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**‘An Ethnography of “Amazonian  
Shamanism” in Britain:**

**An examination of the migration of  
spiritual and healing practices  
native to Amazon communities.’**

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# Abstract

Traditionally in Great Britain (Britain), and what is commonly referred to as ‘Western society’, psychedelic use has been seen as a tool of revelry; a controversial pastime conducted by countercultural movements. To some cultures, the picture could not be more polarised. For centuries particular plants and fungi have been used to elicit an altered state of consciousness in the interest of healing, to enhance spirituality, and to provide guidance on how to manage life’s challenges. This research takes a lens to the migration of such practices, specifically from the Amazon region in South America, into Britain.

Conducted and presented as an ethnography, this work aims to create a holistic picture of the phenomenon; to understand the motives and beliefs of those involved; to highlight the value it has to them; to consider the impact it has had on their lives; and to understand their attitudes to their own cultural environment. The ethnography is influenced by the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and their conceptualisation of the rhizomatic connections between distinguished phenomenon; a postmodern, philosophical approach that reflects some ideas and beliefs put forward by the research’s participants.

# Table of contents

<b>TITLE PAGE</b>	<b>I</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>II</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>	<b>III</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	<b>VI</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>VII</b>
<b>AUTHOR’S DECLARATION</b>	<b>VIII</b>
<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 SUMMARY	1
1.2 A RATIONALE	2
1.3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES	3
1.4 RESEARCH ONTOLOGY	5
1.5 THESIS STRUCTURE	11
1.6 A NOTE ON SOURCES	13
1.7 LEXICON FOR THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY	14
<b>2. METHODOLOGY AND METHODS</b>	<b>19</b>
2.1 ETHNOGRAPHY	19
2.2 ETHICAL CLEARANCE AND THE CHALLENGES OF RESEARCHING ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES	31
<b>3. SHAMANISM</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>3.1 SHAMANISM THE GLOBAL PHENOMENON</b>	36
<b>3.2 AMAZONIAN SHAMANISM; CURANDEIRISMO</b>	41
<b>4. THE CHEMISTRY OF <i>CURANDEIRISMO</i> IN BRITAIN</b>	<b>54</b>
4.1 <i>AYAHUASCA</i>	54
4.2 KAMBO	60
<b>5. THE DANCE OF THE CONDOR AND THE EAGLE</b>	<b>62</b>
5.1 EARLY INTEREST 1850s – 1950s	64
5.2 1960s – 1980s THE LONG AND WINDING RUNWAY	65
5.3 1990s CURANDEIRO CHIC	68
5.4 2000s PSYCHEDELIC RESURGENCE	74
5.5 2010 INDIE’S NEW DRUG OF CHOICE	88
5.6 2011 MISAPPROPRIATION, DEMONISATION AND GLOBALISATION	90
5.7 2012 BUSINESS IS BOOMING	94
5.8 2013 A MOST MAINSTREAM MOIETY	97
5.9 2014 NOTHING TO SEE HERE	99
5.10 2015 MOTHER MEETS THE MONSTERS	102
5.11 EPILOGUE AND GRAPHS	107
5.12 HOW MIGHT THIS HAVE AFFECTED PARTICIPANTS?	111
<b>6. AMAZONIAN SHAMANISM IN BRITAIN</b>	<b>113</b>
6.1 DATA ANALYSIS INTRODUCTION	113
6.2 NOTES ON PRESENTATION STYLE	113
6.3 THE PRE-RITUAL INTERVIEW	114
6.4 THE <i>AYAHUASCA</i> RITUAL	120
6.5 OTHER RELATED PRACTICES	132
6.5 SUMMARY	143

<b>7. HEALTH AND WELL-BEING</b>	<b>144</b>
7.1 ATTRACTION TO COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINES	144
7.2 ACCEPTANCE, PEACE, AND CLARITY	146
7.3 PHYSICAL HEALTH	149
7.4 RELATIONSHIPS	151
7.5 MENTAL HEALTH	152
7.6 ADDICTION	156
<b>08. ONTOLOGY</b>	<b>158</b>
8.1 ON MAINSTREAM RELIGIONS	159
8.2 GOD AND SPIRIT	166
8.3 INNATE POWERS	168
8.4 MATTERS PARANORMAL	170
8.5 VIBRATIONS AND DIMENSIONS	171
8.6 RHIZOMATICS	173
8.7 DISDAIN TOWARDS THE OCCIDENT	175
8.8 NIHILISM	179
8.9 SUMMARY	181
<b>9. MIMESIS</b>	<b>184</b>
9.1 WHY MIMESIS?	184
9.2 MOTIVATIONS	186
9.3 ALIGNMENT OF BELIEFS	192
9.4 VALUE	202
<b>10. CONCLUSION</b>	<b>205</b>
10.1 VALIDATION	205
10.2 HOW CURANDEIRISMO REACHED BRITAIN	207
10.5 WHY TURN TO CURANDEIRISMO?	208
10.3 WHAT MAKES A COMMUNITY MEMBER?	209
10.4 HOW CURANDEIRISMO IS ENACTED IN BRITAIN	212
10.6 THE PERCEIVED BENEFITS OF CURANDEIRISMO	212
10.7 CLOSING THOUGHTS	213
<b>APPENDIX 1</b>	<b>215</b>
REQUEST FOR ETHICAL CLEARANCE	215
<b>APPENDIX 2</b>	<b>228</b>
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET	228
<b>APPENDIX 3</b>	<b>234</b>
RHIZOMATIC DIAGRAM	234
<b>APPENDIX 4</b>	<b>235</b>
ACTIVITIES FORUM FRONT PAGE — VISUAL ETHNOGRAPHY	235
<b>APPENDIX 5</b>	<b>236</b>
PRELIMINARY GUIDANCE — VISUAL ETHNOGRAPHY	236
<b>APPENDIX 6</b>	<b>237</b>
ACTIVITY ONE INSTRUCTIONS	237
<b>APPENDIX 7</b>	<b>238</b>
ACTIVITY TWO INSTRUCTIONS	238

<b>APPENDIX 8</b>	<b>239</b>
ACTIVITY THREE INSTRUCTIONS	239
<b>APPENDIX 9</b>	<b>240</b>
ACTIVITY FOUR INSTRUCTIONS	240
<b>APPENDIX 10</b>	<b>241</b>
ACTIVITY FIVE INSTRUCTIONS	241
<b>APPENDIX 11</b>	<b>242</b>
RESPONSES TO ACTIVITY ONE	242
<b>APPENDIX 12</b>	<b>262</b>
RESPONSES TO ACTIVITY TWO	262
<b>APPENDIX 13</b>	<b>266</b>
RESPONSES TO ACTIVITY THREE	266
<b>APPENDIX 14</b>	<b>269</b>
RESPONSES TO ACTIVITY FOUR	269
<b>APPENDIX 15</b>	<b>272</b>
RESPONSES TO ACTIVITY FIVE	272
<b>APPENDIX 16</b>	<b>275</b>
CODE LIST	275
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>280</b>

# List of figures

<b>Figure 1</b> Ethnography Venn diagram	12
<b>Figure 2.1</b> Number of academic papers by decade	67
<b>Figure 2.2</b> Total news articles published on ayahuasca 1990s	72
<b>Figure 2.3</b> Total news articles published on ayahuasca 2000s	86
<b>Figure 2.4</b> Total news articles published on ayahuasca per year 1990 - 2019	108
<b>Figure 2.5</b> Open Athens results	109
<b>Figure 2.6</b> Academic papers by decade	109
<b>Figure 2.7</b> Total number of articles per publication	109
<b>Figure 3</b> Investigated motives for drug use	190

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I have met many brilliant members of the psychedelic, and psychedelic research, community as part of this tremendous journey. It has been an incredible honour. I hope you enjoy reading this work.

# Author's declaration

I, Kerry Rowberry, declare that this thesis is my own work. It has not been submitted for the award of Higher Degree elsewhere, other than the University of Cumbria. No other persons have contributed to this research. This work has been supervised in the University of Cumbria, School of Health and Science, by the following persons:

Doctor Tom Grimwood, October 2012 – May 2022

Professor Ian Convery, October 2011 – May 2022

Professor Vincent O'Brien, October 2011 – September 2012



# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Summary

After a long, nascent journey into the popular consciousness of ‘the Western world’, ‘Amazonian shamanism’<sup>1</sup> has reached a point where it is no longer solely the preserve of Indigenous communities. Throughout the 2010s, rituals and practices of the Amazon have piqued the interest of rock stars (Jones, 2010), celebrities (Bain, 2013), the British psychedelic sub-culture, and new age spiritualists alike.

This phenomenon is not without controversy. The substance central to the shamanic work in the Amazon, *ayahuasca*, is a potent psychedelic known to cause vomiting and diarrhoea. *Kambo/sapo*<sup>2</sup> has a painful application technique, causes severe vomiting, and is a potential trigger of autoimmune conditions. When considered along with the contentious legal status of the substances, this creates a juxtaposition of health and well-being, exoticism, and risk, which coalesce to form a fascinating paradox when viewed from the wide-angle lens of ethnography.

In 2011, I experienced my first *ayahuasca* ritual before embarking upon this research project. By this point there was enough of a community of practitioners and users to warrant a justification for study, yet the practices remained primarily underground and unheard of by the wider population. The day of my university interview was remarkably timed as it was the same day that Great Britain (Britain) would declare its attitude towards shamanic *ayahuasca* use. It was the day of the trial of shamanic practitioner Peter Aziz. He had been secretly filmed by an undercover reporter for regional BBC programme *Inside Out West* in 2007. The footage showed Aziz making several unfounded claims about the efficacy of *ayahuasca* including its ability to cure cancer. He administered the brew to participants who had paid £100 each for the experience (BBC News Bristol, 2011). Aziz received a 15-month prison sentence that day (Morris, 2011).

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<sup>1</sup> In the opening section of this thesis, I use terminology that is commonly used in Britain, rather than that which is technically more correct, for the ease of the reader. At the end of this chapter, you will find justification for alternative lexicon that is employed throughout the remainder of this work.

<sup>2</sup> Both are regional terms for the secretion of the *Phyllomedusa bicolor*, a type of green tree frog from South America. For the remaining thesis it shall be referred to as *kambo*.

There was clear need to be understand more about this phenomenon, in this specific cultural context, so different to its native setting. The purpose of this research is to build an understanding of those individuals who participate in these rituals and practices in Britain.

The principal research question asks:

**What understanding can be formed about people in Great Britain, who are engaged in shamanic practices originating from the Amazon jungle, and what their involvement means to them?**

## **1.2 A rationale**

Since this research began, the subject of *ayahuasca* and interest in its use globally has grown exponentially. Chapter 5 looks at the growth of *ayahuasca* popularity in detail, but I will offer a preview of that here as it is central to the argument of why we need to increase our awareness and understanding of the matter.

In his 2013 Breaking Convention talk, the highly respected biochemist Dr. Dennis McKenna, who has been involved in *ayahuasca* related research for over three decades, reported that the number of papers about *ayahuasca* went from less than 20 citations between 1940 – 1984 to over 100, up to that point. Since then, interest in the topic has grown further: not just in academic articles but also in popular news sources such as *The New Yorker* (Levy, 2016), and *The Guardian* (Hill, 2016), who both use the term ‘boom’ in their headlines referring to the growth of *ayahuasca* use. The popularity of *ayahuasca* has grown in places like Brooklyn and Silicon Valley (Levy, 2016). Peru has developed a well-established, *ayahuasca* tourist industry linked to the growth of interest (Hill, 2016).

It was 2011<sup>3</sup>, in Birmingham, England, when I first encountered *ayahuasca* and its periphery practices. It was clear that this was a fascinating subject with lots of rich, interlaced, and at times elusive themes to be explored. There was a range of research available at that time that looked at the chemistry of *ayahuasca*. We will see in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 that there is also ample

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<sup>3</sup> I had been made aware of it as a ‘mysterious cure all from the Amazon’ in 2008 yet paid little attention to what sounded like a fantasy. This attitude changed in 2011 when presented with the opportunity to experience *ayahuasca* for myself.

research about these practices in their native setting of South America, specifically throughout the Amazon Jungle. What has been lacking is an understanding of them here, in Britain, an occidental environment.

As mainstream media has increased awareness and popularity of these practices, it has become increasingly important to better understand *ayahuasca* use in Britain. This research provides a platform for those British individuals who have been involved in these activities, so that they can share what the involvement means to them. This research will not examine whether these practices are effective in achieving the desired outcomes of the participants, or whether it is morally right or wrong to be a participant in them. What is of interest here is the people; their motivations, perceptions and reflections.

These practices are not particularly new to Britain, there is anecdotal evidence<sup>4</sup> that they arrived here around 2000, yet they are marginal and secretive. There are no other published studies of Amazonian shamanism in Britain currently. However, Druidism was formerly recognised as a religion in 2010 and ‘spirituality’ in Britain dates to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century:

‘...and there was a flourishing around the start of the twentieth century’ (Harvey and Vincett, 2012: 157-158). In this instance, ‘alternative spirituality’ covers groups, practices, and beliefs that can be considered new age, Pagan, and anything associated with mind-body-spirit or well-being cultures. The emergence of shamanic practices, native to the Amazon, may be seen as the flourishing of alternative spirituality, which continues to grow in diversity.

This research will uncover why people are getting involved; highlight the attitudes of those involved; and give us their perception on how participation in these rituals and treatments impacts on their life.

### **1.3 Aims and objectives**

The primary aim of this research is to provide an understanding of shamanic practices that are native to the Amazon, in Britain, from an ethnographic perspective, using a postmodern philosophy as an underpinning guide to the phenomenological aspects of this matter.

There were four key areas of investigation to this research:

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<sup>4</sup> Based on confidential conversations with active members of the relevant community throughout this research.

**1) What motivated the participants to get involved in these practices?**

In entering the project, it was clear that *ayahuasca* was widely promoted as a tool to enhance spirituality and personal health. To understand the phenomenon in Britain, it was important to clarify if this attracted the participants, or if they had different motivators. This community, in this climate, unlike other Occidental nations may have its own motivators.

**2) What are the belief systems of the participants, if any?**

In its native setting Amazonian shamanism is enshrined in beliefs, superstition, and taboos. It is relevant to see whether the participants have adopted these, or similar belief systems, alongside the temporal aspects of the practices. This thesis shows participants' theological perspectives both in their upbringing, and how it stood at the time of the interviews. By analysing theological and ontological opinions, we gain a deeper understanding of the impact of Amazonian shamanism in Britain. Theologies and ontologies are core to our individual value systems and can impact everyday decision making dramatically.

**3) What is the perceived impact of these practices on the participant?**

This considers broader aspects of the participant's lifestyle. To enhance understanding of Amazonian shamanism in Britain, as a cultural phenomenon, it is important to consider the wider consequences of involvement, such as changes to lifestyle, relationships, or health. This holistic approach creates a fuller picture and explains some of the participants' attitudes towards their involvement.

**4) What is the perceived value of these practices?**

This is a pertinent question given the legal status of *ayahuasca*. Every ritual carries the risk of being interrupted by police force. There is the potential for community members to be imprisoned while in a state of euphoric, and at times, all-consuming, and disorienting, psychedelic state of consciousness. By understanding the value of the practices to the participants we can begin to understand why they would be willing to take such a risk.

These four underpinning questions ensured a specific focus within a methodology that can be far reaching. The questions were used as a guide, but not a rigid and fixed focus of inquiry,

which may hinder the scope of what we can learn about this phenomenon. The questions also helped focus the attention of the participants who were keen to discuss their visual hallucinations and novel aspects of the practices. *The Antipodes of the Mind* (Shannon, 2010) includes scores of accounts of the *ayahuasca* experience from within the altered state of consciousness and provides a taxonomy for the types of experiences reported. There is no value in repeating that work here.

### **1.4.3 Rhizoanalysis and poststructuralism**

Psychedelics facilitate a feeling of or belief in interconnectivity.

'The importance of interconnectivity is commonly expressed in both secular and spiritual works regarding psychedelic consciousness' (Shipley, 2015: 223). This aligns neatly with the postulations put forward in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* [ATP] (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 1-27). This begins by criticising the linear nature of text and the sorting of information and taxonomies. Nature does not treat linearity as a universal law. It does not conform to the same format present in written works, such as a thesis.

...in nature, roots are taproots with a more multiple, lateral, and circular system of ramification, rather than a dichotomous one. Thought lags behind nature. Even the book as a natural reality is a taproot, with its pivotal spine and surrounding leaves. But the book as a spiritual reality, the Tree or Root as an image, endlessly develops the law of the One [sic] that becomes two, then of the two that become four.  
(Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 3)

It continues:

'Binary logic and biunivocal relationships still dominate psychoanalysis... linguistics, structuralism, and even information science' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 4). This linearity, which is forced by the format of presentation, effects the analysis and understanding of such information, as necessity sees it bound to unnatural forms. Since this work was first published, a range of digital technologies, that delineate the presentation of information, have been developed; still the written thesis remains the standard for academic work.

The rhizome is the posited solution. Unlike the taproot or tree-like structures that have been commonly employed in academia, the rhizome offers an opportunity for the messiness that can be found when studying natural phenomenon. A messiness found in ethnography. The botanical structure that illustrates the philosophy is explained:

‘A rhizome as a subterranean stem is absolutely different from roots and radicles. Bulbs and tubers are rhizomes. Plants with roots or radicles may be rhizomorphic in other respects altogether’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 5). The concept of the rhizome as a theoretical tool is illustrated:

‘A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations [sic] or power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 6).

This theory allows the mapping of elements of discourse and emergent themes in a way which captures the organic complexity of participants’ engagement with Amazonian shamanism. This is a more fitting approach to a subject of this nature, rather than the shaping of findings to meet a model that is fixed, synthetic and pandering to a culturally developed need for linear order. Rhizoanalysis allows us to see how themes and findings can interlace, be linked, and appear disparate, within and between phenomena.

The work describes individual phenomenon as a plateau, which can be the off shoot of multiple plateaus, and can lead to other, diverse plateau linked to subsequent plateaus; or not. Three terms have been employed in this work that originate in *ATP* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988). These will be explained in Section 1.7.5.

## **1.4 Research ontology**

There are three theoretical principles governing this research. This shapes the perspective taken when approaching research design, data collection, and analysis. They are the lens through which the question is approached.

### **1.4.1 Postcolonialism**

Defining postcolonialism is a notoriously difficult task. And so it should remain. Since postcolonial theory’s emergence within literary studies in the 1970s, the broad body of work it has precipitated has steadily worked against definitive categorizations, taxonomies and concrete assumptions. If we can be sure, as much postcolonial scholarship argues, that the legacies of colonialism and imperialism are still with us, that they have indelibly shaped the world as we know and experience it, then we should also be clear that any definition of postcolonialism itself must be partial, provisional, and attenuated to new, unthought strategies for

thinking and living through and past the inequities of colonialism in the present. In other words, whatever else postcolonialism is, it is a cluster of perspectives and postcolonial theory and geography interventions that interrogate what we think we know, urging us to explore more carefully the historical production of that knowledge.

(Jazeel, 2019: pp. 1-2)

Within the context of this research postcolonialism is applied in reference to how the methodology is applied, to the data collection methods used, and how the data is treated thereafter. While colonialism and postcolonialism typically refer to the treatment of cultures outside of the Occident by the Occident, here, it refers to the treatment of the researched by the researcher. It is considered as part of the power differential between the two given the history of the methodology employed.

Ethnography has shifted significantly from its origins: 'A historical overview of ethnographic research generally refers to European colonizers'. There are several examples to highlight distinct power differences between researcher and the researched in early ethnographies (Taylor, 2002: 2). Traditionally, the researcher acted as a 'fly on the wall', an alien viewing the other from their own standpoint. Analysis would be driven by prejudice and the socio-political experiences of the researcher. The ethnographer postured themselves as an ultimate authority, using their own cultural 'advancement' to assert power and control over how other cultures are represented.

...the concentration of anthropologists on precontact [sic] social forms of native people meant that they ignored, or attempted to weed out of their descriptions and analyses, any effects that were the result of contact. Thus questions of racism and economic exploitation were ignored, as they would have required study of both the colonizing and colonized societies. Both the structural functionalism of British anthropology, following Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, and the emphasis on cultural complexities of American anthropology, following Boas, ignored the contemporary reality of the lives of the people they studied in their attempts to reconstruct 'pure' social structures and cultural forms without a regard to the influence of colonial contact, of which the anthropologists were themselves a part...

(Davis, 1999: 11)

The ethnographic discipline has made great strides away from this, taking guidance from postcolonialist scholars.

...Thus from this earlier perspective the influence of the ethnographer was to be eliminated insofar as possible under conditions of long-term participant observation, the alternative that was adopted to minimize [sic] the ethnographer's influence in the reported observations, primarily a matter of reporting style.  
(Davies, 1999: 11)

This is to recognise that the superiority of the Occidental world is perceived only. It is neither tangible, nor actual. Following this, the data collection methods employed in this research are designed to minimise any transposition of presuppositions, and provide opportunity, where possible, for the participants to lead the discussion. It was ensured that participants were able to highlight any matters that they felt to be of importance to the understanding of this phenomenon. As an ethnographer it is detrimental to claim any superiority of knowledge from the outset, as one cannot hold the perspectives and knowledge of many. While postcolonialism is a broad subject covering sociology, philosophy, and politics, here it is applied in reference to the conduct of ethnography, especially given that it has a tradition steeped in the study of politically disempowered communities by scholars of the Occident. The intention of this is to empower participants to drive the narrative of the research, to encourage them to highlight matters that may not have been considered from the outset by the researcher, and to enhance their experience as a research participant which may encourage future engagement in research. Chapter 2 will offer a more detailed explanation of the data collection methods employed, and how these were justified.

### **1.4.2 Hegemony, imperialism, and Occidental dominance**

#### *1.4.2.1 On cultural appropriation*

Throughout the course of this research, several cultural groups, including Native Americans, have taken a stand against 'cultural appropriation'. Cultural appropriation is an important subject, especially within the discussion of postcolonialism. The term was first coined in the work *"Logiques métisses": Cultural Appropriation and Postcolonial Representations* (Lionette, 1993: 100-120) and describes the act of an Occidental individual or group taking on the cultural practices of a politically less empowered cultural group in a way that is either disrespectful to its origins, profiteering, or both. Not every act of 'cultural adoption' is viewed as appropriation. It commonly relates to the treatment of cultures that have historically met with great violence and subjugation from the Occident.



It may be considered an important aspect of a project such as this. However, the subject of cultural appropriation is intrinsically underpinned by moral judgment. To use the data collected for passing moral judgment would be unethical. To do so goes against the postcolonialist sentiments afforded participants set out already, as it would undermine the power balance being sought between researched and researcher. Such an approach would not attract participants, and the opportunity to develop new knowledge will be lost. This is not an attempt to debase the importance of recognising and reducing problematic cultural appropriation, rather, it is the maintenance of research integrity.

In addition, various resources on research ethics point to the importance of doing no harm to participants (The ASA, 2021: 7; Hammersley, 2019: pp. 10-11; Social Research Association, 2021: pp. 21-22). It is vital that the researcher leaves the researched in a state where they would be willing to engage in future research. Subjecting participants to moral judgment has the potential to cause harm to them.

