, grandmother or healer from a higher spiritual dimension, and she is often experienced as an intelligence that provides guidance and loving, comforting, protective support.⁷⁹ Her nickname "*death that lives*" (*muerte que vive*),⁸⁰ expresses the final transformation that she brings, and she is being materialized by 'Ayahuasca drinking artists' in the form of art. Other central symbols and sacred patterns found in art are; cosmic anaconda's or snakes, DNA-strings, vines, wings, maps, labyrinths and faces of entities.⁸¹ Like art, the icaros are also carriers of meaning. The icaro carries the healing intention of shamans, with different icaros for each purpose or illness. Icaros are also the way that the shaman communicates with the spirits of the plants mentioned in each icaro.⁸²

⁷⁶ Eller, *Introducing Anthropology*, p. 81.

⁷⁷ Fotiou, "One hearth", p.81.

⁷⁸ Eller, *Introducing Anthropology*, p. 71-73.

⁷⁹ Harris, Gurel, *A Study of Ayahuasca*, doi: 10.1080/02791072.2012.703100

⁸⁰ Fotiou, *From medicine men to day trippers*, p. 277.

⁸¹ Beyer, S. "Some thoughts on DMT Art" in Steve Beyer's blog on ayahuasca and the Amazon, (Singing to the plants, 2008) via <http://www.singingtotheplants.com/2008/03/some-thoughts-on-dmt-art/>

⁸² Fotiou, *From medicine men to day trippers*, p. 184.

4.3.2 External ritual meaning

The external ritual meaning refers to ‘a meaning that transcends our everyday reality. Ritual transcends the immanent frame of reference, and establishes a symbolic reality that facilitates a faithful experience’.⁸³ With an *Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony*, this is not precisely the case. It is not a symbolic reality that facilitates a faithful experience. In my opinion this happens through the experience of an expansion of consciousness. The term entheogen⁸⁴, meaning “bringing forth the divine within”, indicates how this works. By means of the entheogens in Ayahuasca, participants report to experience to be a part of the divine.⁸⁵ Representations of this ‘divine’ are ambiguous among participants, but in its own way it reveals it self through dreams and visions, showing the participant that all is divine and connected to each other. During my observation I have hardly encountered a direct reference to a transcendental God by participants. However, the relationship between the shaman and the 'spirits' or Grandmother Aya, do seem to refer to something higher, and something greater that is outside himself. But even in this case, the transcendental is 'brought forth' or 'brought in' by means of a trance.

⁸³ Quartier, *Liturgical Spirituality*, p. 2.

⁸⁴ Fotiou, *From medicine men to day trippers*, p.106.

⁸⁵ Fotiou, “One hearth”, p.96.

Chapter 5 – CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This research was initiated in response to a research question. In this chapter, the main question, together with the three sub-questions, is answered using the research, that is a literature and a case study, described in Chapters two, three and four. Finally, I will formulate some discussion points and limitations of my research.

5.2 Conclusion on sub-questions

1. What is Ayahuasca, where does it originate and how is it being used by Westerners?

Consumed in the form of a decoction, Ayahuasca is a hallucinogenic plant potion consisting of *B. caapi* and the Chacruna leaf. By combining these ingredients, the alkaloids in the Chacruna leaves produce psychoactive effects. Due to the MAO inhibitors in *B. caapi*, these alkaloids are not oxidized as they normally would by an enzyme in the stomach. Ayahuasca's exact place of origin is not certain, but *B. Caapi* is an indigenous vine in the western and northwestern Amazon. Archaeological evidence from Ecuador hints that Ayahuasca use was well established in at least 2000 BC, and its name derives from Quechua, the language of the Inca Empire. Next to the use by indigenous people of the Amazon, Ayahuasca has entered the globalizing world by Ayahuasca-tourism, neo-shamanism, online sales of the ingredients, and its sacramental use by churches. In these churches -with branches in several countries in the world- the ritual consumption of Ayahuasca differs significantly from the tradition-based shamanic use, as it is used as a sacred beverage for improving social and individual outcomes. The interest of Westerners in the religious and spiritual purposes of Ayahuasca has created a phenomenon known as 'Ayahuasca tourism'. Research shows that Westerners have several motivations for travelling to the Amazon in order to find an authentic Ayahuasca experience, including emotional healing, assistance with substance abuse, personal evolution and life direction. Westerners increasingly become neo-shamans and brought Ayahuasca back home to use in their own cross-cultural rituals. Their ceremonies often take on a hybridized form, mixing with several other traditions. Ayahuasca is also used in a non-ritual way; *psychonauts* use entheogenic drugs as a vehicle for exploring consciousness. These 'mind-explorers' can, like everybody else, buy the ingredients of Ayahuasca over the counter or online for home-brewing consumption.