Furthermore, the concept of informed consent is vital. The participants should, from the outset, have a clear understanding of how their data will be handled within the project they have agreed to participate in (Resnik, 2018: 113; The ASA, 2021: 12; Social Research Association 2021: pp. 5-10). It is important to note that while cultural appropriation was first written about in 1993, the subject was not popularised until 2015. A search of national newspapers in Britain shows that stories published prior to this year that touch on the subject were few (Kolawole, 2002: 16; Priya, 2012: 3; Hadley, 2013: 5; Chang, 2014). However, in 2015 there was a flurry of newspaper articles to use the term (Nesrine, 2015; Virtue, 2015; Guardian Music (a), 2015; Mokoena, 2015; Holpuch, 2015; Moore, 2015; Stevens, 2015; Quirk, 2015; Guardian Music (b), 2015; Cochrane, 2015; Marsh, 2015; Twitty, 2015)

This occurred after data collection for this project was undertaken, and so this researcher was unaware of the topic at the time and no participant raised the subject. It would be unethical to retrofit the study since proper permissions and informed consent were not granted.

#### 1.4.2.2 Hegemony

Prevailing attitudes in the Occident are against the use of psychedelics, illustrated by the introduction of the Psychoactive Substance Act (2016). Chapter 5 provides opportunity to consider how the hegemony of the press can influence attitudes towards this phenomenon. Much of Gramsci's work on cultural hegemony, which was the result of his attention to Marx's writings, focused on the power differentials between social classes, the state, the governed, and the influence of power.

Structures and superstructures form a 'historical bloc'. That is to say the complex, contradictory and discordant ensemble of the superstructures is the reflection of the ensemble of the social relations of production. From this one can conclude: that only a totalitarian system of ideologies gives a rational reflection of the contradiction of the structure and represents the existence of the objective conditions for the revolutionizing [sic] of praxis. If a social group is formed which is one hundred per cent homogeneous on the level of ideology, this means that the premisses exist one hundred per cent for this revolutionizing: that is that the 'rational' is actively and actually real. This reasoning is based on the necessary reciprocity between structure and superstructures, and a reciprocity which is nothing other than the real dialectical process.

(Gramsci, 2000: 192)

We can consider the Occident a superstructure and Britain a structure within. Additionally, Amazonian shamanism in Britain is a structure within the superstructure of Britain. Hegemony is the exercise of power and influence of the ruling classes (or the powerful) upon the ruled (or subjugated). This can be overt, through means such as legislation, or more insidious by way of subtle media influence. This research leads to an inquiry about the positionality of this phenomenon in Britain, especially in relation to the level of homogeneity, and the extent of which ideologies are aligned between the research participants and wider populace. In particular, the views of postcolonial authors have been vital in showing how the prevalent attitudes towards shamanism in Britain are rooted in imperialism.

It should not be possible to read nineteenth-century British literature without remembering that imperialism, understood as England's social mission, was a crucial part of the cultural representation of England to the English. The role of literature in the production of cultural representation should not be ignored. These two obvious "facts" continue to be disregarded in the reading of nineteenth-century British literature. This itself attests to the continuing success of the imperialist project, displaced and dispersed into more modern forms.

(Spivak, 1985: 243)

Section 8.7 examines participants' attitudes towards their own culture, to see the impact of imperialism on them.

... many cultural theories pretending to universally assume and incorporate the inequality of races, the subordination of inferior cultures, the acquiescence of those who, in Marx's words, cannot represent themselves and therefore must be represented by others.

(Said, 1993: 335)

These prevailing attitudes against psychedelic use position the research participants as subordinate in the wider cultural landscape of Britain. This research gives a voice from which to determine a participant driven narrative. Still, the migration of rituals from South America to Britain takes place in a broader context of colonial histories and legacy.

## 1.5 Thesis structure

Throughout the thesis footnotes are used to present an autoethnography, recognising the semi-insider nature of this work. The first half of this thesis is presented in a traditional manner. Chapter 2 explains the methodology and methods employed. It provides insight into how the data was collected, examined, and explains why this was the appropriate approach.

What Amazonian shamanism is will be explained in Chapter 3. This chapter supplies a cultural context from where these practices derived. With an understanding of their heritage, we shall then consider their migration out of the South American jungles, and their spread globally, with special attention on Europe.

A deeper understanding of the rituals and practices from a biochemical perspective is provided in Chapter 4. This aspect of the thesis is unavoidably reductionist, which is at odds with the ethnographic approach. However, it provides insight into what the rituals and practices can involve and what can be understood about them from an objective standpoint.

Chapter 5 offers a timeline to help us understand how knowledge of *ayahuasca* grew outside of its native jungle setting, with the aid of academics, artists, the press, and popular media. It shows the various media formats and their treatment of the subject from which we can understand the hegemonic influence that has shaped public opinion of the substance's use.

The ethnography is formed in Chapters 6 to 9, inclusive. This is where the data collected is analysed and understanding of this phenomenon is developed. In the spirit of postmodernism,

the presentation of these chapters deviates from what can traditionally be expected. To provide the reader an opportunity to select preferred elements to read, and so that the analysis isn't interrupted by a stream of supporting quotes, the page orientation switches to landscape, and the main body of the page is split into two columns. On the left is a presentation of associated observations made, analysis, and interpretation of the interview data. On the right you will find the relevant quotes taken from interviews that correlate with the information set forth on the left. This presentation style will prevent fragmentation of the data and allow readers to work through the emergent themes more systematically.

Figure 1 provides a visual guide to the benefits of employing three different types of ethnography. A more thorough rationale for the use of varied ethnographic method is found Chapter 2.

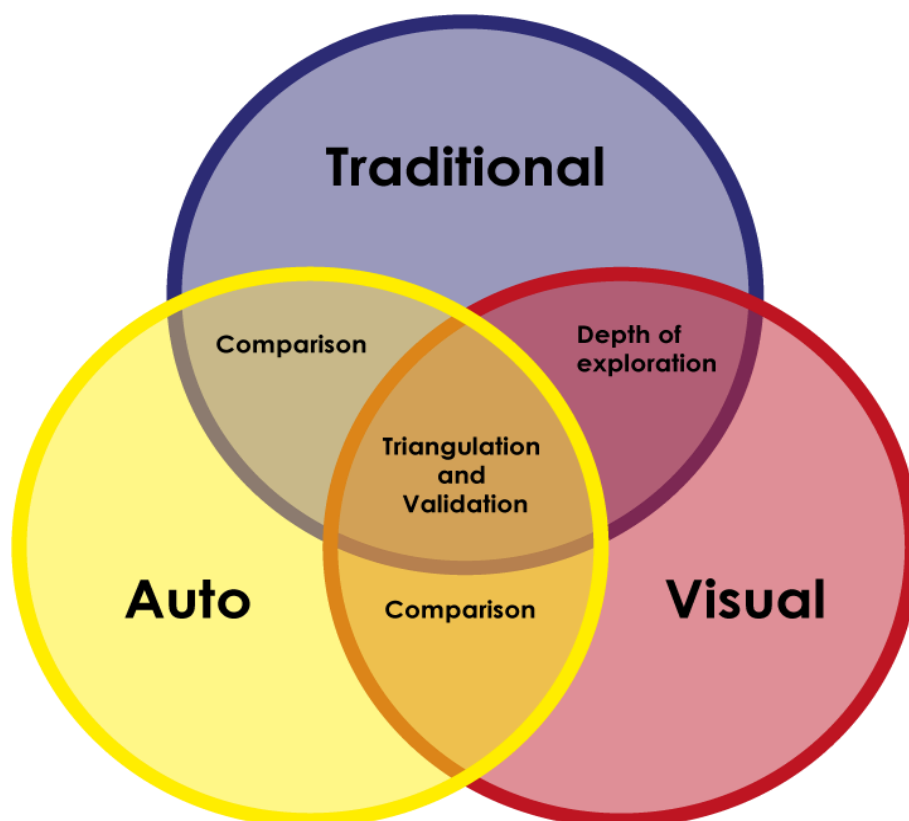


Figure 1

Chapter 6 illustrates what the experiences are like from a temporal perspective, that is, in the physical space. Chapter 7 explores the notion of well-being and considers how, as a concept, it has shaped this community. Chapter 8 investigates the ontological perspectives of the

participants. Chapter 9 considers the mimetic aspects of this phenomenon - that is the copying and adaptation of these practices.

The conclusion of this thesis, found in Chapter 10, provides a review of the data and highlights the theory to be drawn from it, to answer the research question set out in Section 1.1.

## **1.6 A note on sources**

Where possible, peer-reviewed sources have been used throughout this work. However, this thesis does draw on some secondary sources that are not considered academic and are not peer-reviewed. This is required because shamanism is not a formal academic subject in Britain, and those interested in learning more on the subject, such as our participants, are not gaining their understanding from textbooks. There are many articles and accounts available online, through e-zines and blogs that have proved useful in understanding the influences placed upon the research participants and community members. In addition, native Amazonian's cannot easily access established and reputable publishing services, yet can self-publish using blog posts, and similar easy to access platforms. This creates a conflict between considering the validity of a native, via a less reputable publishing source, and an outsider Occidental academic account, by way of an established publishing house. A combination of both are employed.

Chapter 5 specifically looks at the growth of popularity of *ayahuasca* and must draw on popular culture and non-academic sources to understand this. Additionally, some of the substances involved have not received a great deal of academic attention, such as *kambo*, and *rapé* (pronounced hap-ey); a tobacco-based snuff. Where these studies do occur, they are lab based and do not tell us anything from the perspective of the end user.

Some sources employ terminology that is not in keeping with the postcolonialist standpoint of this work. Content notes [CN: reason] are placed in square brackets at the start of any excerpt where this occurs, and where there may be content that could be seen as unsettling.

## 1.7 Lexicon for the purpose of this study

### 1.7.1 *Brasil, Shaman/curandeiro, and ayahuasca*

Throughout Section 1.4 we considered the necessity to be mindful of an equanimity of power amongst different global communities, away from an assertion of Occidental dominance. Therefore, there is no reason, since there is no phonic difference, to employ the spelling ‘Brazil’. The native ‘Brasil’ is still easily recognisable by British readers and is used throughout this work.

The will to be postcolonial is at discord with the title of this thesis. Both the title and the text to this point are for the benefit of the predicted British audience, and layman reader, meaning a term recognisable to this demographic has been applied to enhance search engine results. This is important in enhancing the potential impact of this research.

Antecedently, ‘Amazonian shamanism’ has referred to ‘magico-religious’ and ‘medicinal’ practices found in the Amazon. The word ‘shamanism’ is one which English-speaking countries have commonly taken to use to describe a range of disparate and unique cultures and practices. It is not what a practitioner of these activities would call them in their native tongue. The word shaman is from the Tungusic word ‘*šaman*’:

[CN: Offensive terminology used]

Since the beginning of the century, ethnologists have fallen into the habit of using the terms “shaman,” “medicine man,” “sorcerer,” and “magician” interchangeably to designate certain individuals possessing magico-religious powers and found in all “primitive” societies. By extension, the same terminology has been applied in studying the religious history of “civilised” peoples, and there have been discussions, for example, of an Indian, Iranian, a Germanic, a Chinese, and even a Babylonian “shamanism” with reference to the “primitive” elements attested in the corresponding religions. For many reasons this confusion can only militate against any understanding of the shamanic phenomenon. If the word “shaman” is taken to mean any magician, sorcerer, medicine man, or ecstatic found throughout the history of religions and religious ethnology, we arrive at a notion at once extremely complex and extremely vague.

(Eliade, 2004: 3-4)

From herein the term shaman will be applied when referencing the phenomenon from a global perspective, or when highlighting similarities between the disparate shamanic communities. *Curandeirismo* is used when referring to what we have thus far deemed ‘Amazonian shamanism’, since this is the terminology of that region, as demonstrated in the works, *A Hallucinogenic Tea, Laced with Controversy: Ayahuasca in the Amazon and the United States* (Dobkin de Rios and Rumrill, 2008: 51, 65, 69, 87, 93, 97) and *Shamanism: An Encyclopaedia of World Beliefs, Practices, and Culture, Volume 1*. (Walter and Fridman, 2004: 412, 436). The term *curandeiro* describes the naturalistic, holistic, healers of Spanish and Portuguese speaking regions of South America<sup>5</sup>. It is acknowledged that as a Spanish and Portuguese term (with slightly different spelling for each) this is the language of the colonisers in the area and not a term that would be used by the Indigenous people of the area. As such it is not an entirely correct term to use. Yet, there are many Indigenous languages throughout the Amazon region.

Lowland Amazonia boasts over 350 languages grouped into some fifteen language families, plus a fair number of isolates. The six major linguistic families of the Amazon Basin are Arawak, Tupí, Carib, Panoan, Tocanoan, and Marco-Jê. Add to this at least fifteen smaller families, among them Makú, Yanomami, Witotoan, Jivaroan, Arawà, Chapacuran, Manbiquara and a few score isolates.

(Aikhenvald, 2011: 1)

Each of these languages will have their own way of naming the practices of interest to this research. To choose one language over another will support a false hierarchy. However, a term is required here, to succinctly direct the reader to the concept of indigenous practices of the region. For simplicity, and to move away from the more generic concept of ‘shamanism’, a term with no geopolitical link to the region, and as discussed further in Section 3.1, the term *curandeirismo*, which directly translates from Portuguese to English as ‘healerism’, is employed henceforth throughout this thesis to describe the various medicinal, ritual, and spiritual practices from across the Amazon region. The term *curandeiro* is used to describe the Indigenous people of the area who take on the role of healer and guide to their community. This research is not the first to employ the term *curandeiro* or *curandeirismo* for this purpose, and it is illustrated as interchangeable with the term shaman (though in this case specific to the Spanish speaking Peruvian area of the Amazon, and as such using the Spanish spelling of

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<sup>5</sup> Spellings have been checked with native Brazilian Portuguese speakers.

*curandero*) in the work of Buijs, and Welling (2021: 23) for example, and by the healers of the region too (Beyer, 2011: 104).

There are several terms used throughout the Amazon in relation to *curandeirismo*. These include *brujo*, or *buja*, meaning a black, or evil doing magician, or sorcerer; *hechicero* which means sorcerer; *curandeiro*; and *ayahuasquero/ayahuasquera* which is applied to those who specialise in *ayahuasca* (Campos, 2011: 131-133).

While the term *curandeiro* is applied to a healer with a broad range of knowledge and skills, the term *ayahuasquero* is more specific to those specialising in *ayahuasca* use.

Throughout the Upper Amazon, the three most important psychoactive plants are the three hallucinogens mapacho, toé, and ayahuasca, which embody the primary functions of protection, power, and teaching. Thus, there are three primary shamanic specialities, based on which of these plants the shaman uses to diagnose sickness and to contact the healing and protective spirits - tabaquero, toero, and ayahuasquero...

... Other commonly used terms with the *-ero* suffix indicate what we can call shamanic practice areas—for example, *pusanguero*, a maker of love potions; *curandero*, a healer of sickness; *shitanero*, a practitioner of shitana, sorcery; *heichero*, a caster of evil spells; *chontero*, a sorcerer who inflicts harm which magic darts.

(Beyer, 2011: 104-105)

### **1.7.2 Shamanic practitioner**

This term is used to refer to any persons facilitating shamanic rituals and treatments that are not native to the culture from which those practices originate.

### **1.7.3 The Occident**

It is recognised that in common parlance, the part of the world that is dominated by people of European heritage is usually referred to as ‘the West’. Throughout Chapter 6-9 we can see this reflected in the speech of the research participants. While this is expected of the public, it is not geographically accurate, and the word ‘Occident’ is used as a collective noun for these regions instead as it is not used in a directional sense in modern lexicon.



*Chewing over the West: Occidental narratives in non-Western readings* (Jedamski, 2009: xii) explains that ‘Occident’ is a term that is opposing, or in contrast to, the ‘Orient’. The latter being a term abandoned in formal settings thanks to the arguments of *Orientalism* (Said 2003), that warn of a European tendency to dominate a territory, and the narrative about it.

‘The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories, and landscapes...’ (Said, 2003: 1-2)

When one refers to ‘the West’ in popular discourse its use conjures vast imagery, symbolism and meaning. It can include colonised Central America, Canada, and Australia, as well as European countries such as Britain, France, and Spain. It typically refers to anything that is considered ‘white and white culture’<sup>6</sup>. Yet it has limited use in a scientific text as it holds no geographical relevance. Typically, it is claimed that Central America is ‘Western’ yet Mexico and Brazil are not. South America was affected significantly by European colonialism too, but principally that of Spain and Portugal, not Britain and Ireland. Geographically both Central and South America are on the same vertical plane, or latitude, yet Central America is considered ‘Western’, and South America is not. Additionally, on a sphere with a north south axis only, there is no way to determine what is West and what is East relative to the entire globe. This inaccuracy is corrected by adopting the use of the term Occidental.

#### **1.7.4 Participant and community member**

There is a need to differentiate between a participant in shamanic activities and participants in this research, since the former is not necessarily the later. The community under investigation does not have a collective noun currently, and throughout this research a will or need for one was not seen in the community. As a postcolonialist there is an aversion to applying a term to a group as an ‘outsider’ for utility. To clarify, the term participant is applied only to those persons involved in this research project. When referring to the wider community of persons involved in *Curandeirismo* in Britain the term community member is employed.

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<sup>6</sup> In racial classifications labels are commonly derived from geographical locations, except in the case of ‘black’ and ‘white’. These terms were brought into use after Nathaniel Bacon’s rebellion in 1676 Virginia, USA, and used in legislation to allow European (likely Irish) servants greater rights than African slaves. However, this use is a reference to common parlance and both terms are used universally at this point in history. (Rice, 2013: 221)

### 1.7.5 A Thousand Plateaus

As an underpinning text, *ATP* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988) has provided terms which describe aspects of the concept of the rhizome phenomenologically. The following have been used in this research:

- **Plateau(s).** Traditionally a geological term, a plateau is a flat, elevated, land mass. In *ATP* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988) it is an alternative for the term phenomenon. In visualising the concept, it is useful to imagine individual phenomenon as plateau, all connected organically, in a web like fashion.
- **Stratification.** As phenomena succumb to internal and external influences they change. Eventually these changes lead to new phenomena. It is this shift, the influence, leading one phenomenon into becoming another that is described as stratification.
- **Lines of flight.** The line of flight is the journey of stratification between phenomena. It is the changes that take place that differentiate the new phenomenon from its origins.

## 2. Methodology and methods

To answer the research question set out in Chapter 1, this research employs the following data collection methods:

- Participant observation.
- Semi-structured interviews.
- A range of visual ethnographic exercises designed to encourage free and alternative expression.
- Autoethnography.

### 2.1 Ethnography

To understand *curandeirismo* in Britain it is important to employ the best developed methods for examining the interweaving of culture and well-being that it presents. This subject may benefit from a phenomenological approach however, given that:

‘Phenomenology is the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view’ (Smith, 2013). It is important that this first-person view is situated within a more generalised view of the wider community first. Unlike phenomenology, ethnography allows us to cast a wide net and to gather a variety of different data sources. This allows a more diverse range of perspectives to be introduced into the discourse.

There are several terms used to describe research of culture. These include cultural anthropology (Warms and McGee, 2013: 431), participant observation (Bryman, 2012: 431), ethnomethodology (Giddens, 1994: 39; Warmes and McGee, 2013: 232), and ethnography (Gobo, 2008). It is worth noting that participant observation is also a form of data collection. Additionally, ethnography is the noun applied to the discipline, and the product of that discipline.

The birth of the ethnographic methodology is commonly dated to the period between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It developed internationally to ethnology, a discipline which in the first half of the 1800s split away from traditional anthropology, which was then dominated by the physical and biological paradigm. Ethnology was more concerned with studying people (through

comparison of their material artefacts) and their cultures and classifying their salient features. ...

...When ethnographic methodology was adopted by social research – a disciplinary area different from anthropology – problems of adaptation required its partial revision – a revision which then affected the anthropology of the post-war period... But from the late 1940s onwards various anthropologists studied work communities in American and British Factories. This gave rise to the 'Human Relations' movement and inaugurated applied anthropology, as well as industrial or organisational anthropology.

(Gobo, 2008: pp 7-9)

Ethnography does draw on phenomenology as a part of the tapestry it presents.

...and the philosophy of ordinary language and focuses intensively on practical action and social interaction in everyday settings. Together with the spin-off program of conversation analysis, ethnomethodology has become a familiar perspective in several fields besides sociology, including anthropology, linguistic pragmatics, communication and information studies, science and technology studies, education studies, and workplace studies.

(Warms and McGee, 2013: 232)

It is claimed to be the oldest of the qualitative methods with no one single approach, and that it specifically addresses a desire to understand cultures and cultural knowledge (Francis, 2013: 66). As this is the study of a nascent cultural phenomenon, this is the ideal study to employ ethnography and ethnographic methods. It is a discipline that attracts, and must embrace, diversity of ideas and expression. There are a range of types of ethnography, more than can be considered in the space of this chapter.

Ethnographic studies of all types aim to interpret culture by explicating the nuances of what makes a culture or cultural group distinct, albeit from different perspectives. They are always conducted in settings, involve the collection of data generation, case numbers are small and there are a myriad of ethical issues that need to be negotiated.

(Francis, 2013: 66)

Other types of ethnography include feminist ethnography (Bryman, 2001: 307), structuralist ethnography, reception ethnography (Gobo. 2008: pp. 43, 54), and both visual and autoethnography.

Early cultural anthropologists such as Franz Boas and Bronislaw Malinowski paid less attention to research design as they did the validity of the outcomes; the scientific rigour of the work (Bernard and Gravlee, 2014: pp. 97, 98).

...the nature of fieldwork, in terms of its requisite huge investments in time and geographical focus, has often limited the attractiveness of more formal research designs because of its commitment to studying specific problems in a specific way. The realities of fieldwork often dictate the need to change the problem focus or, finding that the proposed hypotheses are inappropriate to the cultural setting under study.

(Bernard and Gravlee, 2014: 100)

There is need for flexibility from the researcher to fit the culture under study. In ensuring the study maintains a post-colonial nature this need for flexibility is amplified. This is crucial if the research is to be fundamentally based on the contributions of the research participants and voices of the community under investigation, and not shaped by popular media reports on *ayahuasca* use. But these voices may express themselves in a variety of ways. As such, when considering the methods for collecting data, ethnographies benefit from a wide range of sources.

Ethnographers typically use multiple techniques in the field. No data-collection technique is without its limitations and potential biases, so that the more of them are used, the more chance there is to cancel out some of those biases and come up with a reasonably objective overall portrait. (Angrosino, 2006: 3)

As Figure 1 illustrates, this work draws from three different forms of ethnography. This widens the scope of investigation, improves the opportunity for participant led data, and provides greater opportunity for triangulation and verification. At the core, two fundamental ethnographic data collection methods are employed: participant observation, and semi-structured interviews.

To represent my position as a native researcher, and to enable greater transparency, autoethnographic notes are added throughout in the form of footnotes. They offer a supplementary commentary whilst exposing my own views and experience, standpoint epistemology, and interpretive lens.

...the central idea of standpoint epistemology is that knowledge is *situated*. In other words, what one knows reflects the particular perspective, or in our case, *standpoint*, of the knower. The task for the standpoint epistemologist is, then, to explain the relationship between one's standpoint and the knowledge this standpoint makes available. That is, how and why does one's social identity play and epistemic role, and what role (if any) it ought to play.