2. Case study: Which ritual acts take place during a cross-cultural Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony as hosted by Angel?

To analyse the *Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony* I disassembled the ceremony into various ritual acts as parts of the whole ritual. Starting with an account of the preparations for the ceremony, I described how participants were asked to follow the specific dietary restrictions of 'La Dieta', and to build an intention to give their transformation a direction. The ceremony itself started with circle work in which all participants sniffed tobacco-juice in order share their intentions from a deeper level of consciousness. Following several preparations, the

shaman drank his Ayahuasca brew first, and asked participants to sniff tobacco-juice before coming to the altar. Each participant sacrificed a little tobacco in the fire, after charging it with intentions, and drank the Ayahuasca-brew. Then the phase of 'La Purga' started with vomiting and diarrhea in the bodily stage, dealing with personal issues in the psychological stage, and the removing of negative energy or spirits in the spiritual stage. During the purge, icaros -sacred songs with healing powers- were sung, and after the intense discomfort of the cleansing, participants could experience visions, visual effects, a sense of euphoria, wonder and deep peace. After a few hours each person went to the temazcal for a deeper cleansing of the body, and to physically integrate the process. Hot stones were blessed as ancestors, and placed in a hole inside the sweat lodge. Succeeding another sniff of tobacco-juice (which reactivated the Ayahuasca) the door was closed, and the purge -with icaros to guide the participants to their visions- started again. After five rounds of new hot stones, it was time to leave the sweat lodge and to be 'reborn'. Participants poured cold water over themselves and sat around the fire to reflect. The next night the whole procedure repeated. Except this time the shaman blew a sacred snuff-medicine into everybody's nose with a blowpipe, before leaving to the temazcal, where a new dose of Ayahuasca-brew was offered. During the five rounds in the sweat lodge, people were praying and singing. In the last round stinging nettles were passed around for participants to beat themselves with, to heal and awaken the body. Eventually, the shaman allowed the participants to be re-born, they went out, stood around the fire and celebrated their birth. The morning times were spent 'sitting in a circle' with tobacco-juice to talk about and reflect upon experiences, intentions and integration. After cleaning everything up, it was time to break the fast with a feast and participants went home to live their renewed life.

3. What is the structure and meaning of the ritual acts that take place during an Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony hosted by Angel?

This investigation of various ritual acts of the *Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony* is based on Quartier's model of four dimensions of ritual, which relate to the structure and the meaning of ritual action. Looking into the *internal ritual structure*, Van Gennep's classic threefold-structure was recognized, and by placing the various rituals acts in a diagram according this scheme, it became easy to understand the purpose of these ritual acts. By fasting, the building of intent, circle work with tobacco-juice, and the breath and body work, the participants focus their consciousness on their inner-life, creating distance from their regular social life in the '*phase of separation*'. Then during the '*phase of liminality*', the participant devotes himself entirely to his transformation by drinking Ayahuasca, enduring La Purga, temazcal and the blowpipe, and receives teachings in a nonverbal way through visions. In the last '*phase of integration*', participants experience a type of re-birth, share and reflect on their experiences and integrate their transformation. Investigating the *external ritual structure* I found that Victor Turner's model of anti-structure and liminality is more useful than the Durkheimian model of ritual reinforcing social structure. This because an *Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony* causes anti-structure and *communitas*. With *communitas* Turner refers to an unstructured state in which all members of a community are equal allowing them to share a common experience. The *internal ritual meaning* concerns the meaning of the ritual itself, and is also about the meaning of symbols used in the ritual. The ritual acts of the