(Toole, 2021: 339)

To complete the ethnographic triad, visual ethnography allows participants a more creative means of exploring their thoughts and feelings on the topics that came from the interview data.

The questions, and activities the participants were presented centre around the four principal lines of enquiry listed in Section 1.3 and aim to create a broad image of this phenomenon from a cultural perspective. Enquiries in this research are broad, and include attempts to understand the participants' lifestyles, belief systems, and relationships to each other. Inquiry remained flexible and open enough for the researcher to shape the research yet held some structure to prevent discussions presenting irrelevant data, such as thorough descriptions of the hallucinatory experience. The balance of flexibility and structure is discussed further in Section 2.1.2.2.

This research does not aim to emulate the work of any researcher, neither does it intend on furthering the work of any other ethnographer.

Given shifting theoretical and methodological frameworks, anthropology and ethnography, as a discipline and research practice, have remained open to innovation. In ethnography itself the theory was in the writing, and throughout the 20th century, anthropological theory has not proceeded in a linear fashion (although historians of anthropology often depict it as such)-from functional, to structural functional, to structuralism, to interpretive, reflexive, critical, and so forth. Today, all of those theories are in use to some extent or another. I do not mean to indicate that there are no paradigm shifts over time, that is, a shift in an implicit body of intertwined theoretical and methodological presuppositions, but that anthropology has always appeared to be theoretically heterodox.  
(Nader, 2011: 213)

### **2.1.1 Insider research**

It is appropriate to consider my position in relation to the research. I was known to some of the participants socially prior to the study. I had participated in two *ayahuasca* rituals, and one *kambo* treatment before commencing on this project. This makes me a community member.

This familiarity offers a great advantage to the research (Asselin, 2003: pp. 99-103; Breen, 2002: pp. 161-171; Hellawell, 2006: 484; Hewitt-Taylor, 2002: pp. 33-35; Hodgkinson, 2005: 133; Kanuha, 2000: pp. 1-8; Mercer, 2007: pp. 4-14; Heuten, 2004: pp. 207 - 211). I was already in the field; trust was established. It was fair to assume enthusiasm and gratitude for taking this

subject to the academic community. Cooperation and access were given freely. This would have been more difficult to obtain from an outsider position, given the legal ambiguity that has been associated with *ayahuasca* use, which is covered in Section 2.2.

The two principal benefits of insider research are ‘common folkways’ and ‘insider privilege’. Common folkways is a collective noun for the subtle nuances and shared meanings within a group (Kanhua, 2000: pp. 1-8). This may be experiences, lifestyle choices, or shared belief systems. Sharing common folkways with the group under analysis helps to avoid *faux pas* and the damage they may do to trust. This research benefitted from the *a priori* knowledge that it is offensive to discuss *ayahuasca* in terms of being simply a hallucinogenic, or recreational drug. Additionally, it was known that note taking and recording was not welcome inside the *ayahuasca* rituals, and when it was appropriate to speak or be silent throughout. Knowing the discomfort experienced in a *kambo* treatment enhanced empathy in observing others undergoing the experience. Laughing might be a tempting way to lighten the mood but should not be assumed as welcome.

Further benefit of being an insider is that privileged information can be exploited (Mercer, 2007: pp. 4-14). Additionally, there is a potential to gather a greater depth of information as a trusted insider. This would be owing to the established reputation and contacts of the researcher within the group. Participants are more likely to present a distorted image to outsiders, either to counter predicted value judgements, or to guard information that might be open to manipulation, misunderstanding, or make the group vulnerable (Hewitt-Taylor, 2002: pp. 33-35).

Despite these advantages, there are criticisms of insider research to be mindful of, such as a lack of objectivity, or unavoidable bias. However, Section 2.1.2.1 shows how this is inevitable when collecting data from participant observations. This is true regardless of the researcher being a member of the community they investigate or not. Other concerns with insider research include attachment, overfamiliarity, assumption, and confused and shifting roles (Rowberry, 2015: 37). The first three of these concerns are interlaced and can be mitigated. Including as much opportunity as possible for participant led data is one way.

Asking participants to review the analysis produced is another. This work has been read and agreed by a participant prior to publication, for this purpose.

The matter of confused and shifting roles was a significant issue to navigate throughout this project. Some friendships were strengthened, others saw an increase of tension. My status had changed; I was now an informant offering up this underground practice to an academic audience. Not all community members were comfortable with this idea from the outset and proposals were occasionally met with some suspicion. This was managed with assurances that there was no interest in collecting incriminating information and the use of a Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 2). In addition, there was at times an intensity of emotion that came with the ontologies related to this subject.

‘Those who consume the brew may feel that they are gaining access to new sources of knowledge and that the mysteries and ultimate truths of the universe are being revealed to them. All this is often coupled with what drinkers describe as an encounter with the divine.’ (Shannon, 2010: 13). The conflicts here did cause cognitive dissonance on my part, which was resolved with distance from the field. The time away allowed for reflection and recalibration of my own ontology, with the intention of improving the integrity of the analysis.

### **2.1.2 Traditional ethnography**

Since a variety of types of ethnography have emerged there is a need to identify ‘traditional ethnography’ as a type of its own. In this work, traditional ethnography provides the foundation. ‘Interviewing and observing are fundamental ethnographic data-collection techniques’ (Angrosino, 2006: 3). Traditional ethnography may employ more data collection methods than set out here, however those presented are held as the principal methods that have been employed by ethnography historically. This will provide the research with the most robust foundations upon which to build a more diverse picture.

#### *2.1.2.1 Participant observation*

It is important to understand what is required, and what considerations might need to be made, in the process of performing participant observation. Participant observation carries two principal categories of error: control effect and biased viewpoint.



‘The control effect is present when the measurement process itself becomes an agent working for change’ (Webb, Campbell, and Schwartz et al., 1966: 114). This means that if the researcher has a particular agenda going into the research, they themselves may influence and impact the field in which they work. Having an impact on your surroundings is an unavoidable natural phenomenon that is only overcome by using covert observations techniques, such as hidden cameras. Using covert data collection methods raises ethical concerns. It removes the opportunity for participant interaction, conversation, and the use of probing questions. Covert observation also removes the opportunity to experience first-hand, any practices, rituals, or behaviours, that the group of interest engage in; such immersion is a significant advantage of participant observation.

The second consideration is that all researchers, no matter how professional and mindful in their actions, possess their own standpoint epistemology, which naturally leads to innate bias.

[CN: sexist language employed; gender bias presented]

‘The instrument (the human observer) may selectively expose himself to the data, or selectively perceive them, and worse yet, shift over time the calibration of his observation measures’ (Webb, Campbell, and Schwartz et al., 1966: 114). This is unavoidable and must be mitigated where applicable. Section 2.1.2 explains how autoethnography assists mitigation.

With these considerations in mind, participant observation remains the most beneficial means to underpin attempts to understand Amazonian *curandeirismo* in Britain. Given that *curandeirismo* includes the use of a variety of substances, some of which impact on individual perceptions, only by taking part, as well as observing, could the understanding of these practices be fully explored.

My own firm belief is that there is no alternative to studying phenomenology from within. The experiences that Ayahuasca induces are extraordinary in the full sense of the term, and many are ineffable. There is no way to really appreciate what they are without experiencing them firsthand [sic]. After all, would anyone venture to study music without experiencing how music sounds? Moreover, for a serious study of the ayahuasca experience a cursory, explorative exposure to the brew is not sufficient.

(Shannon, 2010: 32)

This research benefitted from the experience of between 15 and 20 *ayahuasca* rituals, approximately ten *kambo* treatments, one *rapé* ceremony, and one *salvia divinorum* practice. In addition to these experiences, throughout the three-year data-collection period of this research, efforts were made to socialise with research participants as much as practicable to further understand their lifestyle. This included spending time with them and their families, going to parties, and meeting for coffee.

#### 2.1.2.2 Interviews (*semi-structured using ladder technique*)

As was highlighted above, interviews are also a fundamental data collection method in traditional ethnography. They are an excellent way to elicit information directly from participants. They provide a sounding board for the participants and can be used to help the researcher clear up any areas of confusion that might come from participant observation.

Semi-structured interviews sit amongst a range of data collection methods that elicit information directly from the participant. Questionnaires, focus groups, documents, and narrative data are all useful to both quantitative and qualitative social researchers (Mathews and Ross, 2010: pp. 200 - 284). There was no available documentation or narrative data of this field to review. Questionnaires are incongruent to the post-colonial considerations of this work as they do not allow questions to adapt towards new tropes offered to the conversation by participants. Focus groups do overcome the incongruence found with using questionnaires, because the researcher can respond to the events of the moment while the participants are available to them, and participants can contribute freely to the narrative. Focus groups have a lot of value to offer ethnography, however they compromise anonymity, and this is a sensitivity that was integral to the recruitment of participants in this research. One to one interviews allow maintenance of this anonymity.

There is a second dimension to interviews which interacts with this continuum [from unstructured to structured]. This relates to the roles that the researcher and participant play in the interview. These can vary, again along a continuum, from the researcher being in control of the interview, through asking a set of questions to which the participant replies (known as **participant interviews**), through to the participant being substantially in control of the interview and being enabled by the researcher to tell their own story, in their own way (sometimes known as **informant interviews**). [Emphasis from original]  
(Mathews and Ross, 2010: 220)

The freedom offered to participants to control the narrative is important to the post-colonial aims of this research because it reduced the risk of researcher imposition and assumption. However, if there was no structure to the interviews this may lead to a set of transcripts that are too disparate to allow for any meaningful themes to be identified. Informal interviews allow participants to discuss things that may seem relevant to the participant but are not to the study. For instance, *ayahuasca* users are often enthused by the sharing of the visual aspects of their experience. While the participants in their excitement illustrate that for them, these visual experiences were central to their involvement, they are not relevant to the cultural aspect of the subject and can be understood by reviewing existing publications. A balance was needed to ensure the freedom of participants to bring forth unpredictable ideas, yet to not stray too far from the purpose of the research.

Semi-structured interviews allow room for the participant to speak freely, and in a more conversational manner than is offered in structured interviews. In addition, they offer the researcher an opportunity to establish boundaries for the scope of discussion, and to direct conversation if it strays into areas that are not relevant to the study. For these reasons semi-structured interviews were of excellent value to these investigations.

Initially ten interviews were conducted. However, the third and tenth did not record well enough for a transcription to be made and as such were redacted. To increase the conversational nature of the interviews they were conducted in environments that were as comfortable as circumstances allowed. From their outset I highlighted the four broad areas of investigation: religious/spiritual beliefs, motivation for being involved in the practices, the perceived impact the practices have had on their life, and the value the participant places on the practices; all correlating with the subset of questions set out in Section 1.3. By going through these areas one at a time and in no fixed order, I was able to create a relaxed discussion with the participants taking a lead while still being able to define broad areas of discussion relevant to the aims of the research. Where appropriate, particularly where shorter answers were given, I was able to ask subsequent questions and probe further into any matters of interest, or ambiguity.

Three more interviews were conducted, with Participant 7, Participant 9, and Participant 10<sup>7</sup>. These were initially intended to form 6 to 12-month long case studies. These were with participants new to Amazonian *curandeirismo*. It later transpired that all three of these participants were unable to continue their involvements over the intended duration. Their shamanic practitioner decided to stop offering the service.

The intention of case studies was to capture a participant's thoughts early in their relationship to the phenomenon and to see how this, their ideologies, lifestyle, and beliefs might change over the course of a year of their involvement with *curandeirismo*. These three Participants all expressed a pre-determination to have regular involvement with *curandeirismo* prior to their involvement with this research and all lost their access to the rituals and practices following their first interview. Their data has been preserved as part of the research as it offers insight into the motivators and beliefs of those first choosing to investigate *curandeirismo*. Their motivators would have been recently contemplated and fresh at the time of recording. Following their loss of access to *curandeirismo* no later interviews were conducted with these participants.

All participants were subjects of, rather than providers of, the rituals and treatments. If a participant had financial or reputational investment in the treatments their contributions would not be impartial, and data could be corrupted as a result. Firstly, they would have motive for an agenda; a will to impress the efficacy of the practices. This does little to educate us about the cultural aspects of this phenomenon. The second reason relates to ethics. If I were to collect the details of individuals who are trading a substance containing a Class A compound my notes may then become a point of interest for the police, this would put both that individual's and all other participants' personal information at risk. We will consider this in more depth in Section 2.2 below.

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<sup>7</sup> Please note that participant numbers were assigned at random after all interviews were completed. They do not represent the order in which they were conducted.

### **2.1.3 Autoethnography**

Autoethnography, much like an autobiography, is an author's account of their own experiences. However, autoethnography has a focus on cultural identity and experiences.

'Autoethnography is a method that allows for both personal and cultural critique' (Boylorn and Orbe, 2016: 17). This is the space where any bias, owing to individual standpoint, can be highlighted. Autoethnography is a place for transparency and disclosure. It is a place to acknowledge the researcher in the research.

Autoethnographers recognize the innumerable ways personal experience influences the research process. For instance, a researcher decides who, what, when, where, and how to research, decisions necessarily tied to institutional requirements (e.g., Institutional Review Boards), resources (e.g., funding), and personal circumstance (e.g., a researcher studying cancer because of personal experience with cancer).

(Ellis, Adams, and Bochner, 2011: p.274)

As an insider researcher, it is of value to the thesis to include my own experiences. This allows me to see if my own experiences, ideas, and beliefs align with that of the community. As part of reflecting on my own experiences and by positioning myself as a research subject it is important for me to consider what participation in the rituals has done for me. The intention of this is not to prove the efficacy of the practices, but to share my subjective experiences, as part of a holistic understanding of this phenomenon.

The autoethnography, as highlighted in Section 1.5, is presented as footnotes anywhere it has been relevant to add notes from my own perspective. Sometimes this is as a reaction to an observation or comment made by a particular participant. The commentary is a reflective aspect of the overall data analysis; it offers insight into my own cultural heritage and experiences in this field; and offers the reader an insight into any personal bias that may impact my interpretations.

### 2.1.4 Visual ethnography

Visual ethnography is commonly described as a form of ethnography that uses documentary style films or photographs. Typically, cameras will be given to members of the community under investigation to create an individual documentary of their lived experiences.

‘Integration of documentary methodology with ethnographic methodology. Ethnographies are conducted using visual media (photographs and film clips), also in order to document the analysis more graphically’ (Gobo, 2008: 189).

Visual ethnography in this form has many great advantages. A film for instance is a more diverse piece of data than field notes. It records full details of a scene, instantly. Less strain is placed on the researcher’s memory. Even with photographs, the visual representation is preserved in full and reliance on the researcher’s descriptive skills is no longer an issue. Giving members of the community their own recording devices is significantly empowering for them too. It gives them absolute control over what they feel is important to document about their culture.

‘They [images] are inextricably interwoven with our personal identities, narratives, lifestyles, cultures, and societies, as well as with definitions of history, space and truth. Ethnographic research is likewise intertwined with visual images and metaphors’ (Pink, 2007: 21).

‘Sometimes using cameras and making images of informants is inappropriate for ethical reasons. In some situations, photographs or videos of the informants may put them in political danger, or subject them to moral criticism’ (Pink, 2007: 43). This is a particularly significant concern given the nature of this research project.

In this research, the rituals and treatments were too intimate to allow the use of electronic recording devices. Although there are other ways that visual ethnographies can be conducted.

Sometimes it is not possible to photograph places, even less to visually record the behaviours of participants. Numerous organizations [sic] dislike being filmed, and obtaining formal permissions to do so may greatly prolong the research. Paper and pencil are among the least invasive of tools, and making sketches and drawings may therefore be an acceptable alternative.

(Gobo, 2008: 178)

The purpose of implementing visual methods in this research was not to illustrate the visible aspects of *curandeirismo*. That was possible through participant observation. This research employs the richness and diversity of image to empower the Participants to illustrate their ideas

and opinions, on a variety of subjects, which arose following the interview stage of this project. Using creative communication techniques provided an opportunity to break down any tensions and barriers that may occur with face-to-face communication.

Research participants were dispersed across Britain, so to facilitate this aspect of the project, a private, online forum was created. Participants were invited to sign up to this anonymously. The forum was not accessible to the public in any way. Inside the forum was instructions to five activities that had been designed in response to the initial interview data. Everyone was able to maintain anonymity, and tasks could be completed in the participant's own time. There was space on the forum for participants to chat with each other and ask questions about the activities, yet this was not used by them. The information provided about this aspect of the research and the activities can be found in the Appendices 4 to 10 of this thesis. Participants 4, 7, 9, and 10 contributed towards this aspect of the research.

## **2.2 Ethical clearance and the challenges of researching illegal activities**

### **2.2.1 Ethical considerations**

Principally a researcher's ethical responsibility lies with the protection of the field and the research participants. No harm or damage should come about because of participation in research. If it does, it seriously damages the likelihood of continued research in that field and the general reputation of researchers.

The ethical frameworks used in social research have emerged from the frameworks developed in relation to medical research. This is an issue that is a concern for many social scientists who view the risks of social research to be far less significant than for medical research. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that the social sciences have not been immune from accusations of unethical behaviour. ...

...virtually all research conducted by researchers in the UK and North America, and much research conducted in other European countries and indeed in the Western world [sic], is subject to some form of ethical review by a recognised ethics committee.

(Wiles, 2013: pp. 11-12)

This project has two principal ethical considerations. The first being the experience of the research participant. The second is that of the legal status of *ayahuasca* in Britain. The legal status of *ayahuasca*, throughout the time that data was collected, was ambiguous. More detail on legislation is offered in Section 4.1.4; at this stage it is important to understand that

*ayahuasca* is a Class A narcotic in Britain. However, as defined by both international and European Union (EU) human rights conventions, using *ayahuasca* as a religious sacrament should be a protected practice providing all applicable safety concerns are addressed. At the time of data collection, Britain, as part of the UK, was a member of the European Union, however at the time of writing, this is no longer the case.

Ethics is a broad philosophical subject and there are various frameworks that might be employed in the discussion of whether an act is morally justified or considered ethical. The Internet Encyclopaedia of Ethics lists: egoism and altruism; virtue theories; duty theories; and consequentialist theories including utilitarianism. It is also key to remember in the discussion of ethics that there is a tension between developing objective ethical principles, as argued in Kant's *Categorical Imperative*, and recognising that ethics can be relative. This relativity can be found when comparing the different attitudes towards the use of psychedelic compounds in Britain, with shamanic cultures such as the *curandeiro* of the Amazon. In the former, they are illegal substances. Legislation in Britain serves to 'protect' society from any potential dangers they pose to the users<sup>8</sup>. In the latter, they are seen as a sacred tool for personal and societal betterment. This is not the space to discuss which culture is correct, only to acknowledge that the ethical principles are subjective dependent on the cultural context within which psychedelic compounds are consumed.

Equally as concerning for this project was the matter of participants' mental health state. As *ayahuasca* is reported as being an effective therapeutic tool (Mckenna, 2004: pp. 111 – 129) it was expected that research participants may have been experiencing some form of turbulence in their mental health. There was a need to minimise the potential that relapses in mental health might occur because of participation in the research. Additionally, there was a need to plan a response to any displays or expressions of reduced mental health that may occur.

There is robust guidance for anyone conducting research with human participants in the UK. This includes the following key principles:

1. Participants should be made aware of the presence and purpose of the researcher whenever reasonably practicable. Researchers should inform

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<sup>8</sup> Nutt, D., King, L. and Lawrence, D. (2010 pp.1558 - 1565) present a harm scale of various, recreational, state altering substances which challenges the perception that psychedelic compounds are harmful. At the time of writing this British law does not mirror the best available information on psychedelic related harm.



participants of their research in the most appropriate way depending on the context of the research.

2. Fieldnotes [sic] (and other forms of personal data) are predominantly private barring legal exceptions. This is the most important way in which confidentiality and the anonymity of subjects is ensured. Anthropologists have a duty to protect all original records of their research from unauthorised access. They also have a duty to ensure that nothing that they publish or otherwise make public, through textual or audio-visual media, would permit identification of individuals that would put their welfare or security at risk.

(The Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and the Commonwealth (ASA), 2011: 2)

This guidance forms the ethical foundations for this work and led to the measures put in place to protect the participants of this research. This research was subject to a research ethics panel who agreed that the research could go ahead based upon these measures and recognition given to the fact that ethics is a matter necessitating constant review, as the research progressed. A copy of the submission to the University of Cumbria's Ethic Panel can be found as Appendix 1.

To address the concerns about the legal status of the activities under observation, consideration was given to how researchers in criminology might protect their research participants. Criminological research can mean that the researcher will have to witness crimes such as burglary or assault, for instance, at football matches. While it is important that we can research crime, to better understand it, researchers are not offered any special exemptions from their societal duty to report it. However, there are defences that can be argued if the police are issued with a warrant to seize any notes, recordings, or other items related to the research project. The primary argument that could be presented to a court would be that of 'the greater good'. If the results of the research could be deemed as having greater benefit to society than any prosecution for the crimes witnessed then a judge may absolve a researcher of their duty to expose any crime or wrongdoing and refuse any warrant requested to authorise the seizure notes, recordings, and other relevant materials (Frenan, 2002: pp. 762-781).

### **2.2.2 Measures taken**

Prior to conducting any interviews, a list of professional services was collated, to be used for signposting, in the instance of any mental distress. When conducting interviews all interviewees were provided with a Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 2). Each interview was preceded

by a verbal explanation of the research aims, and space was offered for any questions from participants. Written consent was not suitable in this instance as it did not support anonymity, which was vital in protecting both the participants and all research notes from the reach of the UK courts.

Interviewees were reminded from the outset, that they could withdraw from the study at any time without providing a reason, including during the interview. They were informed that they could also contact me at any time before October 2015 to ask to be withdrawn in part, or in full, without reason. The four topics of interests were reiterated, and participants were advised to not share anything that they felt was too personal or upsetting. In addition, it was stated that there was no intention to collect any information that might incriminate someone, and the use of pseudonyms was recommended when referencing other community members. Participants were also reminded that confidentiality could not be offered, since the data would be published, but anonymity was guaranteed. Verbal consent to use the contents of the recordings in the research and writing of this thesis was granted in each case. All recordings, transcriptions and notes have been stored in password protected devices and drives. Transcriptions of the recordings were fully anonymised, before being printed for purpose of annotation.

While observing the relevant activities no notes or recordings were creating *in situ*. Recording devices were seen to have the probability of affecting the natural course of events and conversations that took place. An anonymised diary was kept and updated shortly after each observational practice, away from the field. Any community members present, that were not interviewees, were made aware of my role as a researcher and given opportunity to ask any questions about my work as far as was reasonably practical. In some social settings, for instance at parties, it was not feasible to inform all persons present of my role as a researcher. This type of experience was used primarily to further understand the lifestyle of the participants and to assist in building trust-based relationships with them.

One instance of ethical consideration arose during this research. During an interview a participant confessed something that I felt compelled to pass on to the *Santo Daime* practitioner they had been working with. It was valued as important to share as it potentially affected safety within the rituals that included them and the participant.