liminal phase lead to visions, which stimulate transformation within a participant. It is this transformation, which gives meaning to the ritual itself. The visions bear a personal meaning, which is shared and reflected upon, and is sometimes interpreted by the shaman. This religious specialist is also a symbol, for he is considered to be a bridge between the transcendental and the human world giving his words more power and effectiveness. Like the art of Grandmother Aya, the icaros are also carriers of meaning. Finally, the *external ritual meaning* refers to how ritual ‘establishes a symbolic reality that facilitates a faithful experience’. In my opinion this is not precisely the case when analysing an *Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony*, following my experiences it is not a symbolic reality that facilitates a faithful experience. This happens through the experience of an expansion of consciousness caused by entheogens. The term entheogen, meaning “bringing forth the divine within”, indicates how this works.

5.3 End-conclusion

“What is the ritual structure and meaning of an *Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony* as experienced in the context of a Western participant in a postmodern society specifically The Netherlands?”

To ritually drink the hallucinogenic decoction, originally made by the indigenous Amazonian people, is now easily achievable in the West because the *Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremonies* have entered the globalizing world. By becoming neo-shamans themselves, Westerners increasingly use *Ayahuasca* in their own cross-cultural and hybridized rituals. To investigate the ritual structure and meaning of this ceremony, it had to be disassembled to analyse the various ritual acts as parts of the whole ceremony. The detailed descriptions served as a guide when I first looked into the *internal ritual structure*, and clearly recognized Van Gennep’s classic threefold-scheme, with phases of separation, liminality, and integration. When looking at the *external ritual structure*, I recognized an anti-structure with *communitas*. The ‘*unstructured state in which all members of a community are equal*’, to which Turner refers when speaking of *communitas*, is clearly perceivable among participants who endure *La Purga*. The *internal ritual meaning* became clear by investigating the liminal phase with its visions, which stimulate transformation within a participant. This transformation gives meaning to the ritual itself. The visions bear a personal meaning, which is shared for reflection and interpretation on their meaning. When looking at the *external ritual meaning*, I concluded that in the case of an *Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony* faithful experiences happen through the experience of an expansion of consciousness caused by the entheogens, and not by a symbolic reality established by ritual.

End-conclusion: In the case of an *Ayahuasca Medicine Ceremony* there is a clear *internal structure*, which revolves around transformation in the liminal phase. The *external structure* is not a regulating one, but is consistent with the anti-structure and *communitas* of Turner. Furthermore, there is a recognizable *internal meaning* revolving visions and the transformation they bring, and the referring *external meaning* reveals itself, due to the expansion of consciousness caused by entheogens.

5.4 Discussion

Anthropology, and participant observation in particular, stands and falls with the critical attitude of the researcher and whether he/she continues to look at how the validity is maintained and justified. In addition to being to (emotionally) involved, a point of criticism of the method I used is that there is a temptation for the ethnographer to present the community in a kind of temporal and spatial isolation. Due to the fact that I did not include the view of other participants, the experiential accounts became one sided. Suggestions for continued research could be to conduct in-depth interviews with various experienced and first-time Ayahuasca users. I fully endorse the fact that ethnography is incomplete without the cross-cultural comparisons that allow the uniqueness of ethnographic description to find a comparative spatial and temporal context. Furthermore, I agree with professor of anthropology Alan Fiske that ethnographic fieldwork should not rely on participant observation alone. It should be supported by other means of observing and collecting data to supplement and provide convergent evidence to compare with the results from participant observation.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Fiske, A.P., *“Learning A Culture The Way Informants Do: Observing, Imitating, and Participating”*, (Los Angeles, University of California, 1998)

Literature

Andritsky, W. Sociopsychotherapeutic Functions of Ayahuasca Healing in Amazonia', *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, vol. 21, no. 1, 1989.

Barbosa, P.C.R. Cazorla, I.M. Giglio, J.S. Strassman, R. *A Six-Month Prospective Evaluation of Personality Traits, Psychiatric Symptoms and Quality of Life in Ayahuasca-Naïve Subjects*, *Journal of Psychiatric Drugs*, vol. 41, no. 3, 2009.

Bell, Catherine. *Ritual. Perspectives and Dimensions*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Beyer, S.V. *Singing to the plants: a guide to mestizo shamanism in the upper Amazon*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 2009.

Bousquet, M.P, Crépeau, R.R. *Dynamics religieuses des autochtones des Amériques* (Editions Karthala, 2012.

Cavnar, C. *The Effects of Participation in Ayahuasca Rituals on Gays' and Lesbians' Self Perception'*, PhD Thesis, Graduate School of Professional Psychology, Pleasant Hill, California: 2011.

DeWalt, K.M., DeWalt, B.R. *Participant Observation: A Guide for Fieldworkers*. Plymouth: Altamira Press, 2011.

Dobkin de Rios, M., Rumrill, R. *A Hallucinogenic Tea, Laced with Controversy: Ayahuasca in the Amazon and the United States*. Westport, Greenwood Press, 2008.

Eller, J.D. *Introducing anthropology of religion*. New York: Routledge, 2007)

Fiske, A.P. *Learning A Culture The Way Informants Do: Observing, Imitating, and Participating*. Los Angeles, University of California: 1998

Fotiou, E. *From medicine men to day trippers: shamanic tourism in Iquitos, Peru* (Diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2010.

Fotiou, E. Working with "La Medicina": Elements of Healing in Contemporary Ayahuasca Rituals', *Anthropology of Consciousness*, vol. 23, no. 1, p. 2012.

Fotiou, E. One Heart; Personal Insights into Spiritual Dimensions of Participations in Contemporary Ayahuasca Rituals, in *Seeking the Sacred with Psychoactive Substances: Chemical Paths to Spirituality and to God*, ed. JH Ellens, Westport: Praeger Publishing, 2014.

Geertz, Clifford. *Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture*. In *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.

Gennep van, Arnold. *The Rites of Passage*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1960.

Grimes, Ronald L. *Deeply into the bone. Re-inventing Rites of Passage*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

Grimes, Ronald L. *The craft of ritual studies* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Harris, R., Gurel, L. *A Study of Ayahuasca Use in North America* in *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, 44:3, 2012.

Kilham, C. *The Ayahuasca Test Pilots Handbook: The Essential Guide to Ayahuasca Journeying*. Berkely: Evolver Editions, 2014.

- Kjellgren, A., Eriksson, A., Norlander, T. *Experiences of Encounters with Ayahuasca- the Vine of the Soul*", in: *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, 41:4, 2009.
- Luna, L. E. *Vegetalismo: Shamanism among the Mestizo population of the Peruvian Amazon*. Stockholm: Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis, 1986.
- Luna, L. E. Icaros: Magic melodies among the mestizo shamans of the Peruvian Amazon. In: *Portals of power: Shamanism in South America*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1992.
- Metzner, R. *Sacred Vine of Spirits: Ayahuasca*. Vermont: 2006.
- Ott, J. *Ayahuasca analogues: Pangæan Entheogens*. Kennewick: Natural Products Company, 1994.
- Quartier, Thomas *Ritual Studies: een antropologische bezinning op liturgie. Dimensies en discussies binnen een onderzoeksveld. Tijdschrift voor Liturgie* 91, 2007.
- Quartier, Thomas *Liturgical Spirituality in Benedictine Tradition. Ritual Perspectives on Life and Death, Summary Lectures, St. Anselmo*: 2013.
- Rätsch, Christian. *The Encyclopedia of Psychoactive Plants: Ethnopharmacology and Its Applications*. Rochester, VT: Park Street Press, 2005.
- Seddon, M. *An anthropological analysis of ayahuasca: Healing Paradigmsm, Science and Spirituality* (bachelor thesis, La Trobe University, 2014)
- Shanon, B. *Ayahuasca Visualizations: A Structural Typology*. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2002.
- Spradley, J. P. *Participant Observation*. London: Thomson Learning Wadsworth, 1980.
- Tupper, K.W. *The Globalization of Ayahuasca: Harm reduction or Benefit Maximization?* *International Journal of Drug Policy*, vol. 19, 2008.
- Tupper, K.W. *Entheogenic Healing: The Spiritual Effects and Therapeutic Potential of Ceremonial Ayahuasca Use*, in *The Healing Power of Spirituality: How Faith Helps Humans Thrive*, eds. JH Ellens, Praeger Publishing, Westport, 2009b.
- Tupper, K.W. *Ayahuasca, Entheogenic Education & Public Policy*", PhD Thesis, University of British Columbia, 2011.
- Turner, Victor W. *The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-Structure*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company USA, 1969.
- Turner, Victor W. *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors Symbolic Action in Human Society* . Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975.
- Winkelman, M. *Drug Tourism or Spiritual Healing? Ayahuasca Seekers in the Amazon*, *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, vol. 37, no. 2, 2005.
- Geertz, Clifford. *Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture*. In *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.
- Gennep, van Arnold. *The Rites of Passage* . London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1960.
- Grimes, Ronald L. *Deeply into the bone. Re-inventing Rites of Passage*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