However, the code of ethics set out prohibited the discussion<sup>9</sup>. Any discussion with the *Santo Daimé* practitioner would have breached the anonymity assured. There was also potential to damage the participant's access to future rituals. To have spoken up may have also jeopardised similar future research in this field since trust in researchers would be broken. Upon discussion with the project's research supervisors, it was agreed that the finer details of my concerns (omitted to prevent recognition of the participant) were not my responsibility in my role as a researcher, but a matter for the practitioner and participant to navigate independently.

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<sup>9</sup> As a community member I would have discussed this immediately, yet as a researcher I could not.

# 3. Shamanism

## 3.1 Shamanism the global phenomenon

There are many studies of the disparate communities that utilise a shamanic system of managing their society and personal matters around the world. The first person to make a global comparison was Historian of Religion, Mircea Eliade, who published his key text *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* in 1951. In this he claims to be the first researcher to position shamanism within the history of religion rather than psychology, sociology, or ethnography (Eliade, 2004: pp. xvii-xxvii).

Shamanism has proved difficult to define by researchers:

The word "shamanism" [sic] does not express an ideology, like Communism, or Buddhism, which are formalised systems of beliefs, Shamanism refers to the activities of the shaman and is used because the activities are found all over the world with a surprisingly high degree of similarity, given the normal variance over time expected in aspects of human culture and the natural variations among shamans....

...Shamanism is not a system of faith either. Rather, it is a group of common activities and experiences that link shamans and their unique experience of the world....

...The shaman is distinguished from all other practitioners by his or her ability to enter into an ecstatic trance state, which frees the shaman's soul to travel to the realms of the invisible world.

(Pratt, 2007: xi)

It is these means of managing the ethical, spiritual, physical, and mental health within their communities, the entire system, that we typically refer to when using the term shamanism. These practices and traditions have been untouched by organised religion, the enlightenment period that underpins Occidental philosophy, and the industrial revolution. There are few communities today that remain completely untouched by modernity of 'developed' countries, however shamanic communities have preserved, and continue to preserve ancient folk ways. Shamanism has no specific doctrine, or texts to determine it; yet, to many ancient cultures it is something of great significance.

Commonly shamanism is distinguished by the utilisation of a trance like state of consciousness:

Shaman (pronounced SHAH-maan) is a word from the language of the Tungus people of Siberia, and has been adopted widely by anthropologists to refer to persons in a great variety of non-Western cultures who were previously known by such terms as “witch,” “witch-doctor,” “medicine man,” “sorcerer,” “wizard,” “magic man,” “magician,” and “seer.” One of the advantages of using the term is that it lacks the prejudicial overtones and conflicting meanings associated with the more familiar labels. Furthermore, not every kind of medicine man or witch doctor is a shaman.

A shaman is a man or woman who enters an altered state of consciousness – at will – to contact and utilize [sic] an ordinarily hidden reality in order to acquire knowledge, power, and to help other persons. (Harner, 1990: 20)

Shamanism can be found in Central and North Asia; North and South America; Tibet, China and the Far East; Indo-Europe; as well as, South East Asia and Oceania (Eliade, 2004: pp. viii-x). To this list we can add the Australian Aborigines (Drury, 1989: 11). Strong common threads run throughout these cultures. There is an abstract rhisomatic network that can be envisioned by their similarity yet, how these concepts have formed, travelled, and adapted over time, is principally, lost to history.

The shaman holds a prominent position in their cultural group. They are given a position of authority upon on their appointment of becoming a shaman. This may be as a birth right or through a calling (Drury, 1989: 6). A shaman maintains their position through reputation as an effective healer and guide. Alternatively, if found to be using shamanic abilities for nefarious purposes they become known as sorcerers (Eliade, 2004: 299).

Shamanic activities are reconceptualized [sic] as sophisticated ethnomedical practices that provide important cultural healing resources and an alternative epistemology of cause and remediation of health maladies. Shamanistic practices also manipulate physiological processes, psychological reactions, and social psychology and relations. The emerging understanding of shamanistic practices locates their foundations in biological potentials, with deeply embedded roots in the functional bases of ritual, a foundational communicative and relational capacity of vertebrate species. Shamanism was the context in which hominins and early modern humans expanded these relational capacities into concerns with personal and social identity, emotional modulation, attachments, sense of self, and personal transformations associates with alterations of consciousness. (Winkelman, 2010: 3)

Put this way, one can start to see how fundamental shamanic folk ways are to humanity, and the foundation of religious belief systems. Their preservation offers a window into early human thought organisation, and treatment of key aspects of human life: health, interpersonal

relationships, behaviour, and emotional regulation. That they have endured suggests that those employing them continue to experience utility from it and adds to the intrigue surrounding them.

It is argued that there are three principal elements that can be used to determine if a system, practice, or culture is shamanic:

[CN: gender bias demonstrated]

(1) belief in the existence of a world of spirits, mostly in animal form that are capable of acting on human beings. The shaman is required to control or cooperate with these good and bad spirits for the benefit of his [sic] community. (2) The inducing of trance by ecstatic singing, dancing, and drumming, when the shaman's spirit leaves his or her body and enters the supernatural world. (3) The shaman treats some diseases, usually those of a psychosomatic nature, as well as helping the clan members to overcome their various difficulties and problems.

(Stutley, 2003: 2)

The shaman and shamanic belief systems see mental, spiritual, and physical health as intrinsic to one and other:

...to the shaman, there is no split or lack of connection between the human body/mind and the rest of our visible and invisible world, or between mind, body, soul and spirit.

In addition, where positivistic ontologies are utilised, shamanism may be seen as folly or superstition, whilst to shamanic cultures, their ways have been tried and tested, and have worked for them, since time immemorial. (Mackinnon, 2012: 23)

Shamanic philosophies, healing, and practices are typically based on the underpinning belief of two worlds. First, the world as we experience it in day-to-day life. Harner, differentiated with the terms the Ordinary State of Consciousness (OSC) and the Shamanic State of Consciousness (SSC) (Harner, 1990: pp. 46-55). Other terminology can be employed, for example in Aboriginal communities the term 'Dreamtime' is applied to the SSC (Pratt, 2007: 149).

In shamanism, healing is delivered by entering the SSC where guidance is sought from either spirit guides, or spirit animals. The SSC can be entered into using rattles, song, and drumming (Meadows, 1998: pp. 94-99). Some shamanic communities such as the Hungarian, Ugrians, enter trace via 'intoxication by mushrooms', as do the Russian Yurak-Samoyed (Eliade, 2004: pp. 222-223, 228). 'The search for evidence that human tribes and societies throughout global history have used psychoactive plants for religious, shamanic, philosophical and medical purposes has met with great success' (Webster, 2013: 83).

### 3.1.1 The shaman's relationship to plants

Shaman the world over have strong connections to plant life. As mind, body, and spiritual health in equilibrium, is imperative, a healthy diet is paramount. To traditional healers, plants are the key resource. In areas with Indigenous plants and fungi with psychedelic properties they become the gateway into trance.

For many primitive cultures the psychic effect of pharmacologically active substances is often far more important than the purely physical ones.... [T]he shaman, as the religious and medical specialist of his community, would consciously explore the environment not only for plants with therapeutic value but also for those whose properties assisted the journey of the soul. (Pearson, 2002: 163)

In shamanic terms plants are divided into two categories. Those with psychedelic properties, which are thought of as ‘sacred plants’ and are usually used exclusively by a shaman, and other medicinal plants, which can be used by the general population. This is explained:

In many **cultures** the herbal or plant doctor is a different profession than the shaman, though in these areas the two types of healers usually work together. Whether a shaman or a plant doctor, these Indigenous healers may know and employ over a hundred species of medicinal plants. Each of these species may be used in different ways to treat a variety of illnesses.

Indigenous peoples have always considered the plants sacred, particularly those that alter the normal functions of the mind and body. In the native pharmacopeia there are many plants that aid the physical **healing** of the body. However the **entheogens**, which help to heal the **soul** as well, are considered doctors in their own right. [Emphasis original]

(Pratt, 2007: pp. 353-354)

Literature on shamanic use of plants focuses primarily on the use of psychoactive plants or ‘plant teachers’ (Doyle, 2012: p.28), with particular attention being given to *ayahuasca*. Yet, shaman view all plants and trees as carriers of intelligence:

Shamans recognize [sic] that the trees have a Spirit, as we do – an intelligence whose experience of existence, though very different from ours, is no less real. Indeed, since trees as a life form have existed on Earth for much longer than mankind, it may be that they are more advanced along their evolutionary path than man is on his! In any event shamans recognize [sic] that trees vibrate in tune with Earth and associate them with age and wisdom.

(Meadows, 1991: 133)

From an Occidental perspective, the diverse chemical make-up of different plants, and the different psychoactive effects, flavours, aromas, could all be interpreted as plant personalities. It all links neatly with the ‘Gaia hypothesis’ popular among ‘New Age’ spiritualists, and shamanic communities alike.

‘The totality of the earth as a living system is unavoidably connected to the countless cycles, processes, and rhythms of the whole, and we are perhaps only beginning to glimpse interconnections with the help of ecology and climatology.’ (Doyle, 2012: 29)

Continued: ‘Plants engage in activities of information processing (memory) and exchange (communication) of such complexity that scientists explore a new vocabulary that can adequately describe their findings.’ (Doyle, 2012: 40)

Prior to working with a new plant a *curandeiro* will follow a restrictive diet. Details of the diet, and how to use each plant are received by the healer through psychoactive plants, including *ayahuasca*. For some plants this diet is used only when a *curandeiro* is learning about a specific plant, though in some cases, such as with *ayahuasca*, the diet is followed each time the plant (or plant-based substance) is used (Pratt, 2007: 351)

### **3.1.2 The importance of the trance state and the two-world phenomenon in shamanism**

As highlighted above, the trance state is a measure to determine whether a culture is shamanic. Although entered in a variety of ways, the trance state is the shaman’s route into the spirit realm, from where they obtain guidance. The African Samburu dance themselves into a state of trance before collapsing. With the Macumba of Brasil, and in Haitian Voodoo, an entire congregation will drum and dance together to enter trance. Yet, these examples are not shamanic because those entering the trance state are giving themselves over to spirit and possession, but not mastering them (Jakobsen, 1999: 15).

The shamanic trance state can be compared to mediumship. However, shamanism is active whereas mediumship is passive.

‘Shamanism involves a *going forth* [Emphasis original] of the spirit whereas mediumship involves a *coming in* of the divine force.’ (Drury, 1989: pp. 11-12)

Lucidity is fundamental; shaman can direct what happens inside the trance. Furthermore, trance can be described as a form of focused concentration where one does not leave the body (Sansone, 1994: pp. 24, 28, 55).

In some cultures this other world is regarded as more real than that experienced with ordinary consciousness.... Shamanism cannot exist in a culture that disputes the existence of such an ‘other’ dimension, because it relies on this ‘other’ realm



for its practices and procedures. This other is intimately connected with the natural world and inextricably connected with the process of human living.  
(Tillman, 2000: 123)

Trance states are found in the practices of mainstream religions too; for example, the counting of rosary in Catholicism, or the ecstatic dances of the Sufi in Islam.

### **3.2 Amazonian shamanism; *curandeirismo***

The practices that this research considers originate in the South American, Amazon jungle. This covers parts of Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Columbia and Venezuela. As well as utilising the vast selection of plants available to them, the *curandeiro*, employ *icaros* to assist their work. These are songs that have been delivered to the healer in trance. Sometimes they are passed down throughout a shamanic lineage or they may be personal to a particular *curandeiro*. They are uncomplicated in structure and communicate much in the way a prayer would (Campos, 2011: pp. 80-81). In addition, artefacts such as rattles, bones, stones and *mesa*, which is a portable altar, or medicine tool bag, may also be employed by *curandeiro* (Rysdyk, 2014: 168).

The website Survival International, claims that the Amazon region is home to roughly 400 tribes, each with their own language, culture, and territory. In the 1960's there were an estimated 250 'uncontacted' tribes in the Brazilian Amazon alone. However, this number, due to deforestation, reduced to approximately 60 community groups in 2013 (Boekhout van Solinge, and Kuijpers, 2013: p. 203). Amazonian tribes tend to not be nomadic and will settle near a useful source of food such as a river. Today the majority have access to 'Occidental', or pharmaceutical, medication and education; with a small number of tribes that remain insular.

*Curandero* work with 'spirit darts' for both defence and attack. The true nature of these is unclear; they may be a tool to induce psychosomatic healing.

...drinking ayahuasca causes a substance called *dau* to grow inside the drinker; when sufficient *dau* [sic] has been accumulated, the person has the power to cure and to harm....

...Most often the shamanic substance is localized [sic] in the chest or stomach, and the pathogenic objects are embedded within it. Among the Shuar, the substance is called *tsentsak*, and the term refers equally to the substance and its contents - spirit helpers in the form of darts.

(Beyer, 2009: 127)

Any object small enough to be swallowed, including insects, can become *tsentsak*. It is understood that the greater the variety of *tsentsak* in a *curandeiro*'s body, the more effective and powerful they are (Harner, 2003: 54). The *tsentsak* has two aspects to its form. The physical aspect: the pebble, insect, or similar, that is visible in the OSC; and the non-ordinary aspect, which is only visible when under the influence of *ayahuasca* and in darkness (Harner, 1990: 17). Furthermore, the *curandeiro* of the Peruvian, upper Amazon, claim to hold a white phlegm in their upper stomach as their *tsentsak* (Vitebsky, 2001: 24).

Jaguars are particularly symbolic creatures for the Amazonian healers. Some Amazonian people claim *curandeiro* to be jaguars in an absolute sense as opposed to being like a jaguar. 'Shamans may turn into jaguars by singing spells, putting on jaguar ornaments, teeth and skins, or by taking hallucinogenic drugs.' (Vitebsky, 2001: 46)

### **3.2.1 Understanding the role of ayahuasca and kambo in traditional curandeirismo**

The subject of *ayahuasca*<sup>10</sup>, and *kambo* are intrinsic in the discussion of *curandeirismo*. *Ayahuasca*, a Quechua word meaning 'vine of the (dead) spirits'. is the most popular name for what is also known as: *caapi*, *yagé* (*yajé*, *yahé*), *natem*, *cipo*, *marini*, *Daime*, *hoasca*, and *vegetal* depending on region and context (Shannon, 2013: 13). It is used to access the spirit realm and seek guidance and healing. Participation in an *ayahuasca* ritual is seen as part of one's initiation into *curandeirismo* (Harvey and Wallis, 2016: 112). The ingredients are not specifically defined but commonly it is made up of the *banisteriopsis caapi* vine, and the leaves of the *psychotria viridis*. *Caapi* is the Tupi people's name for 'grass', and means 'thin leaf' (Pinkley, 1969: 307). Sometimes other admixtures are included, such as tobacco (see Section 3.2.1.1.2) and *datura*, also known as *toa*<sup>11</sup>, and *brunfelsia* (Pinkley, 1969: pp. 311-312). Details of the chemical make-up of *banisteriopsis caapi* and *psychotria viridis* is covered in Chapter 4.

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<sup>10</sup> From my Occidental perspective.

<sup>11</sup> I would not advise the drinking of *ayahuasca* with either of these admixtures. Tobacco may cause nicotine poisoning and *datura* has been present in a number of *ayahuasca* associated deaths.

In many shamanic practices, the shaman enters a trance state on behalf of a patient<sup>12</sup>; *ayahuasca* works to the contrary as the patient is an active participant in the trance and is said to communicate directly with spirit. *Ayahuasca* places one in the driving seat of their own healing. With it the patient follows a preparatory diet and sexual abstinence prior to, and after drinking the bitter, strong scented, brew.

The *curandeiro*, here take on a passive role, acting as a director of ceremonies. The *curandeiro*, call on the spirits and ask for their guidance; sometimes using *icaros*, or a variety of rattles. The shaman will also be on hand as a caregiver if the participant has a challenging time with the experience, or if they need to purge. With *ayahuasca*, trust is placed in the efficacy of the brew itself rather than the quality, skills, or traits of the *curandeiro*. The *curandeiro* helps to protect those in the ritual from harm.

The origin of *ayahuasca* use in the Amazon is not known for certain. It is believed to have been used for millennia by the Indigenous population there (Shannon, 2010: 14). Exactly how the *curandeiro* knew which plants to combine to create such an effect is a mystery. It is fair to assume that the *curandeiro* would have developed a methodological system for experimentation and verbally shared their findings on effects of various plants and plant combinations.

Throughout the observation of *ayahuasca* rituals undertaken in this research, it was impressed that *kambo* was an important substance too, though not as prevalent as *ayahuasca*. *Kambo* is a colloquial term for the waxy secretion extracted from an agitated *Phyllomedusa bicolor*, which is commonly known as the giant monkey tree frog. The name *sapo* is also applied in some Amazonian regions. It was explained that it is also called *vacina da floresta* (vaccine of the forest) as it is known to strengthen the immune system and has been used to treat malaria in Brasil. Tales were told of how, prior to it being outlawed in Brasil, there would be community *kambo* events, where people would line up to receive their dose. It was explained that it was believed to remove bad luck and curses and is seen as a complimentary practice to *ayahuasca* use: ‘*Kambo* draws out the darkness and *ayahuasca* fills you with light’ was imparted.

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<sup>12</sup> Here the term patient is used to reference an individual seeking a *curandeiro*’s services.

Community members were told a fascinating tale of how *kambo* was discovered. It was said that hundreds of years ago natives were being killed by some sort of plague, probably malaria. Whole tribes were falling ill, and their numbers were becoming dangerously low. *Curandeiro* turned to *ayahuasca* for guidance and received instruction to collect the village's strongest warriors and head out into the jungle. They walked for days and weeks, and as they did the *curandeiro* drank more *ayahuasca* and received further instruction. Eventually the visions directed him towards the *Phyllomedusa bicolor*. *Ayahuasca* showed how to extract the wax and how to apply it safely. By this time the warriors had become ill and weak. He delivered the wax to them as shown by his visions and saw them quickly restored to full health. With that they returned to the village and helped to cure all those that had fallen ill. A tradition was born. This tale appears to be common amongst *kambo* users. Azarius.net (1999) presents its own similar version.

*Kambo* is applied by creating small burn holes on the flesh. These are rubbed until the upper flesh is removed and a small open wound is formed. Small dots of *kambo* are then placed on top of these holes.

### 3.2.1.1 Other noteworthy plants and/or substances

In a rich jungle environment, there are plentiful varieties of plants available to the *curandeiro*. By gaining an understanding of this variety, and considering what we find in Britain, we can develop a sense of what aspects of *curandeirismo* are being adopted. We can see whether *curandeirismo* being viewed, and taken on, in its entirety, or whether only selective aspects are of interest.

Over 100 different plant types, preparation methods, and purpose have been charted as being used by the Peruvian *Yanesha* (*Amuesha*) community (Valadeau, Castillo, and Sauvain, et al., 2010: pp. 178-185). A similar, although much smaller table is available about the *Ese'ejas* people of Peru (Desmarchelier, Gurni, and Ciccía, et al., 1996: pp. 48-49). No charts are available for the communities in other areas of Peru, Ecuador, Columbia, or Brasil however, it is reasonable to think that many genus of plant will spread throughout the entire Amazon, and that in these other regions the plants will be used in similar, if not identical, ways to in available charts.

It is difficult to determine exactly how many of these plants have made it over to Britain for medicinal purposes. Many of these plants may not be available, and those that are can be purchased in isolation, by individuals that may have more of an interest in plant-based medicine as an entire discipline, rather than an interest in *curandeirismo* specifically. They may also be used by those with no interest in shamanism.

This research has led to the identification of a number of other plants that are found to be used in Britain by those taking an interest in Amazonian *curandeirismo*. and/or psychedelic substances and cultures which shall be covered here. Often *salvia divinorum*, a psychoactive relative to mint, and *peyote*, a psychoactive cacti, are associated with the discussion of psychedelic plants used by *curandeiro*. Both of these plants are native to Mexico and fall outside of the geographical area of interest in this study.

#### 3.2.1.1.1 Coca

The coca plant (*Erythroxylum coca*) a tropical shrub, the leaves of which are the source of the street drug cocaine, and subsequently, its alternative form crack (*The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2019).

Native Amazon communities have been using coca since before the Incan time of the fifteenth century A.D. where it became popular across the area:

Judging from the abundant evidence in pottery, “two stimulants were used by the Mochica” – coca leaves, from which commercial cocaine is produced nowadays, and *chichi*, a fermented drink made from maize (corn). However, neither one is a hallucinogen, even though both have long associations with religious rites and sacrifices. Coca has mythopoeic origins in a legend coming from Cordillera of the Andes. The chewing-or more properly, sucking- of its leaves could have started in the region of Machu Yunga, in the highlands of what used to be Peru but is now Bolivia. The Chibchas spread this custom to the Arawaks, diffusing it among the Aymaras and the Quechua. An Inca by the name of Mayta-Capac (A.D. 1230) and his successor Rocca (d. A.D. 1315) were heavily involved in the widespread dissemination of the coca sucking habit. We know for a fact that, by the end of the fifteenth century, this practice was deeply rooted in the Incas.  
(Ripinsky-Maxon, 1993: 177)

The coca is believed to have a high vibrational and spiritual energy. The mild narcotic effect allows the *curandeiro* to move more readily into the trance state. It is also used to treat stomach, and headaches. It can be dried and powdered and used like a snuff and its use is usually highly

ceremonial. The leaves can also be used as offerings to the spirit guides. The *Q'ero* people of the Cusco region of Peru use coca in daily life, making a tea or chewing leaves to stave off hunger and to increase stamina (Pratt, 2007: 108).

As coca use of this manner has not been witnessed or found in Britain. The derivatives, cocaine and crack, are used recreationally, despite their possession and distribution being deemed a serious crime. This type of use is commonly devoid of any aspects that might be considered shamanic.

### 3.2.1.1.2 Tobacco

*Nicotiana rustica*, known in South America as *mapacho* is commonly used in ceremonies around the Amazon region.

... [*Nicotiana rustica*] most likely originated in north-central Peru. As the hardier and richer in narcotic properties of the two cultivates species, [the other being *nicotiana tabacum*] it spread far beyond the tropical and subtropical belts to the very limits of New World agriculture between Chile and Canada.  
(Wilbert, 1987: 6)

Aztecs used it for magical healings with incantations and for divination. It is often mixed with other substances for consumption or to be used as incense and is ingested in a variety of means such as pressed juice drinks, snuff, smoking, and sometimes as an enema. Sometimes it is added to *ayahuasca*.

‘...in general, tobacco and cigars are their most important traditional gifts for establishing or strengthening social relationships.’ (Rätsch, 2005: pp.384-386)

The documentary *The Shaman's Last Apprentice* (2014) shows the continued importance placed upon the use of *Nicotiana rustica* for current *curandeiro*. From before the *Banisteriopsis caapi*, is harvested for *ayahuasca* use, the thick white smoke of the *mapacho* is blown over it whilst *icaros* are sung. We can also see that in the long, slow, brewing process of *ayahuasca*, again the smoke is blown over the top of the brew in a ritualistic manner.

It is *nicotiana tabacum* that is commonly available in Britain. This is not typically used in a shamanic sense, neither is it commonly associated with any ritual practices.

### 3.2.1.1.3 Rapé

There is little peer reviewed information available on this powdered snuff at the time of this research. Searching for information on *rapé* is made problematic by its similarity to the English word ‘rape’ dominate search results. It is a *nicotiana rustica*-based powder that is mixed with unknown herbs (Stanfill, Silva, and Lisko, et al., 2015: 50).

*Rapé*<sup>13</sup> is administered by being sharply blown up the nasal cavity via a pipe that is usually made of bone. This may be by a *curandeiro* or self-administered by using a ‘V’ shaped pipe that connects the user’s mouth and nose. It may also be placed under the tongue and absorbed in the buccal area (Stanfill, Silva, and Lisko, et al., 2015: 51).

No academic sources could be found to explain its usage. One online store claims:

Generally, they have the following effects – profoundly helps to re-align and open all your chakras, improves your grounding, releases any sickness on physical, emotional, mental and spiritual levels, opens-up the third eye, de-calcifies the pineal gland, clears any mental confusion, releases any negative thoughts, removes any entities, connects you to your divine breath, and elevates your connection with Spirit.

Please note that you may experience purging, vomiting, bowel movements and excess saliva, which is normal – where stuck energy, toxins and sickness are being released from your energetic and physical bodies. You may need a bucket, toilet tissue and drinking water close to hand.

(Shamanic Snuff, 2017).

The site goes on to explain:

Traditionally, during Yawanawa, Kaxinawa-Huni Kuin and Katukina (Brazilian Indigenous tribes) ceremonies, they normally use Rapé and Sananga eye medicine

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<sup>13</sup> This description of *rapé* consumption comes from participant observation. The opportunity was impromptu and took place outside. There was a circle of us all awaiting our turn to experience the snuff. Some ceremony went into the occasion. The shamanic practitioner used their rattle and a light, relaxing *icaro* to prepare the space and all persons participating. We sat on the grass crossed legs as one by one the shaman approached each of us shaking their rattle around our person. Presumably in an act of purifying and protection. Once all persons had received the treatment of the rattle the shaman used their thin long bone pipe to administer the snuff, one person at a time. There was some coughing and spluttering, yet most people maintained a state of meditative like composure until it was their turn.

From the outside the *rapé* appeared to have little or no affect. Save one or two persons seemingly in a state of bliss and euphoria. Upon my own turn I remained composed and took the sharp intake of powder into my nasal cavity. It was sharp and instantly my eyes began to water. I sat and held my position not wanting to expel the powder through sneezing or coughing. A cough was uncontrollable.

I sat and looked around me for some hint of what I should be feeling. By now those who received the first administrations were sitting smiling, with a look of complete resolution to their experience. I felt nothing except as tickle in my throat. A will to wretch and cough out whatever I had just let in. My state of consciousness remained unchanged and I left the experience confused as to what I should have just experienced.

during Ayahuasca (aka- Uni or Nixi pae) ceremonies to help with purging, releasing sickness, moving any stuck energies, opening-up the visions and for clear sight.

No participants raised this when interviewed. Though it is believed that some shamanic practitioners do offer *rapé* as a supplement to the *ayahuasca* ritual in Britain. It is not understood as a practice that community members seek, but would rather accept when offered, as part of the milieu.

#### 3.2.1.1.4 San Pedro and the Peruvian Torch

These two types of cacti are remarkably similar and at times confused. Both San Pedro (*Echinopsis pachanoi*) and the Peruvian Torch (*Echinopsis peruviana*) contain mescaline, which produces a psychoactive, psychedelic effect when consumed. They also look similar and grow in tall columns; the Peruvian Torch has a blueish hue to the flesh, other than at the top near new growth.

The San Pedro cactus is native to Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia, growing in regions 6,000 to 9,000 feet (2,000–3,000m) above sea level, particularly the around the Andes Mountain region, although not exclusively. Archaeological evidence shows use of the San Pedro dates back at least 3,000 years, and that it has been used for divination and healing since at least 1,300BC (Stafford, 1992: 119).

In ritual use of San Pedro, a specific area is set out and cleansed, the permissions of God sought, and specific songs being sang. A *mesa* is also used. The ritual is used to diagnose and clean ‘patients’ of illness (Joralemon, and Sharon, 1993: pp. 97-98).

San Pedro and the Peruvian Torch are both available to purchase online in Britain, however drying and preparing for consumption is illegal. They are known to be used for experimental usage, and the amount of ritual use is difficult to determine. Since they are difficult to procure and prepare, use in Britain is typically amongst experienced and dedicated psychedelic enthusiasts<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> This is based upon observations and conversations within psychedelic communities.



#### 3.2.1.1.5 Sananga eye medicine

Limited information has been found on *sananga*, at the time of this research. It is available to purchase legally online as a liquid to be dropped directly onto the eye. One such site, Sacred Paradise, offers *sananga* direct from the *Nukini* tribe. The site reports that it is made from the bark of *apocynaceae*. The site claims it is used to remove *panema* “bad luck, depression, laziness, sadness, or negative energetic influences, which attract difficulties and disease.” (Sacred Paradise, 2019)

The *apocynaceae* is a flowering genus of trees, shrubs, herbs, vines and plants that is part of the dogbane family. It goes on to highlight that arrow heads are often furnished with poisons extracted from the dogbane family (*The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2019).

### 3.2.2 *Ayahuasca centred syncretic religions*

From the South American plateau, of our globe spanning rhizome of shamanism, we can shift our focus onto the religions that have emerged, to create their own unique, cultural, offshoots. From 1500AD the Portuguese imperial actions led to the Lusitanian form of Catholic Christianity to be the only legally practiced religion in Brazil until the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Dawson, 2007: 11).

Following encounters with native *curandeiro*, a few descendants of earlier colonial settlements developed religions that are strongly influenced by the practices of the native *curandeiro*. Three religions have taken shape which also contain aspects of animism, Catholicism, as well as the spiritual influence of African diaspora: each in a unique way.

Though distinct in their interpretation of the *ayahuasca* experience, expression of faith, there are similarities in their formation. All were created by Catholic Christian, rubber tappers, of Portuguese decent; all were conceived following visions received in *ayahuasca* trances; and the three founders were all introduced to *ayahuasca* in the Amazon region of Acre by native users.

#### 3.2.2.1 *Santo Daime*

The first of the three religions of interest, commonly known as, the *Santo Daime* was formed by the Afro-Brazilian man, Raimundo Irineu Serra, who has since been commonly known as

*Mestre* [master] Irineu. Initially Irineu experienced *ayahuasca* with the *mestiço* and Indigenous people while rubber tapping in Acre. Following this he went onto practice *ayahuasca* in a more formal religious setting with the *Circulo de Regeneração e Fé*, an earlier formed church to fuse local Indigenous spiritual practices with Catholicism. The churches internal politics led Irineu to distance himself but not before building a reputation as a *curandeiro* (Dawson, 2007: pp.71-72).

In the 1930's *Mestre* Irineu, reported that he had been visited in *ayahuasca* visions by a feminine apparition. The apparition offered guidance that formed the foundations of *Santo Daime*, which was originally known as *Alto Daime* (Walter, and Fridman, 2004: 381).

He saw a woman in the Moon [sic] who identified herself as the Queen of the Forest. She told him to go into the jungle by himself for a week to fast, pray, and drink the sacred tea. When he did this he was informed, to his surprise, that he had a spiritual mission: He was to establish a new spiritual path to be called the Santo (Holy) Daime. He came to understand that the woman with whom he was communicating was in fact an embodiment of the Divine Feminine in one of Her aspects, the Virgin Mary, and learned that the Lady of Conception was offering herself as his patroness, guide and protector.  
(Goldman, 2010: XXII)

The official name of the *Santo Daime* is the *Centro de Iluminação Cristã Luz Universal* (Universal Christian Light Illumination Centre) and was eventually founded by Irineu in 1940 (Dawson, 2007: 72). Research has offered no explanation why this formal title is not typically used.

At the time of *Mestre* Irineu's death, three branches of the *Santo Daime* faith formed. One of these was led by Sebastião Mota de Melo, or *Padrinho* (meaning Godfather) Melo. Through experiences with the brew Melo received teaching that he was the reincarnation of John the Baptist, and that it was his mission to lead his followers to the centre of the jungle where he would create a utopian society. This community is known as *Céu do Mapiá* or 'Heaven of Mapiá'. It is documented that *Padrinho* Melo's split came mainly down to a dispute over the use of cannabis in ceremony: Melo believed it to enhance participants' mediumship, yet followers of *Mestre* Irineu believe cannabis use to be outside of the doctrine. In 1974 Melo registered their branch officially as CEFLURIS which stands for 'Ecletical Centre of the Universal Flowing Light Raimundo Irineu Serra' (Goldman, 2010: pp. XXVI – XXVII). The

second branch is likely the original doctrine set out by *Mestre Irineu*, which survives under the title *Alto Santos*. The third is undocumented.

Throughout the *Santo Daime* there is a calendar of dates in which *ayahuasca* rituals are performed in relation to specific events, in addition to routine rituals on the 15<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> of each month. Dates are provided via the religion's official website [santodaime.org](http://santodaime.org). *Ayahuasca* rituals are performed usually with all participants dressed in white, with males and females separated. On special occasions the colour blue is worn.

There are two religious symbols adopted by members of this faith. First is the six-pointed star, known commonly as The Star of David, or Star of Solomon. The shamanic practitioner working with this research (2012) explained that this represents the union of male and female energy.

Santo Daime churches in Brazil have been built in this shape (Dawson, 2013: 143), members receive a star shaped badge when being formally indoctrinated (Dawson, 2013: 39), and typically in *ayahuasca* rituals, members sit facing a table of this shape (Dawson, 2013: 47).

The second religious symbol is a cross, much like in Christianity, except with two cross bars, the *cruzeiro* (Dawson, 2013: 47).

...Serra adopted the twin-beamed cross of Caravaca as Santo Daime's most explicit Christian Symbol...

...the two-sparred cross is said to represent both Jesus Christ (via the original cross beam) and Master [sic] Irineu (by way of the second crossbeam which runs above the original.)

(Dawson, 2013: 202)

However, this research's shamanic practitioner explained (2012) that the second beam represents the return of Christ, or second coming, through *ayahuasca*. Which leads to the notion of developing 'Christ consciousness' with regular *ayahuasca* consumption.

It is understood the *Santo Daime* take the preparation of *ayahuasca* very seriously, following tradition from the native *curandeiro*. This research's shamanic practitioner (2012) explained that only men prepare the *Banisteriopsis caapi* vine by beating it into threads. The women prepare the leaves of the *Psychotria viridis* by separating it from the branch and removing unhealthy leaves. One *ayahuascquero* will work on the brew, sometimes for days, in an area

not admissible by others. This is to protect the brew from any maleficent energies during its creation.

### 3.2.2.2 Barquinha

The second noteworthy religion to form around *ayahuasca* use was *Barquinha*. Founded by Daniel Pereira De Matos in the mid 1940's. This was upon instructions said to have been received by a supernatural entity and presented to De Matos in the form of a blue book (Dawson, 2016: 237).

Barquinha is now divided into many churches in Rio Branco and Brasilia. Since they also refer to *ayahuasca* as *Santo Daime*, it is likely, since *Mestre Irineu* and his followers coined this term, that this is the third incarnation of the *Santo Daime* referred to above.

Pereira De Matos had received therapeutic treatment from Irineu Serra and began to participate in the recently established Alto Santo community where he was introduced to the ritual consumption of *ayahuasca*. Whilst under the influence of *ayahuasca* Pereira De Matos received his final visionary commission which resulted in him subsequently founding *Centro Espirita e Culto de Oração Casa de Jesus Fonte De Luz (House of Jesus Source of Light Spiritist Centre and Prayer Worship)* in 1945 on the outskirts of Rio Branco (Araújo, 1999:49). It was here that 'Frei Daniel', as he became known, founded Barquinha as the means of undertaking his charitable commissions of healing the sick and indoctrinating spirits.  
(Dawson, 2007: pp. 85-86)

Pereira De Matos envisioned his community as a boat guiding its members through the sea of life, by using *ayahuasca* to finally bring them to dock at the Cross of Jesus. This is represented by its members wearing sailor-like blue and white uniforms. Just like *Santo Daime*, members consider themselves to be Christians and may still attend regular church services. Barquinha however is set apart from *Santo Daime* by more than simply their uniform, as it takes greater influence from more mystic practices. There is a greater focus on the curative aspects of *ayahuasca* use and influenced by the *Umbanda* in Barquinha there is a rich cosmology that includes a hierarchy of spirits which reflects the three shamanic realms of the lower, earthly, and heavenly plain (Dawson, 2007: pp. 85-86).

### 3.2.2.3 *União do Vegetal*

The youngest religion, which uses *ayahuasca* as its central sacrament, is the *União do Vegetal* (UDV), meaning union of the plant. Similar to both *Santo Daime* and *Barquinha*, the UDV is also comprised of a combination of Catholicism, Afro-Brazilian, spiritualist, esoteric and Indigenous elements (Dawson, 2007: 27). They are described as occupying the opposite side of the religious spectrum to *Barquinha*. The *Barquinha* have been influenced more by African practices, while the UDV sits at the other extreme (Dawson, 2007: 88). Meaning that the African influence pertains to a more animistic view of nature, as well as more superstitious ideology, and taboos. The UDV take more influence from Catholicism.

The UDV were founded in July of 1961 by José Gabriel da Costa (Goulart, 2014: 107). Unlike the two faiths above, followers of the UDV do not term *ayahuasca*, ‘*Santo Daime*’, but instead refer to it as *Vegetal* (vegetables), or hoaska (Labate, Canurca, and Brissac et al., 2011: 49).

Their doctrine is enshrined in the belief of reincarnation and spirit.

‘The spirit has the mission to evolve in order to arrive at God and religions exist to show the path of rectitude. “The path of God is clean”, said the Mestre’.

Members claim that the religion acts as a guide to those on the path of God, and employs various songs and stories, which may include characters from the bible, to do this (UDV.org, 2021).

Of the three *ayahuasca* religions of Brazil, the UDV has enjoyed most success promoting *ayahuasca* use as fundamental to their worship of God, and as such, a protected human right. The UDV received official authorisation from the US Supreme Court to use *ayahuasca* as a religious sacrament, despite it containing the international schedule 1 compound dimethyltryptamine (DMT)<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> DMT is a complicated family of compounds. For utility, the term DMT here is sufficient to convey the relevant information. More information is provided on chemistry relevant to this research in Chapter 4.

## 4. The chemistry of *curandeirismo* in Britain

As an ethnography, this section of the thesis will not be comprehensive, but is included to provide a fundamental understanding of the relevant substances. Throughout this research, it has been clear that *ayahuasca* and *kambo* use are the two principal practises being taken up in Britain, therefore focus is given to them in this chapter.

### 4.1 *Ayahuasca*

As reported in Chapter 3, *ayahuasca* is usually based on two plant ingredients. Chemical compounds found in them work together to cause the effect experienced. *Banisteriopsis caapi*, the vine from which the brew takes its name (see Section 3.2.1), is always used. There are various members of the *psychotria* genus that may be employed, yet it is *psychotria viridis* that is typically used.

Chemically, the main active constituents in the Ayahuasca [sic] potion are the alkaloids N, N-Dimethyltryptamine or DMT, and the so-called harmala alkaloids – notably, harmine, harmaline, and tetrahydroharmine; these latter ones are all beta-carbolines which are MAO (mono-amine oxidase) inhibitors [MAOI].  
(Shannon, 2010: 15)

The combination of DMT, from the *psychotria viridis*, and a MAOI, *Banisteriopsis caapi* is a prolonged psychedelic experience often lasting between four and six hours. Why this happens is explained in more detail in the following sections.

#### 4.1.1 *DMT and its effects*

DMT is a schedule 1 drug internationally, and class A in Britain. This means that harsh penalties are applied for its distribution and possession. It comes in a number of different forms such as N,N-Dimethyltryptamine (as found in *psychotria viridis*), 5-Methoxy-N,N-Dimethyltryptamine, and 5-hydroxy-dimethyltryptamine.

N,N-Dimethyltryptamine (DMT) is an indole alkaloid widely found in plants and animals. It is best known for producing brief and intense psychedelic effects when ingested. Increasing evidence suggests that endogenous DMT plays important roles for a number of processes in the periphery and central nervous system, and may act as a neurotransmitter.

(Carbonaro, and Gatch, 2016: 1)

We know that DMT is produced endogenously within humans, and despite much speculation linking it to dreaming, and near-death experiences, we cannot, at this time, ascertain exactly why (Nichols, 2018: pp. 30-36).

DMT is the simplest of the tryptamine psychedelics. Compared to other molecules, DMT is rather small. Its weight is 188 “molecular units,” meaning that it is not significantly larger than glucose, the simplest sugar our bodies, which weighs 180, and only ten times heavier than a water molecule, which weighs 18. By comparison, consider the weight of LSD at 323, or of mescaline, at 211.

DMT is closely related to serotonin, the neurotransmitter that psychedelics affect so widely. The pharmacology of DMT is similar to that of other well-known psychedelics. It affects receptor sites for serotonin in much the same way that LSD, psilocybin, and mescaline do. These serotonin receptors are widespread throughout the body and can be found in blood vessels, muscle, glands, and skin...

...Once the body produces or takes in DMT, certain enzymes break it down within seconds. These enzymes, called monoamine oxidases (MAO), occur in high concentrations in the blood, liver, stomach, brain, and intestines. The widespread presence of MAO is why DMT effects are so short-lived.

(Strassman, 2001: 52)

When extracted and smoked in crystal form, or when dried leaves of DMT rich plants are used as snuff, the psychedelic experience lasts only 10 minutes. If injected it lasts around 45 minutes (Blom, 2009: 143)

#### **4.1.2 MAOIs and their effects**

The monoamine oxidase process is a natural bodily function that acts rapidly on DMT.

The harmala alkaloids derived from *Banisteriopsis* are  $\beta$ -carboline, which possess potent monoamine oxidase inhibiting (MAOI) action. This MAOI activity allows for a unique profile of biochemical effects, most prominently the activation and augmentation of additive plants. When taken alone, the harmala alkaloids may induce varying degrees of hallucinogenic inebriation and are utilized ritually for this purpose by particular native tribes. The characteristically bitter taste of ayahuasca, along with its nauseating and emetic effects, are attributed to these harmala alkaloids.

(Grob, 2006: pp. 66-67)

MAOI serves to prevent this metabolism of DMT resulting in the psychedelic effects of *ayahuasca* lasting hours rather than minutes.

MAO are present in human physiology in forms: MAOA, found in the intestines, and MAOB, which is present in platelets. MAOI has been used as an effective treatment for a variety of types of depression, anxiety, bulimia as well other related conditions (Gold, Carman, and Lydiard, 1984: pp.159-162). However, despite this efficacy MAOI's are not employed as front-line treatment in Britain.

'MAOIs are an older type of antidepressant that are rarely used nowadays. They can cause potentially serious side effects so should only be prescribed by a specialist doctor.' (National Health Service, 2018a)

The reason for these side effects from using MAOI is the contraindication with tyramine.

Tyramine is normally present in foodstuffs (e.g. cheese and red wine) and is metabolized in the gut wall by MAO to inactive metabolites. In patients taking MAOI, however tyramine will be absorbed intact. If patients taking MAOI also take these amines there may be a massive release of noradrenaline from adrenergic nerve endings with a resulting syndrome of sympathetic over activity characterized by hypertension, headache, excitement, hyper-pyrexia, and cardiac arrhythmias. Fatal intracranial haemorrhage and cardiac arrest may result. The risk of interactions continues for several weeks after the MAOI is stopped as new MAO enzyme must be synthesised.

(Lee, and Stockley, 2001: 224)

### **4.1.3 Adverse effects or safety precautions in the use of *ayahuasca*.**

#### **4.1.3.1 Minimising risk**

Physical risks from *ayahuasca* use can primarily be attributed to the MOAI present. This explains why users of *ayahuasca* follow a restrictive diet leading up to, and after, their experience. An example of advice available about this can be found on [ayahuasca.com](http://ayahuasca.com) (2010), which provides a list of food and drugs to refrain from using if participating in an *ayahuasca* ritual.

In participant observations I found conversations around dietary, and drug restrictions were common, though the reason for these restrictions was not discussed as widely. In addition, the guidance observed was for the restrictive diet to be followed for a maximum of a week before



and after, and at minimum roughly three days before and after, not several weeks as advised at the end of Section 4.1.2.

Some of the discussions I encountered posed that the restrictive diet was intended to flush the digestive system, removing any blocks in the intestines. Also, that fats prevent the body from absorbing the brew and thus reduce the efficacy of the brew. This is provided to offer an understanding into the community's level of insight into this matter.

#### 4.1.3.2 Notable side effects

Lesser, more manageable risks of *ayahuasca* use include diarrhoea and vomiting, or purging, as it is referred to by the community. These symptoms are common whilst under the influence of the brew and was witnessed often throughout this research. Based on conversations with the community it is understood that the term purging has less unpleasant connotations than the word vomit and is employed to encourage the perception that a purge is a cathartic process.

Long-term psychological risks of *ayahuasca* are less straightforward to determine. The following list is what is understood to be almost universal effects of the altered state, such as that following *ayahuasca* consumption:

1. Alterations in thinking such as changes to memory, concentration, attention, and judgement.
2. Altered sense of time.
3. Fear of losing connection to reality, and loss of self-control.
4. Changes in emotional expression ranging from ecstasy to despair.
5. Changes in body image attributed to dissolution of boundaries between self and others, and states of depersonalisation.
6. Perceptual alterations including visual and audial hallucinations.
7. Changes in meaning or significance including the attachment of special meaning or significance to subjective experience, ideas, or perceptions.
8. Sense of the ineffable; because of the extraordinary and subjective nature of these states it can be difficult to communicate the experience to others.
9. Feelings of rejuvenation which may be short term or lead to significantly improved changes to mood and outlook.
10. Hyper-suggestibility as critical thinking is reduced.

(Grob, 2006: pp.75-76)

As psychedelic experiences are subjective, and open to interpretation by the community member, some of these attributes may be experienced as beneficial, while others may find them in some way traumatic. Where traumatic, further individual interpretation may be applied in the processing and integration of the experience thereafter. To use the community's vernacular – it is difficult to tell from the outset if you will have a good or bad trip and how the individual will respond to these experiences. A difficult *ayahuasca* experience can be interpreted as receiving a hard lesson from the divine; intrinsically beneficent.

More recent studies dedicated to *ayahuasca* have not identified any additional long-term psychological effects of its use (Riba, 2016).

#### **4.1.4 Ayahuasca and the law**

Laws surrounding *ayahuasca* use have been ambiguous and confusing, in Britain. The start of Section 4.1 states DMT is a class A controlled substance, yet in Section 4.1.1 the endogenous nature of it is illustrated, not just in humans but in many plants and animals. The UK Home office address this by stating that possession of plants containing DMT would not be legislated in their natural form, but are subject if prepared for consumption, such as drying or boiling (Home Office, 2007).

Firm arguments have been presented on why, when conducted by the UDV and Santo Daime, *ayahuasca* rituals are protected by both the international and European Convention on Human Rights<sup>16</sup> guidelines. This is owing to an individual's right to express their religion. *Ayahuasca* is fundamental to the UDV and Santo Daime's worship of God. It is seen as a tool for connection and communication with God on an individual level, rather than through a religious leader (Küfner, Rabe, and Sonczyk, 2007: pp. 12-25).