- Grimes, R.L., *The craft of ritual studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Harris, R., Gurel, L. *A Study of Ayahuasca Use in North America*, *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, 44:3, 2012: 209-215, doi: 10.1080/02791072.2012.703100
- Kilham, C. *The Ayahuasca Test Pilots Handbook: The Essential Guide to Ayahuasca Journeying*, Berkely: Evolver Editions, 2014
- Kjellgren, A., Eriksson, A., Norlander, T. *Experiences of Encounters with Ayahuasca- the Vine of the Soul*, *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, 41:4, 2009.
- Luna, L. E. *Vegetalismo: Shamanism among the Mestizo population of the Peruvian Amazon*. Stockholm: Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis, 1986.
- Luna, L. E. Icaros: Magic melodies among the mestizo shamans of the Peruvian Amazon. In E. J. Langdon & G. Baer (Eds.), *Portals of power: Shamanism in South America*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1992.
- Metzner, R. *Sacred Vine of Spirits: Ayahuasca*, Vermont: Park Street Press, 2006
- Ott, J. *Ayahuasca analogues: Pangæan Entheogens*, Kennewick: Natural Products Company, 1994.
- Quartier, T. *Ritual Studies: een antropologische bezinning op liturgie. Dimensies en discussies binnen een onderzoeksveld*, in *Tijdschrift voor Liturgie* 91, 2007.
- Quartier, T. *Liturgical Spirituality in Benedictine Tradition. Ritual Perspectives on Life and Death, Summary Lectures, St. Anselmo*: 2013.
- Rätsch, Christian. *The Encyclopedia of Psychoactive Plants: Ethnopharmacology and Its Applications*, Rochester, VT: Park Street Press, 2005.
- Seddon, M. *An anthropological analysis of ayahuasca: Healing Paradigmsm, Science and Spirituality* bachelor thesis, La Trobe University, 2014.
- Shanon, B. *Ayahuasca Visualizations: A Structural Typology*. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2002.
- Spradley, J. P. *Participant Observation*. London: Thomson Learning Wadsworth, 1980.
- Tupper, K.W. *The Globalization of Ayahuasca: Harm reduction or Benefit Maximization?*, *International Journal of Drug Policy*, vol. 19, 2008.
- Tupper, K.W. *Entheogenic Healing: The Spiritual Effects and Therapeutic Potential of Ceremonial Ayahuasca Use*, in *The Healing Power of Spirituality: How Faith Helps Humans Thrive*, eds. JH Ellens, Praeger Publishing, Westport: 2009b.
- Tupper, K.W. *Ayahuasca, Entheogenic Education & Public Policy*", PhD Thesis, University of British Columbia, 2011.
- Turner, Victor W. *The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-Structure*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company USA, 1969.
- Turner, Victor W. *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors Symbolic Action in Human Society*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975.
- Winkelman, M. *Drug Tourism or Spiritual Healing? Ayahuasca Seekers in the Amazon*", *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, vol. 37, no. 2, 2005.