In Britain there have been two legal cases involving the use of *ayahuasca*. The first, against Peter Aziz, resulted in prosecution and imprisonment. Aziz was practising as a shaman rather than a member of the Santo Daime or UDV. He had been publicly promoting *ayahuasca* as a cure for cancer (Morris, 2011) where there is no clear scientific evidence to back up this claim.

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<sup>16</sup> At the time of data collection for this research, the UK were members of the European Union and beholden to this convention, and so it was firmly held that data collection was taking place in a protected environment.

*Ayahuasca* has not been through the required medical testing procedures to evaluate its efficacy as a cancer treatment at the time of this report. These claims contravene The Medicines for Human Use (Clinical Trials) Regulations (2004), which was later surpassed by the Human Medicines Regulations (2012). Aziz was sentenced to 15 months in prison for possession and distribution of a Class A substance on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2011 (Morris, 2011).

The second case involved several members of the Santo Daime, located in Devon. Local news sources reported that four people were arrested and 54 litres of *ayahuasca* was seized (This is South Devon, 2010). However, alternative accounts from those charged, claim that seven people were originally held on bail, although charges were only brought against Mr. Freedman and Ms. Lidell, and that the trial was scheduled for January 2013. At the pre-trial hearing the charged presented a case based on the legal ambiguity of *ayahuasca* and ‘Article 9 right of religious freedom’ (Freedman, and Lidell, 2012). The case was later dropped by the prosecution.

Without any warning, last week, on Friday 26th October, the prosecution sent a letter abandoning the case. As yet we do not know the precise reasons why they have come to this decision. In the letter they wrote that Evidence [sic] that it was believed would prove a key element of the offence, when carefully reviewed in the context of the whole case and further information supplied by the police, is now believed to be insufficient for there to be a realistic prospect of a conviction. (Freedman, and Lidell, 2012)

Since there were 54 litres of evidence community members have speculated that the case was dropped to avoid appeal at The European Court of Human Rights<sup>17</sup>.

Prosecution also wrote in their letter that it is not accepted that the N-Dimethyltryptamine [sic] (DMT) found in the tea falls outside prohibition imposed by the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. (Freedman, and Lidell, 2012)

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<sup>17</sup> At this time of the case the UK were still members of the European Union and beholden by its Human Rights conventions.

## 4.2 Kambo

### 4.2.1 The chemical make-up of kambo

Research on *kambo* is in short supply when compared to *ayahuasca*.

This frog's skin secretion, which the Indians [sic] introduce into the body through fresh burns, is rich in peptides. These include vasoactive peptides, opioid peptides, and a peptide that we have named adenoregulin, with the sequence GLWSKIKEVGKEAAKAAKAAGKAALGAVSEAV as determined from mass spectrometry and Edman degradation. The natural peptide may contain a D amino acid residue, since it is not identical in chromatographic properties to the synthetic peptide. Adenoregulin enhances binding of agonists to A1 adenosine receptors; it is accompanied in the skin secretion by peptides that inhibit binding. The vasoactive peptide sauvagine, the opioid peptides, and adenoregulin and related peptides affect behaviour in mice and presumably contribute to the behavioural sequelae observed in humans.

(Daly, Caceres, and Moni, et al., 1992: 10960)

The language use here is discipline specific. Vasoactive means affecting the blood vessels especially in respect to the degree of their relaxation or contraction. Opioids are endogenous neural polypeptides that bind to opiate receptors and mimic some properties of opiates that tend to induce sleep and reduce pain.

‘Adenoregulin is a member of dermaseptin family which are vertebrate antibiotic peptides having lethal effects against a broad spectrum of bacteria, fungi and protozoa.’ (Zhou, Cao, and Luo, et al., 2005: pp. 725–730). From this it can be determined that *kambo* has an opioid like effect, and peptides that are known for their ability to eradicate a range of harmful microbes.

### 4.2.2 Adverse effects or safety precautions in the use of kambo

Nausea and vomiting are an expected, and often induced aspect of *kambo* use. It may also cause diarrhoea, dizziness, raised blood pressure and short-term swelling to the head. All these symptoms were both experienced and witnessed as part of the participant observation aspects of this research. For these reasons it would not be advisable to administer *kambo* to small children, pregnant women, or those with elevated blood pressure. In addition to this administration method used will cause scarring and puts the community member at risk of transferred infection as open wounds are created.

*Kambo* is used to boost the immune system. If so, it is fair to assume autoimmune deficiencies may result, or be triggered by its use. If the immune system is over efficient it can sometimes

attack vital organs joints, risking the onset of conditions such as type one diabetes<sup>18</sup> and arthritis. As there is no regulation or established dosage system the effect of overdosing is not yet known.

There are eight recorded cases of individuals that experienced severe, detrimental side effects following *kambo* use, including three fatalities (Araújo da Silva, Monteiro, and Bernarde, 2019: pp.1-2). In these cases, *kambo* was administered outside of its native setting of the Amazon.

There is concern that *kambo* is considered a panacea and that not enough research has been conducted into its side effects at this time. Concerns are also raised of an ecological nature:

Due to the reports of complications and death, it is necessary to caution the public on the contraindications regarding the use of Kambô [sic], such as severe cardiovascular conditions, hypotensive syndromes, and to limit water intake after the ritual, in order to reduce the risk of contracting SIADH syndrome. In addition, since Kambô is also traditionally used to induce abortions, pregnant women should not participate in this ritual. Excessive applications (overdose), and treatment of children with a lower body mass, should be avoided as mass-to-dose ratio may be relatively higher during the treatment in these two groups of patients. The secretion of *P. bicolor* contains several different uncharacterized toxins. Additional studies on the pharmacological potential of amphibians are necessary, and the risk of bio-piracy should be monitored. Trafficking of these animals and their secretions, and the possible impact on the *P. bicolor* population in their natural habitats, should be extensively studied.

(Araújo da Silva, Monteiro, and Bernarde, 2019: pp.1-2)

## 5. The dance of the condor and the eagle

This chapter looks at the growth of *ayahuasca* as a topic in both academia and popular culture. Using the search terms ‘*ayahuasca*’ and ‘*yagé*’ to search peer reviewed journals, news articles, and entertainment media, it was possible to chart the spread of information about the topic in Britain. This provides an insight into how the participants are likely to have developed an interest in and understanding of *ayahuasca*. It serves to highlight, culturally, where influence, be it conscious, or subconscious, on their approach, attitude, and interpretation of the phenomenon, are likely to have derived. It also serves to contextualise the data collection and interpretation that is found in Chapters 6 to 9.

While there is not scope within the confines of a PhD thesis chapter to include every mention of *ayahuasca* or *yagé*, the chapter focuses on research and media that is felt to have had a significant impact on the growing awareness of this topic. By virtue of the search terms used, it will omit any papers specific to DMT, MAOIs, or shamanism, or curandeirismo, that may have had an impact. To include all these search terms would have expanded the scope of this aspect of the project beyond what can be contained within a PhD thesis. Other key texts and findings have been included in earlier chapters of this thesis to provide foundational understandings of the subject. The term *ayahuasca* was chosen as the interview data showed that this was the key interest of participants. *Yagé* was used as the most common alternative name given to the substance, as seen in Burroughs and Ginsberg’s (2006) work.

The chapter expands on the paper; *The Scientific Investigation of Ayahuasca: A Review of Past and Current Research* (McKenna, Calloway and Grob, 1998: pp. 65-76), which strictly covers scientific reports. This chapter is a more holistic picture of the contextual landscape in which *ayahuasca* has been introduced to Britain that extends more than 20 years after the publication of the original review. Any research produced after the 1998 review was found using the Open Athens database. The filter ‘scholarly and peer review’ was applied to all searches. Figures presented here are indicative rather than exact. Due to volume, it is difficult to tell how many

papers are specifically about *ayahuasca*, Amazonian shamanism, psychedelics, DMT, or MAOIs. In addition, where papers appear in languages other than English, further challenge is presented in assessing their relevance. Papers not published in English were omitted from this part of the study as a result. Additionally, duplicate entries in search results were counted only once.

To see how *ayahuasca* has been reported by the British news media, the *Lexis Library News* database was employed. The newspapers included represent a range of political bias in their reporting. This is to ensure fairness and to obtain a complete picture of how the public may have been influenced to perceive *ayahuasca* use by way of the hegemony of the press.

‘Hegemony is a process that operates through the transfer of dominant ideology, consciousness formation and social power experience’ (Çoban, 2018: pp. 97-98)

Those that own the means of production, in this case news publications, can impose influence over those that do not. The ideologies of the press owners become the ideologies of their readers.

In our day, knowledge is power and power holders are those who determine what “knowledge” is and those who present “knowledge” to the society. Knowledge strengthens people. Those who dominate the media do so to isolate and alienate us.

(Çoban, 2018: 101)

This chapter includes graphic representations throughout, displaying the volume of both scientific papers and news articles published in each era covered. This illustrates the rate of increased interest in the topic. In some cases, the searches brought back multiple results for the same article with slightly differing word counts. These duplications have been counted as one article.

Attempts have been made to categorise the findings as ‘academic interest’, ‘popular culture’, and ‘news and current affairs’; however, since the press often reports on popular culture there is some overlap.

## 5.1 Early interest 1850s – 1950s

### 5.1.1 Academic interest

The first Occidental scholar to write about *ayahuasca* was Richard Spruce, a botanist working in the Amazon in 1851. A letter reporting his encounter with ‘Caapi’ drinking, was published in *Hooker’s Journal of Botany and Kew Garden Miscellany* dated 1854 (Spruce, 1854: pp. 107-117).

He did not formerly publish this research until 1873 (Spruce, 1873: pp. 184-193). The first academic report was from the geographer, Manuel Villavicencio in 1858, who reported on the use of *ayahuasca* in divination, on the upper Rio Napo (Villavicencio, 1858)

‘Villavicencio supplied no botanical details about the plant used as the source of the beverage, his account of his own intoxication left no doubt in Spruce’s mind that they were writing about the same thing.’ (McKenna, 2006: 44). Research around *ayahuasca* continued slowly, primarily in the fields of botany and chemistry. It was hindered by taxonomic confusion and findings were not easily accessible to those outside of these two fields (McKenna, 2006: 46-47).

### 5.1.2 Popular culture

The first appearance of *ayahuasca* in popular culture can be dated back to April 1932 when the magazine *Modern Mechanix* published a small piece of 43 words on ‘Yagé’, claiming that ‘the drug is supposed to cause clairvoyance’ (Uncredited. 1932). Owing to the small word count, and the typical readership of a mechanic’s periodical in that era, it is doubtful that this had any significant impact. At this time *ayahuasca* remained primarily unheard of by the public, and researchers outside of botany and chemistry.



## 5.2 1960s – 1980s The long and winding runway

### 5.2.1 Academic interest of the 1960s

Only one academic publication addressed *ayahuasca* in the 1960s with a paper that looked specifically at the effects of harmala alkaloids (Naranjo, 1967).

### 5.2.2 Popular culture of the 1960s

*Ayahuasca*'s first significant entry into popular culture was from William Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg, who, in 1963, published their correspondence, *The Yage Letters* (Burroughs and Ginsberg, 1963). Both authors had a significant audience, and with their associate Jack Kerouac founded the Beat Generation (Lawler, 2005, p 29).

Burroughs entered the public eye with his work *Naked Lunch* (1959), and Ginsberg with his then controversial poem *Howl* (1956), which could be described as a poetic ethnography of what was to become deemed 'the Beat Generation'. There were attempts to prosecute Ginsberg on the grounds that *Howl* was 'obscene'. Ginsberg won the trial which enhanced his reputation amongst artists, writers, musicians, and rebellious minds of the time (Morgan, and Peters. 2006: 2). This tells us that the first significant introduction of *ayahuasca*, termed *yagé*, to the public, came with a strong association to counterculture; with Beat fans attuned to the fact that the state was working to stymie culture and creativity.

DMT features in the highly influential, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (Wolfe, 1968: pp. 33, 101, 107, 111, 163, 175), although no reference is made to *ayahuasca* or any of its aliases. Therefore, this work did not contribute to the furtherance of *curandeirismo* but helped spread understanding of one of *ayahuasca*'s active ingredients.

Popular culture in the Occident at this time was focusing on the relatively new compound lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD or LSD-25), discovered by the Swiss Chemist, Albert Hofmann.

Hofmann's serendipitous discovery of the chemical compound LSD introduced a new drug that inspired a flurry of interest. He had first synthesized [sic] the drug in 1938, but without physical contact with the substance until 1943 he remained unaware of its dramatic effects. Not until some spilled on his hand, in 1943, did he discover that he might have produced something worth further investigation. (Dyck, 2014: p. 13)

*The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead* (Leary, Metzner, and Alpert, 1964) compared the psychedelic experience to the different *Bardos*, the believed stages of the spirits journey after death, described in the Tibetan book of the dead. This work warrants criticism for not differentiating between the types of psychedelic experiences that various compounds evoke. However, it allowed the Occident to see psychedelic compounds as more than tools for novel experience, as well as something able to induce a spiritual experience, and can be credited for popularising the psychedelic experience throughout this era.

### **5.2.3 Academic interest of the 1970s**

Academic interest began to increase in the 1970s (McKenna, Calloway and Grob, 1998: pp. 65-76), as seen in Figure 2.1, in Section 5.3.1. First was a detailed account by Lamb (1971) of former rubber tapper Manuel Córdova-Rios' abduction by a group of natives, in a plot to help defend themselves from ever encroaching rubber traders. It offers a detailed insight into the *curandeirismo* and shined a light on the threats faced by natives in the Amazon (Lamb, 1971). This started a small trend of investigating the use of *ayahuasca* by a range of Indigenous Amazonian communities (Rivier, Lindgren, 1972: pp. 101-129; Dobkin de Rios, 1972: pp. 256-269). It was established that *banisteriopsis caapi* and *psychotria viridis* are the standard ingredients of *ayahuasca*, whilst acknowledging the range of admixtures employed occasionally (Rivier, Lindgren, 1972: pp. 101-129, Schultes, 1972: pp. 34-41). It was also the time that *ayahuasca* was considered as a treatment for psychiatric conditions outside of the Amazon (Dobkin de Rios, 1973: pp. 67-85).

The remaining academic works of this decade focused on harmaline and the effects of MAOIs, from a biochemical perspective (McKenna, Calloway and Grob, 1998: pp. 65-76). This is the decade that academic interest in **ayahuasca** was firmly established.

#### 5.2.4 Popular culture of the 1970s

In 1975 the McKenna brothers published *The Invisible Landscape: Mind, Hallucinogens, and the I Ching* providing details of their experience of *ayahuasca* with the *Jivero* community of the Marañón River, Peru (McKenna and McKenna 1975). This was accessible to psychedelic enthusiasts and the zeitgeist of the era, thus popularising interest. Coupling psychedelics with the i-ching, like Leary and Metzner had achieved with the Tibetan book of the dead earlier, emphasised an exotic appeal, as argued throughout *Orientalism* (Said, 2003).

#### 5.2.5 Academic interest of the 1980s

Academic interest rose again in the 1980s, as Figure 2.1 shows. Most of this research focused on the biochemical aspects of  $\beta$ -carboline alkaloids (McKenna, Calloway and Grob, 1998: pp. 65-76). Developments were also made in the understanding of N-N DMT synthesis in rat brains (Barker, Monti, and Christian, 1980: pp. 1049-1057).

Ethnographic understanding of *curandeirismo* expanded with focus on Peruvian *curandeiro* (Luna, 1984: pp. 123-133). This work expanded into a book giving special attention to the Peruvian *mestizo*; people of mixed native and European heritage (Luna, 1986). In addition, the story of Manuel Córdova-Rios was completed with the release of *Rio Tigre and Beyond* (Lamb, 1985) explaining how he went on to become the leader of the *Huni Kui* upon the death of his teacher.

Looking more broadly at the subject of psychedelics, comparisons were being made between dreams, drug induced psychedelic states, and schizophrenia, with consideration given to the compromise of the:

‘ego's capacity to average or synthesize various self-representations into a continuous, coherent self’ in these states (Fichman, 1983: pp.73-94). It was also first postulated that endogenous psychedelics in the pineal gland are responsible for the visual aspect of dreams<sup>19</sup> (Callaway, 1988: pp.119-124).

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<sup>19</sup> This theory, in the psychedelic using community of the Occident, morphed into the notion that DMT is produced in the pineal gland and released at the point of death - a notion yet to be proved (Breaking Convention, 2017).

### 5.2.6 Popular culture of the 1980s

Popular culture throughout the 1980s offered an antithesis to the colourful, kaleidoscopic aesthetic of the psychedelic, 1970s 'hippy' movement. Instead, this decade gave us gothics, new romanticism, glam metal, and saw hip-hop establish itself as a cultural phenomenon. Consequently, psychedelic compounds were no longer *de rigueur*. As a result, no attention was given to *ayahuasca* in entertainment media in this period.

## 5.3 1990s Curandeiro chic

### 5.3.1 Academic interest

The review that has formed the foundation for this chapter was published in this decade and is exhausted part way through (McKenna, Calloway and Grob, 1998: pp. 65-76). Data on the number of papers produced, based on this source, are listed in Figure 2.1:

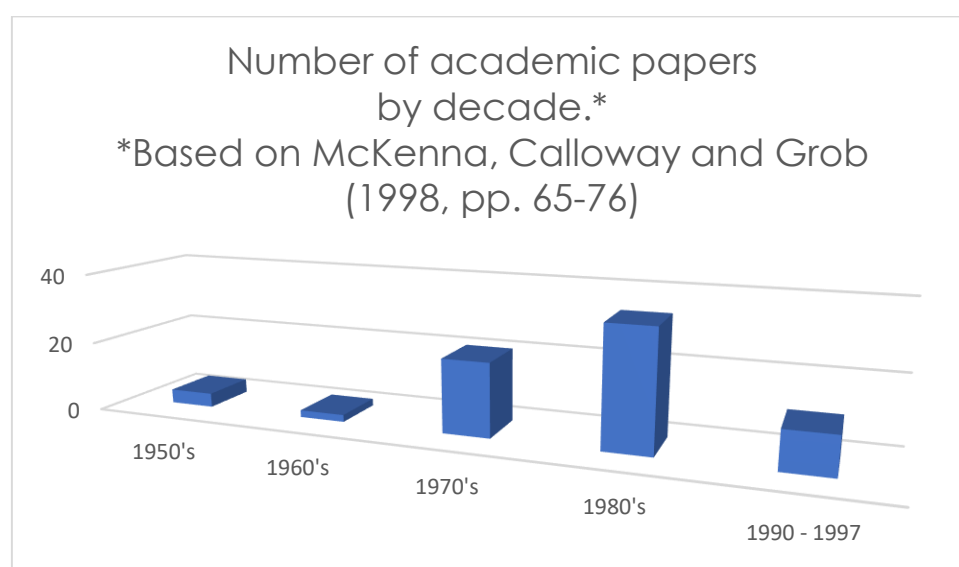


Figure 2.1

Three significant research projects were launched in this decade in relation to understanding *ayahuasca*. First was the launch of a ground-breaking, five-year, research project that focused on human dose responses in N-N DMT relating to neuroendocrine, autonomic, and cardiovascular performance Strassman, and Qualls, 1994: pp. 85-97). This was the first project to be granted permission to administer a psychedelic to participants since psychedelics

compounds had been made illegal across the Occident in the 1970s. It opened a gateway for the future of psychedelic research.

Second, in 1992, the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS) supplied funding, and Dr. Grob was named a principal co-investigator of The *Hoasca* Project (McKenna, 1993). A total of eight papers resulted from this work between 1996 and 1998. In 1998 the team were joined by Dr. Calloway and together they authored the paper that underpins this chapter.

The third project asked what the differences were between healthy males, with similar lifestyles, between regular, and non-*ayahuasca* users, testing various physical and cognitive attributes (Riba, and Barbanoj, 1998: 12-15).

Information about academic outputs from this point will be from the Open Athens database. The number of publications per decade can be seen in Figure 2.6 at the end of this chapter.

### **5.3.2 Popular culture**

The rave scene that built throughout the 1990s in Britain brought with it a new generation of psychedelic loving youth, public interest was renewed. *Ayahuasca Visions* (Luna, and Amaringo, 1991) offered a series of paintings, packed with detail, illustrating the distinctive *ayahuasca* visual experience: geometry, repeat patterns, colour, and a lot to process. *Food of the Gods* (McKenna, 1992), *The Archaic Revival* (McKenna, 1992) and *True Hallucinations* (McKenna, 1993) have also been credited as highly influential books in the spread of interest in *ayahuasca* (Grunwell, 1998: pp. 59-62).

*The Cosmic Serpent* (Narby, 1998) also widened the audience. The book postulates that the common serpent symbolism and mythology found in shamanic traditions is indicative of ‘shamans’ gaining their knowledge from their DNA. He claims that psychedelic and shamanic visions are from constant, low frequency, photons emitted from DNA and projected out from the body like movies revealed in trance state<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> If so, shared visual hallucination would be common. My experience as a member of the ‘psychedelic community’ has led to the conclusion that shared visual experiences are compounds that are considered rare, though not unknown, when psychedelic compounds are used in the Occident.

In this decade knowledge of *ayahuasca* started to dissipate through folk pop and electronic dance music (EDM). In October 1990, Paul Simon released a strongly Brazilian flavoured album entitled *Rhythm of the Saints*. The song *Spirit Voices* is reported to be about Simon's *ayahuasca* experience (Jonze, 2010a). While promoting her second album *Under the Pink*, Tori Amos claimed the album was analogous to an *ayahuasca* experience, mentioning it in several interviews (The Dent, 2000; Shaitly, 2012: 12). Sting also discussed his experience of *ayahuasca*, calling it 'Dead-man's root'<sup>21</sup>.

...it's not a frivolous pursuit. It's very much part of the religious practice of the people there. There is a certain amount of dread attached to taking it – you have a hallucinogenic trip that really deals with death and your mortality. So it's quite an ordeal.

(Dunn, 1998: 26)

In 1994, the then underground, ambient, EDM outfit The Future Sound of London released a one-minute movie called *Yagé* (Gallivan, 1994: 8). The title appeared again as a track on their 1996 album *Dead Cities*.

Like Ginsberg and Burrows earlier, these artists enjoyed a select audience. Simon, Amos, and Sting had a typically more mature, and educated, fanbase. The Future Sound of London were known only to discerning EDM fans. Their depictions of *ayahuasca* romanticised this exotic and mysterious experience and made it 'cool'. It seemed special, elite - known to those 'in the know'. Still, both Amos and Sting were keen to inform their fans that it was not something done for fun; as such *Ayahuasca* was being firmly set apart from the recreational drug scene of the time.

### **5.3.3 News and current affairs**

The 1990s was the first time *ayahuasca* appeared in the British Press. The number of occurrences per publication is shown in Figure 2.2 at the end of this section. The majority were from traditional broadsheet media, typical of the middle class, thus reinforcing this notion of exclusivity, and that *ayahuasca* is not for common drug users but is for the discerning purveyor.

*The Independent* is the starting point of *ayahuasca* entering the awareness of the general public, via the press. A list of substances explored by Alan Ginsberg and his friends, including *yage*,

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<sup>21</sup> This is the only time I have encountered this name for *ayahuasca*.

and *ayahuasca* independently, was featured in a book review (Bradfield, 1990: 30). Significant credit is given to *ayahuasca* for the political prowess of the Polish politician, Stanislaw Tyminski (Father, 1990: 14; Strong, 1990: 8). These reports promote *ayahuasca* as bettering spiritual and physical health and cite it as the source of Tyminski's claimed psychic abilities. However, most mentions of *ayahuasca* in the press, until the latter part of 1993, were references to its association with William Burroughs.

One detailed account of using synthesised DMT briefly mentioned *ayahuasca* (Sharkey, 1993: 37), and a feature article on altered states of consciousness, also lists a variety of psychedelic compound including *ayahuasca* (Illman, 1993: 7). The latter highlights the importance of psychoactive plants in shaping the cultural values of Indigenous communities, further setting *ayahuasca* apart from typical non-medicinal drug use as commonly understood in Britain at that time. The audience was still relatively small, and exclusive, but word of *ayahuasca* was starting to spread.

A detailed account of a traditional *ayahuasca* ritual was reported in *The Guardian* in 1996. From the outset the article positions *ayahuasca* as a middle-class pursuit.

Shamans now travel regularly to Bogota, where they have found new disciples in the professional classes. In hundreds of dimly lit middle-class living rooms, executives in sharp suits have been getting cosmic together.  
(Lennard, 1996: 16)

There was a surge of mentions of *ayahuasca* in 1997 and 1998 (see Figure 2.2). This is due to the death of William Burroughs on 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1997 with obituaries referencing *The Yage Letters*. This did nothing to increase the understanding of *ayahuasca*, yet served as a reminder of it.

One documentary also garnered a variety of reviews. The documentary featured criticism of Timothy Leary's approach to psychedelic research, and illustrated that the UDV is a recognised Christian church, not a cult (*Horizon: Psychedelic Science*, 1997). This offered credibility to the use of *ayahuasca*, and psychedelic research as a field, to a broad audience. Reviews reflected the differing political standpoints that drive the different newspapers selected for this research. *The Observer's* review highlighted the religious use of *ayahuasca* (Flett, 1997: 64),

while *The Times* opens with criticisms of 1960s guitar music and conjures the image of being harangued on the street for (laughably) cheap LSD (Bond, 1997: 43).

Again, targeting a middle-class audience, a report on the birthday party of Fashionista PR Expert Lynne Franks OBE describes attendees as ‘mainly New Age people’ (Barber, 1997: 6). The report explains that Franks’ book describes her experience of *ayahuasca*, in Seattle with the ‘Unione Vegetal Church’ [sic]. *Ayahuasca* is now new age, and fashionable: ‘She now collects shamans and wise women and psychic hookers the way she once collected platform shoes’, it critiques, while illustrating how *ayahuasca* can trigger significant changes in users. A feature on the work of *curandeiro*, Noe Rodriguez Jujuborre elicits how The University of Cambridge established the ‘Fifth Word Project’ thanks to him (Griffiths, 1998: 4). The project ‘aims to treat Indigenous knowledge as equal to Western ways of knowing’, and as such, is important in moving away from imperialist attitudes asserting post enlightenment ideas of Occidental philosophy, and medicine, as superior to those of ‘shamanic’ traditions. The article also shares the idea of ‘plant teachers’ in *curandeirismo*.

A first-hand account of a *Santo Daime* ritual, held in a Church of England (CofE) church, North London was the first account we have of *ayahuasca* in Britain (Carty, 1998: 3). Offering a brief history of the *Santo Daime* it promotes the religion’s claims that *ayahuasca* is a sacrament, and a tool for healing. The description of the experience is candid and shows that the experience is not always idyllic. This is the earliest account of an *ayahuasca* ritual, in Britain, that has been found in this research<sup>22</sup>.

‘the four and a half hours on the floor mercifully came to an end, but the drug’s effects lingered until eight the following morning and I suffered flashbacks – short panic attacks – for a couple of weeks thereafter’. This presents a far from attractive image of the experience.

In 1999 the United States Patent and Trademark Office (PTO) rejected a patent application for the ‘*Ayahuasca* vine’ [sic] since the plant was “known and available” prior to the filing of the application by International Plant Medicine Corporation, following a 10-year counter campaign from representatives of native Amazonians. The reports that followed highlighted the

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<sup>22</sup> Prior to finding this report, conversations within the community had led me to believe that *ayahuasca* rituals were first conducted in Britain around 2000, meaning that this roughly matches up with the findings in print.



importance of a trained guide in *ayahuasca* rituals. (Knight, 1998; Cray 1999, Anonymous, 1999)

Given the growing research, endorsement from select musicians, various impactful books, coverage in a BBC documentary, and many mentions in the press, interest broadened significantly throughout this decade. This is illustrated well by the decade closing with reports of *ayahuasca* rituals taking place in a London, Cof E, church.

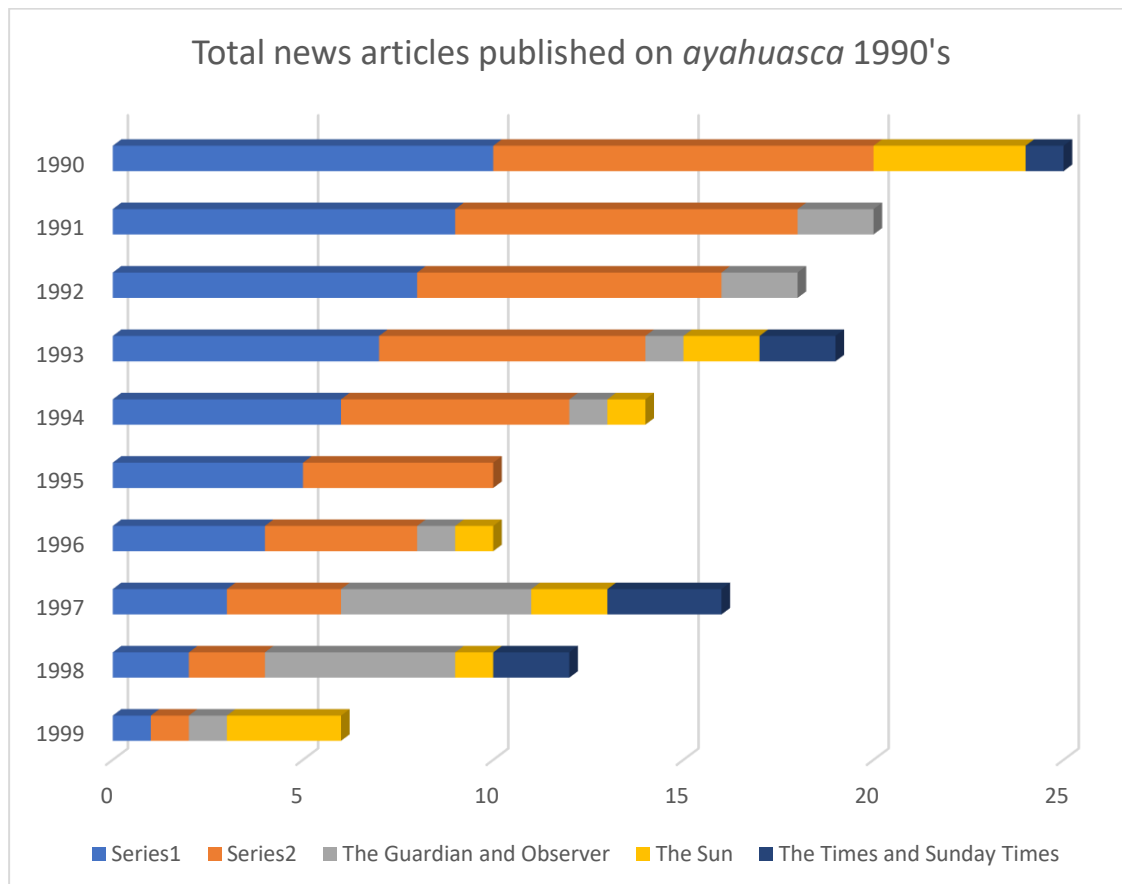


Figure 2.2

## 5.4 2000s Psychedelic resurgence

### 5.4.1 Academic interest

#### 5.4.1.1 Conferences

It is said that 2000 was the year that *ayahuasca* research exploded (Breaking Convention, 2013). The decade opened with the first academic conference on the subject. Titled *Ayahuasca Conference*, it was organised by Tony Rich and Ralph Metzner and held 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> March 2000, at the California Institute for Integral Studies, San Francisco (Earth Erowid, 2000). In 2002 *Psychoactivity III* was the second conference dedicated to *ayahuasca* held over 22<sup>nd</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> November in Amsterdam. It attracted roughly 200 participants (Savant, 2012: pp. 44-46).

From June 24<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> 2004, Bath Spa University College hosted the Exploring Consciousness Conference (MAPS, 2004). This was the first conference on psychedelics in Britain, and of the 40 talks hosted, one was dedicated to *ayahuasca*, a presentation by Benny Shanon entitled *The Study of Ayahuasca and its Philosophical Implications*.

The first International Amazonian Shamanism Conference was also held in Iquitos, Peru in 2005<sup>23</sup> (Ayahuasca Timeline, 2017). This was the first time that *curandeiro* and academics had come together in such a setting. These conferences not only illustrate significant academic interest was established, but *ayahuasca* was appearing as its own field of study.

#### 5.4.1.2 Publications

A visual overview of the amount of peer reviewed publications covering the subject of *ayahuasca* this decade is presented in Figures 2.5 and 2.6 at the end of this chapter.

The first to note were outputs from the third project mentioned in Section 5.3.1 above; *Subjective effects and tolerability of the South American psychoactive beverage Ayahuasca in healthy volunteers* (Riba, Rodríguez-Fornells, and Urbano et al., 2000: pp. 85 -95) and *Ayahuasca Reader Encounters with the Amazon's Sacred Vine* (Luna and White (eds), 2000),

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<sup>23</sup> This has been confirmed in private communications between myself and the organiser Alan Shoemaker, however no formal online record of the event is available.

which provided a wide range of texts on the subject, from a variety of authors including indigenous *ayahuasca* users, relevant scholars, and Occidental *ayahuasca* users.

*Psychometric Assessments of the Hallucinogen Rating Scale* (Riba, Rodríguez-Fornells, and Strassman et al., 2001: pp. 215-223) followed, with focus turning to the long-term effects on physiology and psychology of users, as well as designing a taxonomic scale for the impact of psychedelic compounds.

In 2001, before it was a significant phenomenon, *New Age Commodification and Appropriation of Spirituality* considered the effect of the Occident's adoption of these rituals (York, 2001: pp. 361-372). We can now see research becoming less based on the physiological and psychological impacts of *ayahuasca* use, but also the cultural ethics of its use in Occidental setting.

In 2002 there was a keen sense of challenging existing paradigms around psychedelic use in the Occident. *The Shaman and the Rave Party: Social Pharmacology of Ecstasy*, made the comparison between sacred, and profane, psychedelic use to challenge the notion that hedonistic values are a dominating factor in drug abuse (Nencini, 2002: pp. 923-939). Furthermore, *Entheogens and Existential Intelligence: The Use of Plant Teachers as Cognitive Tools* promotes some psychedelic compounds, especially *ayahuasca*, as 'entheogens'. It declares:

'The intent of my discussion is to confront assumptions about drugs that have unjustly perpetuated the disparagement and prohibition of some kinds of psychoactive use. More broadly, I challenge assumptions about intelligence that constrain contemporary educational thought.'  
(Tupper, 2002: pp. 499-539).

The most notable research in 2003 looked at *Banisteriopsis caapi* as a treatment for Parkinson's disease (Schwarz, Houghton, and Rose et al., 2003: pp. 627-633). By 2004 *ayahuasca* was seriously being considered as a legitimate therapeutic tool in the Occident and *Clinical Investigation of the Therapeutic Potential of Ayahuasca: Rationale and Regulatory Challenges* (McKenna, 2004: pp. 111-129) was published. Also of significance in this year was the publication of *Legal Perspectives On Traditional Knowledge: The Case For Intellectual Property Protection* (Cottier, 2004: pp. 371-399) which considers how to protect the

intellectual property right of Indigenous communities over their artefacts and traditions to prevent perversion and exploitation by the politically dominant Occident.

2004 was a particularly poignant year for the popularisation of *ayahuasca* as it was the year that *The Antipodes of the Mind* was first published (Shanon, 2005). This was the first attempt at providing a taxonomy of the psychological aspects of the *ayahuasca* experience. It remains the leading text about the cognitive psychological experience of *ayahuasca*, at the time of this research. In addition, a collection of papers on *ayahuasca* was published in December 2005, entitled *Sacred Vine of the Spirits: Ayahuasca* (Metzner, 2005). This anthology opened by providing a foundational understanding of *ayahuasca* from both a pharmacological and psychological perspective. Many of the papers included first-hand accounts and interpretations of the *ayahuasca* experience from a diverse range of writers. This book further reinforced the spiritual, religious and therapeutic aspects of the brew.

In 2005, the paper *Endogenous psychoactive tryptamines reconsidered: an anxiolytic role for dimethyltryptamine* (Jacob, and Presti, 2005: pp. 930-937) reported that DMT acts as an antipsychotic, rather than a psychotomimetic, as formerly believed. The neuropsychological effect on adolescent users of *ayahuasca* was also analysed (Doering-Silveira, Lopez, and Grob, et al., 2005, pp. 123-128). The paper concludes:

‘Even though, the data overall supports that there was not a difference between *ayahuasca* users and matched controls on neuropsychological measures, further studies are necessary to support these findings’.

In 2006, increased frontal and paralimbic activation in the brain, following *ayahuasca* ingestion, was identified (Riba, Romero, and Grasa, et al., 2006: pp.93-98). Another noteworthy piece of research this year was the paper *Treatment of drug dependence with Brazilian herbal medicines which validates some therapeutic benefit of ayahuasca* (Carlini, Rodrigues, and Mendes, et al., 2006: pp. 690-695).

In 2007, we see more in-depth focus on safety, risk, and therapeutic potential in the research published. One paper looked at herb-drug interactions (Patel, and Gohil, 2007: pp. 129-139). One paper considered the effect of *ayahuasca* on anxiety, panic and hopelessness in *Santo*

*Daime* members (Santos, Landeira-Fernandez, Strassman, et al., 2007: pp. 507-513). Another reviewed the risk assessments previously made on oral use of DMT and harmala (Gable, 2007: pp. 24-34). In addition, the discussion of patents continued in work on Bioprospecting (Laird, and Wynberg, 2007: pp. 20-32). It is notable that of the 28 papers found from 2007, nine were in Spanish. Riba and his colleagues went a long way to making Spain one of the leading countries in *ayahuasca* related research. The paper *From sacred plants to psychotherapy: the history and re-emergence of psychedelics in medicine* (Sessa, 2007: pp. S215-S216) furthers the argument that psychedelics can be valuable tools in psychotherapy.

This year *New Era – New Religions* (Dawson, 2007) was published as a comprehensive overview of the dramatically changing religious landscape of Brazil. It put forward information covering all of the syncretic *ayahuasca* based religions that have formed.

In 2008 there were two significant pieces on the effects of globalisation. The first was *The globalization of ayahuasca: Harm reduction or benefit maximization?* (Tupper, 2008: pp.297-303) which, given the rise of Occidental *ayahuasca* use evidenced throughout Sections 5.4.2 and 5.4.3, was a necessary consideration of the ethical impacts of its popularisation. The second focuses on the impact of *ayahuasca* Tourism, highlighted in Section 5.4.3, on Indigenous people (Bauer, 2008: pp. 276-291).

In this year, a proposed regulation model for illegal stimulants was established (Haden, 2008). Furthering the credibility of the potential of psychedelics as therapeutic tools, a proposed healthcare model for them was also presented (Moraes, and Saúde, 2008: pp. 121-133). A paradigm shaking theory was also presented about the potential of psychedelic compounds influencing the contents of *The Bible* (Shanon, 2008: pp.51-74).

By 2009, research was starting to show signs of saturation as there were few significant new findings or ideas coming forth. Although, the ideas coming out of the field, especially around therapy, globalisation, and regulation, have taken a significant amount of time to work through. Academic research is not designed to fit neatly into a year-by-year breakdown as presented here.

### 5.4.2 Popular culture

In 2001, *DMT: The Spirit Molecule* was published, expanding on the research project highlighted in Section 5.4.1. The book reaches out to a non-academic audience to explain how Strassman campaigned for 9 years to be granted permission for the work (Strassman, 2001). Later that year, the book *Trail of Feathers: In Search of the Birdmen of Peru* (Shah, 2001) was published. One review reported swift moving narratives and ‘secret guinea-pig healing ceremonies, grave robbing, and ancient folk festivals, with a cast including a paedophile jungle guide and a Hamburger Hill vet’ (Webster, 2001: 8).

This year also saw the Channel 4 programme *The Ends of the Earth* (2001) air. The subsequent reviews were behind the rise in press mentions of *ayahuasca* this year, as seen in Figure 2.3 at the end of Section 5.4.3. One review headline, published in bold capital letters, read:

[CN: Offensive terminology] ‘I was laced with enough frog poison to kill a man and ate a live millipede vomited from the stomach of a witch doctor. Strangely, I am now so much more relaxed and energetic; Briton’s amazon adventure’ (Brough, 2001: 37). The language used is arousing; it suggests danger, the exotic, it is wild and zany. This tabloid audience is not offered the same tempered warnings of safety and reverence seen in the earlier reports from the traditional broadsheet publications.

It has been claimed that artist Alex Grey’s work is influenced by *ayahuasca* (Breaking Convention, 2019, 18:10) especially in relation to his artwork for the band Tool’s album *Lateralus*, released in 2001 (spiritmolecule.com, 2014). With knowledge of *ayahuasca*’s unique form of hallucinatory experience, this assumption is understandable. However, when asked, Grey recalls a teenage introduction to LSD:

‘The Sacred Mirrors series and the Progress of the Soul series were born of this experience of life energy’ (Talat-Phillips, 2012b). *Progress of the Soul* is a 50-piece strong series of works, begun in 1972 and took 30 years to complete (Grey, 2019b). In this series Grey’s distinctive style is clear in all 50 paintings. The site’s biography (Grey, 2019a) also explains a five-year period of LSD beginning in 1975 when he met his wife. It makes no reference to either DMT or *ayahuasca*. The earliest connection that can be made between the artist and the brew is in his 2001 painting *Ayahuasca Visitation* (Grey, 2019c). In it there are clear indications of his distinctive style, yet still it is visually different to his other work. This difference may also be

due to a change in medium. This painting is one of his less famous too. There is no doubt that Grey has used *ayahuasca* and is an advocate for its use as in April 2008 he spoke about it in a New York talk (NosisTV. 2008).

In 2002, *Breaking Open the Head: A Psychedelic Journey into the Heart of Contemporary Shamanism* was published (Pinchbeck, 2002), detailing the author's experiences in the Ecuadorian Amazon. It is claimed that Pinchbeck is responsible for semi-popularising *ayahuasca* use amongst the spiritual counterculture (Talat Philips, 2012a). His work undoubtedly has had influence but to view him as the sole influence ignores the findings of this chapter.

In his 2003 memoir, Sting goes into depth about the *ayahuasca* experience that he shared with his wife in 1987. Religious use of *ayahuasca* is mentioned on the first page, intimating to his readers that this is a significant part of his memoir (Sting, 2003: 1). It impresses that *ayahuasca* is something not only religious, but exceptional, and 'profound'.

If I was to find myself in danger from this experience, psychological or otherwise, then I would have regarded myself as having been adult enough to take the risk, in much the same way as I would climb a mountain or get on a motorcycle. In speaking to experienced ayahuasceros [sic] it had been impressed upon me that ayahuasca is not a drug but a medicine.  
(Sting, 2003: 8)

The comparison of the perceived risks of *ayahuasca* to commonplace leisure pursuits<sup>24</sup> is to combat any prejudice experienced by psychedelic users from the public. He is honouring the brew to his best effort.

Originally named *Blueberry*, the 2004 French movie *Renegade* (English title), dedicates over 13 minutes to the depiction of an *ayahuasca* experience. This was our first experience of *ayahuasca* in cinema. It was a hellscape of kaleidoscopic patterns, giant insects, serpents, death, and spirits. The audience was shown just how all-consuming and intense the experience is.

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<sup>24</sup> Having experienced all three of these activities, I felt safest in an *ayahuasca* ritual. This is owing to strict adherence of the preparatory diet and extensive reading on the substance.

2004 also delivered the first documentary dedicated to *ayahuasca*. The 90-minute piece directed by Jon Kounen, *Other Worlds* features the likes of famous *ayahuasca* artist Pablo Amaringo and researcher J.C. Callaway. Public access to a more in-depth insight into *ayahuasca* was becoming easier.

In 2005 Channel 4 aired *Extreme Celebrity Detox*. The series showed three celebrities visiting the Amazon to participate in *ayahuasca* rituals. Varied attitudes towards the ritual were displayed. One disregarded the social and ritual aspects of the experience altogether. This told viewers that there is little reason to revere or observe the customs and taboos surrounding *ayahuasca*. It can be treated just like any recreational drug if the user demands.

This year BBC Two launched *Tribe*. In one episode, Bruce Parry visits the *Sanema* tribe and uses *ayahuasca* with them<sup>25</sup>. The BBC typically demonstrates a conservative approach to what it promotes, and so offered validity to the subject with this show.

The following year, the book *Supernatural: Meeting with the Ancient Teachers of Mankind* (Hancock, 2005) was the only notable pop culture occurrence. This work offered first-hand accounts of a variety of psychedelic experiences including *ayahuasca*. Pop culture interest waned temporarily and there are no examples to present from 2006.

In 2007, now in its third series, *Tribes* returned to the Amazon; now with the *Matis* tribe showing their use of *kambo*. This is the first time Britain sees *kambo* on its screens. He also experiments with *yopo* a DMT snuff, and *sananga* eye drops in this series.

There was also a collection of published works in 2007 that feature *ayahuasca* from different perspectives. These works include the part-travelogue book *Wild, An Elemental Journey* (Griffith, 2007); short fiction, from an author famed for writing gritty tales of recreational drug use titled, *Rattlesnakes* (Welsh, 2007); and Science Fiction *Brasyl* (McDonnald, 2007).

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<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, this took place in a less than ritual setting and involved the fast guzzling of the brew until one purged; a method I have seen as exclusive to this recording. It is possible that this was not a true representation of *ayahuasca* presented to Parry, but a trick, or ‘Gringo trial’ played on behalf of the natives.



Opening public access to the subject further were two documentaries this year: *Heaven Earth* (IMDB, 2021), which explored the commercialisation of *ayahuasca* with the artist Amaringo; and Channel 4's *Medicine Men go Wild* which was a documentary featuring two medical doctors visiting the *Ashininka* community of the Amazon, where they drink *ayahuasca*.

In 2008, *ayahuasca* gained significant recognition in mainstream entertainment. The American, black comedy, series *Weeds*, which centres around cannabis, featured an episode titled *The Love Circle Overlap*, where the lead character Nancy consumes *ayahuasca*. It was a brief scene that did not educate about the brew, but it did bring it to the attention of their vast, psychedelic friendly, audience. In 2009, another popular American, black comedy, *Nip Tuck*, featured *ayahuasca* in the episode titled *Bubi Sabri*. This hints at it becoming a fashionable thing to know about.

*Black Smoke: A Woman's Journey of Healing, Wild Love, and Transformation in the Amazon* (De Wys, 2009) charts the personal experience of escaping to the jungle for treatments following the diagnosis of breast cancer. This is the first time we see a female perspective presented on the subject.

These instances of *ayahuasca* in popular culture at this time primarily reinforced the notion that *ayahuasca* has powerful healing and spiritual effects, and it was no longer seen as the reserve of select native Amazonians. Now, it was something that could be used by anyone, anywhere, for their own development.

#### **5.4.3 News and current affairs**

At the end of this section, Figure 2.3 shows that throughout this decade a wider range of publications were featuring *ayahuasca* in their reports. There is even spread across both broadsheets and tabloids, and the different political standpoints represented. In the news, everyone is now showing an interest.

2000 was the first year that a tabloid showed an interest in *ayahuasca*, which was listed as a 'useful remedy' for migraines, along with a number to order some (Anonymous, 2000: 34). There is also another first-hand account of the experience, in the few reports of this year (Cole, 2000: 8).

In 2001 *ayahuasca* use is legitimised by a court; the head of a *Santo Daime* Church in Amsterdam was acquitted on class A drug charges, upon appeal.

The Judges in that case decided that, although it was proven that Mrs. Fijneman had owned, transported and distributed a DMT-containing substance, she was protected by her constitutional and human right to freedom of religion.  
(Küfner, Rabe, and Sonczyk, 2007: 8)

This event is the start of a long and complicated issue of Occidental, legal attitudes towards the religious employment of *ayahuasca* rituals.

It was also around 2001 that *ayahuasca* tourism first became a notable phenomenon.

...folks unable to find acid in their hometown – or just looking for something new – started hopping flights [sic] to Peru, Ecuador or Brasil hoping to experience the *ayahuasca* journey, as the experience is known. “Before 2001, I had never saw an American come down,” a Peruvian shaman I met in New York told me...  
... first noticed the *ayahuasca* trend take a major upswing in 2005  
(Grim, 2009: 144)

There is no explanation offered for this boost in 2005, though it is reported elsewhere (Sledge, 2013) with concern being raised about the potential environmental damage of it (Hemming, 2005: 2).

In early 2001, a romanticised image of the brew was inserted into a feature on the love of planes and flying (Buckley, 2001: 2). The juxtaposition of these two subjects suggesting that *ayahuasca* was, at that time, seen as a fashionable thing to reference.

In April 2001 Richard Schultes, featured in Section 5.1.1, passed away. His obituary in the range of broadsheet newspapers reviewed all reference him as an authority on *ayahuasca* and other South American ‘medicine plants’ (Anonymous, 2001a: 21; Anonymous, 2001b: 25; Girardet, 2001: 22). This year was the launch of The British Museum’s exhibition *Unknown Amazon: Culture in Nature in Ancient Brazil* too. One review said:

‘Though the exhibition doesn’t point this out, the drug is better known as **ayahuasca** (vine of the soul) and tends to cause visions of a marked sexual nature. This could explain why “**ayahuasca** tourism” is a growth industry’ [original emphasis] (Hirst, 2001: 4). Though this claim of sexualised visions has not been commonly encountered throughout this research.

In 2006 the UDV won their Supreme Court case that saw *ayahuasca* churches legally accepted in the US (Küfner, Rabe, and Sonczyk, 2007). This is significant considering America's otherwise conservative attitude towards drug use up to that point.

2003 delivered a retrospective feature on The Beat movement highlighting Alan Ginsberg's association with the brew (Taylor, 2002: 13). Amongst 2003's reviews of *Breaking open the Head* (Pinchbeck, 2002) and a note of Sting's autobiography there is an account of eight days spent with the Brazilian musical icon Gilberto Gil, who tells his history of *ayahuasca* use (Steward, 2003: 34).

Press mentions in 2004 came from reviews of the TV shows and films covered in Section 5.4.3. However, in 2005 we see a flourish of more diverse articles. It opens with an extensive report on research involving what are typically deemed 'recreational drugs' as therapeutic tools in psychiatry (Adam, 2005: 4). *Ayahuasca* receives a mention as an addiction treatment although it is not traditionally used as a recreational drug. Importantly, it marks a significant shift in attitude towards recreational drugs, which *ayahuasca* would be considered to someone ill informed, owing to its psychedelic properties.

Linking back to Hirst's claim of sexual visions, a daytime TV celebrity named Alistair Appleton reported a 'vivid sexual revelation' whilst under the influence of the brew (Cook, 2005: 33). He claimed that *ayahuasca* removed the guilt and shame he developed growing up as gay. This pointed to a new 'queer' audience who could potentially seek similar relief from their lived experiences of marginalisation.

2005 is the year that *kambo* first reached the British media, two years before it was featured in *Tribes*, as highlighted in Section 5.3.2. The headline of this first-hand account of a *kambo* treatment hyperbolically claimed:

'The frog poison seeped into my blood. I would gain clairvoyant powers' (Parris, 2005: 21). Throughout this research, claims of clairvoyancy and *kambo* use have not been found elsewhere. This year, the typically conservative broadsheet *The Sunday Telegraph* published a feature on the *Santo Daime*'s presence in Northern Ireland. It describes the *ayahuasca* experience as 'terrifying, horrific, dreadful' (Bellos, 2005:19).

The now established tourism trend is reflected in a feature on one writer's *ayahuasca* experience, which publicised a Brazilian *ayahuasca* retreat (Gill, 2006: 44). 2006 Britain also saw the rise of a 'legal high' or 'research chemical market, where high street stores sold analogue versions of controlled recreational drugs as plant food'<sup>26</sup>. *Ayahuasca* was promoted as part of this phenomenon in a variety of articles (McCandless, 2006: 9; Anonymous, 2006: 15; and Kirby, 2006: 15). *Ayahuasca* was even recommended as an alternative to: 'last year's ban on magic mushrooms' (Nevin, 2006: 26). These articles all contributing to the idea that *ayahuasca* was legal in Britain. It also received celebrity endorsement as two features reported that the Director Oliver Stone (of *Natural Born Killers* fame) has a taste for psychedelics, including *ayahuasca* (Anonymous, 2006: 17; and Hodgson, 2006: 16).

Throughout 2007, mentions of *ayahuasca* are reduced and are primarily reviews of the publications covered in Section 5.4.2 (including: Mars-Jones, 2007: 26; and Martin, 2007). In one feature introducing the folk singer Davendra Banhart, the musician notes their interest in psychedelics, including *ayahuasca* (Campion, 2007, p.38). They associate with psychedelics and *ayahuasca* as a way of earning credibility. This is not a celebrity endorsement of the brew, but rather an up-and-coming celebrity endorsing themselves by associating with the brew. *Ayahuasca* had already been established as fashionable.

There is also a return to the romanticisation of *ayahuasca* retreats previously seen in this chapter. One review quotes a Bristol based writer and self-proclaimed therapist Ross Haven: "I'm taking a trip in October that will include account managers, business professionals, a media figure, a conventional doctor and a nurse. People are getting turned on to the fact that in the Amazon we can learn something about the wisdom of native culture' (Stroud, 2007: 52). This illustrates the typical type of *ayahuasca* user at that time.

This chapter has shown how *ayahuasca* has primarily come into the public consciousness via traditional broadsheet newspapers, the literati, and respected musicians. These elements typically fall within the domain of the middle-class, as are the professions listed.

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<sup>26</sup> This market ended abruptly due to the Psychoactive Substance Act (2016).

Figure 2.3, below, shows that in 2008 there was another rise in articles that mention *ayahuasca*. The first of these being a tourism feature for *The Sunday Times* which promotes a travel agency offering various *ayahuasca* retreats (Croughton, 2008: 32). There are also numerous reviews for *Medicine Men go Wild* covered in Section 5.4.2 (Simon, 2008; Chater, 2008: 19; Skegg, 2008: 75). In addition, a small tabloid report in *The Sun* that Benny Shanon, mentioned in Section 5.4.1 claimed that Moses, of The Bible, was high on *ayahuasca* when he received the Ten Commandments (Morton, 2008). It is not clear from the article, but this is a response to his *Time and Mind* paper covered in Section 5.4.1. The report lacks the sophistication the subject deserves, yet it is not the typical hyperbolic writing we are used to from tabloids, especially *The Sun*. It would lead a less informed reader to believe that *banisteriopsis caapi* and *psychotria viridis* are native plants to Israel, and that *ayahuasca* rituals do not originate in the Amazon. This is not true. While *ayahuasca* does not have strict ingredients as noted in Section 4.1, it is native to the Amazon. It is possible that an analogous substance employed in Israel at that time, is now being called *ayahuasca* as it contains a MAOI and DMT.

A lengthy feature on the *Santo Daime* was published in *The Times*. The piece offers a detailed history of the religion. It also provides an insight into the lives of *Santo Daime* members in Britain.

British Santo Daime groups meet secretly, always, as one put it, "afraid of the knock on the door" because of their (as yet untested) legal status. They worship in each other's homes, community centres, colleges and church halls, often telling landlords that they need them for choir practice. They never advertise and new members are allowed to attend strictly by invitation only. But among those in search of spiritual enlightenment - among weekend New-Agers too - the word is spreading; followers of Santo Daime claim that one session with *ayahuasca* is worth 100 hours of therapy.  
(Boggan, (2008: 4).

Not only does this supply context for this research project, it delivered the realisation to the publication's middle-class readership that there are religions in Britain that are not free to worship as they see fit. However, the principal reason behind the increase of articles in this year was the reviews of BBC2's *Tribes* programme mentioned in Section 5.4.3.

Figure 2.3 shows that in 2009, only traditional broadsheet publications mentioned *ayahuasca*. Another detailed account of a writer's own *ayahuasca* experience is presented. Telling how

they travelled to Ecuador to use the brew as therapy to move on from divorce the author paints an unpleasant, yet strangely novel picture:

Once the nausea subsided, the others seemed to be having a whale of a time, floating around the place mumbling: "Ooh, look at the lights". Meanwhile, I was reliving the day I left my husband and experiencing, all over again, the raw emotions I had felt. And then I was back at the altar on our wedding day - but... er, hang on... why is my husband a badger dressed in a morning suit? And wait... why am I now floating down a marshmallow river waving at Mr Bassett, the Liquorice Allsorts man? I am sure this all had some profound meaning, but, by then, I was screaming for it all to stop.  
(Offer, 2009: 1)

The use of ayahuasca by Tori Amos is also confirmed in an interview for *The Sunday Times* (Hanra, 2009: pp. 12-15, 17). A review of Margaret Atwood's novel *The Year of the Flood*, reveals that *ayahuasca* is written in as an ingredient of a futuristic, super powered hallucinogen (Macfarlane, 2009: 47). *The Guardian* provides a comment piece that illustrates ayahuasca as a:

‘visionary experience of such sublime, boundary-dissolving beauty that it changes the way you see the world for ever’ (Beiner, 2009: 37). This is in stark contrast to the divorcee's account above. This piece promotes the argument that legislation protecting religious freedoms needs to encapsulate spiritual drug practices such as *ayahuasca* rituals, despite there being a lack of a structured religion around them. Using the term ‘entheogen’ rather than psychedelic to reinforce the spiritual aspects that some apply to these compounds the argument relies on these compounds being strictly spiritual tools and makes no mention of those wanting therapeutic relief without a will to adopt religious ideologies.

The typically conservative *The Daily Telegraph* also reported on the phenomenon of underground therapy sessions taking place and shared the promising results of early medical trials for substances such as LSD and MDMA as therapeutic aids. This is notable as the publication represents the area of the press that would typically support the ‘war on drugs’. This is indicative of the resurgence of interest in psychedelic compounds as legitimised therapeutic tools in the Occident.

This overall prevalence of mentions in the traditional broadsheets reinforces the image that this is a middle-class pursuit; it is special, it is fashionable, and it is in some way, exclusive.

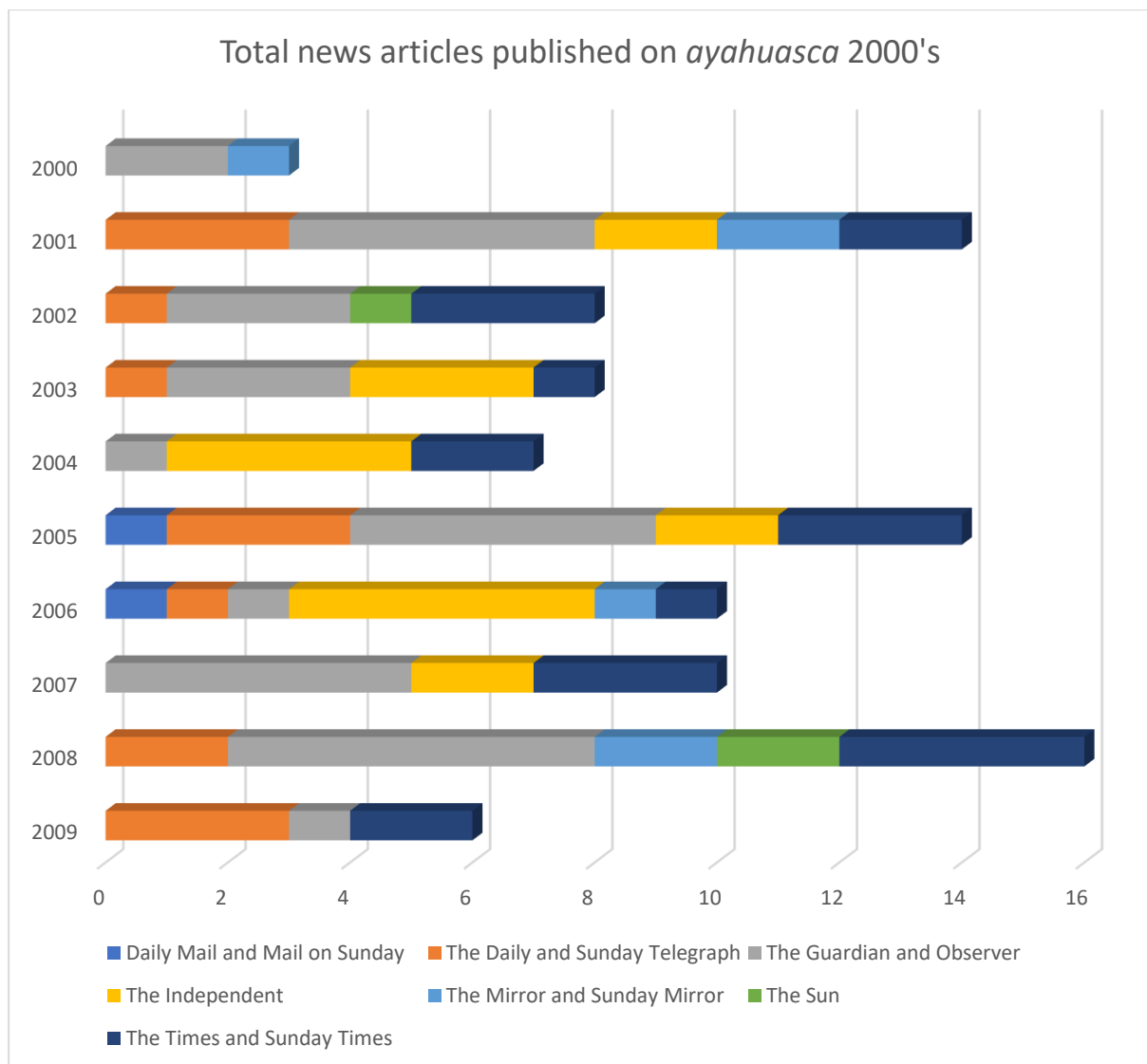


Figure 2.3

## 5.5 2010 Indie's new drug of choice

### 5.5.1 Academic interest

At the end of this chapter, Figure 2.5 shows that academic research continued to grow into 2010. The first notable paper of this time is *Assessment of addiction severity among ritual users of ayahuasca* (Fàbregas, Gonzàlez, and Fondevila. et al., 2010, pp. 257-261). The research found that both jungle-based, and urban, ritual *ayahuasca* users scored significantly lower of the Addiction Severity Index than their control groups. The paper also states:

‘Overall, the ritual use of ayahuasca, as assessed with the ASI in currently active users, does not appear to be associated with the deleterious psychosocial effects typically caused by other drugs of abuse.’

Born of a concern for the erosion of Indigenous knowledge, one project worked with the *Asháninka* community of Peru to understand how well information passed between generations at this time (Luziatelli, Sørensen, and Theilade, et al., 2010). The project recorded the use of over 400 plants, mostly wild herbs, with most being harvested from the forest. They found that they primarily offered treatments for the dermal and digestive systems, and that cultural belief systems were present in just over half of all healing work. Younger *Asháninka* were only able to recite plant names in Spanish and not their native tongue.

### 5.5.2 Popular culture

In July of this year, it was claimed that *ayahuasca* was a source of inspiration for the Bee's album release at the time *Every Step's a Yes* (Chester, 2010). At the close of the year, in an article stating the top seven trends of 2010 the NME also reported:

‘With the now illegal mephedrone being shunned by the rock elite in favour of shamanistic psychotropic plant intoxicant *ayahuasca*’ (Beaumont, 2010a).

*Ayahuasca* was no longer the territory of the middle class, or the domain of middle of the road, contemporary folk artists such as Paul Simon, Tori Amos, and Sting; *ayahuasca* had become rock and roll.



This is the year that *DMT The Spirit Molecule* (2010), the documentary based upon Strassman's earlier publication of the same name was released. Starring the celebrity pundit, Joe Rogan, this documentary amassed significant fame and can be credited for popularising the unproven notion that DMT is released by the pineal gland in sleep and death<sup>27</sup>. The origin of this notion is noted in Section 5.2.5. A second documentary of note *Ayahuasca Vine of the Soul* (2010).

Two popular non-fiction books were published this year: In July, *Fishers of Men; The Gospel of an Ayahuasca Vision Quest* (Elenbaa, 2010), and in May, *Ayahuasca in my Blood* (Gorman, P. 2010). In August *Pictures of Lily*, a contemporary fiction was published (Yorke, 2010a). In the book his lead character Lily traces her birth parents aided by the spirit communications she receives having used *ayahuasca*. *All Kind's of Magic* (Moore Ede, 2010) was also published. In this the lead character travels the world in search of enlightenment and in this journey comes across *ayahuasca*. Both fictional works contribute to the notion that the *ayahuasca* experience is otherworldly, and exceptional in some way. The collection of books continued to further insight into the subject, and contributed to the ongoing romanticising, and popularising of, *ayahuasca* use in the Occident.

In October, *The Religion of Ayahuasca* (Polari de Alverga, 2010) becomes the first book dedicated to the *Santo Daime*. It is also the first insider account published, and it centres on life in the faith's jungle community *Mapia*.

### **5.5.3 News and current affairs**

Figure 2.4, at the end of this chapter, provides an overview of news articles published this year in the context of the decade. It shows that press coverage in 2010 was low, compared with the rest of the decade, yet there remained coverage across the represented political spectrum.

There was a collection of articles promoting the 'New Age' enlightenment image associates with the brew. *Ayahuasca* churches are mentioned in a list of recommended courses to freedom (Stroud, 2010: pp. 16-17). The *ayahuasca* experience is falsely described as nasally insufflated, in a review of *All Kinds of Magic: A Quest for Meaning in a Material World* mentioned in Section 5.5.2 (Pindar, 2010: 9). Also, in a travel piece recommending 'hippy' alternatives to

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<sup>27</sup> David Nichols' talk (Breaking Convention, 2015) breaks down and disproves this claim.

Ibiza and Goa, Euskadi, in French Basque country is noted as a place to go and experience *ayahuasca* (Theobald, 2010a: pp. 14-15). This report also notes that the legality of *ayahuasca* use is ambiguous and the experience for the faint of heart.

The tabloid paper *The Sun* tells us how the ‘dangerous plant extract’ provided a turning point for the band The Klaxsons (Smart, 2010: pp. 18-19). In this one band member provides an account of his experience and explained how this motivated him to continue writing music. This alarmist wording is to be expected from a typically conservative paper of this calibre; it lacks nuance and scientific reasoning. There were numerous articles, across publications, that highlighted The Klaxon’s use of *ayahuasca* on the back of their album release at this time (Lynskey, 2010: 10; Jonze, 2010b: 33. Beaumont, 2010b: pp. 6-7)

Further popularisation of *ayahuasca* retreats is found in an account of a nine-day retreat in *Iquitos* (Yorke, 2010b: pp. 6-7). It states:

‘...we certainly saw some stuff and kicked some demon-butt: we puked, farted, cried, moaned, flew and swam through those ceremonies. It had been a crash course in self-examination: in the presence of *ayahuasca* there is nowhere to hide’. A messy and disgusting path to focused introspection indeed.

## **5.6 2011 Misappropriation, demonisation and globalisation**

### **5.6.1 Academic interest**

There is a slight increase in academic outputs in 2011, as seen in Figure 2.5. Most notable of these is the continued work around intellectual property rights of Indigenous peoples (Yuqin, 2011: pp. 951 – 969) and the formal documentation of dietary restrictions<sup>28</sup> associated with *curandeirismo*, and *ayahuasca* (Jernigan, 2011).

In July 2011 the first Breaking Convention conference was hosted at Kent University. It featured a dedicated panel of eight presentations on *ayahuasca*, with an additional three talks on the subject outside of the panel. It also aired three documentaries on the subject; a preview

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<sup>28</sup> This is also referred to as *dieta*

of *Aya Awakenings* (2011); *Ayahuasca: Vine of the Soul* (2010); and *DMT: The Spirit Molecule* (2010) (Breaking Convention, 2021).

One significant publication this year was *The Internationalization of Ayahuasca* (Labate, and Jungaberle, 2011). Targeted at an academic audience this addressed the benefits and concerns pertaining to the continued rise of interest in *ayahuasca* across the Occident, and wider global population. It made clear the importance of taking the social and environmental aspects of increased global *ayahuasca* seriously.

Incidentally, in October 2011 this research project commenced.

### **5.6.2 Popular culture**

Two notable non-fiction books were released in this year. *The Shaman and Ayahuasca* (Campos, 2011) was accompanied by a documentary of the same title. The second being *Singing to the plants* (Beyer, 2011). Both books helped in disseminating information about Indigenous *ayahuasca* use.

Another significant documentary *Stepping into the Fire* (2011) was also released this year. This followed an American businessman turning his back on city living and investing everything he had into a jungle *ayahuasca* retreat. There can be little more compelling promotion than someone turning away from a seemingly successful career and lifestyle.

*The Welcome Collection's* 'High Society' exhibition (The Welcome Collection, 2010) highlighted how all societies feature some form of none-medicinal drug use. One review said: 'Ayahuasca use in Amazonian tribes is shown to be a critical element in tribal ceremonies, somewhat reminiscent of the way in which Ecstasy use by nightclubbers bonds them together' (Nutt, 2011: pp. 53-54). Given that Native Americans have raised issue over the adornment of feather head dresses in Occidental music festivals (Michaels, 2014). It is reasonable for Indigenous *curandero* to have similar complaints about the comparison between *ayahuasca* and MDMA<sup>29</sup> use. However, as seen in Section 5.4.1 this is not the first time the comparison

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<sup>29</sup> This is the key ingredient in the street drug known as ecstasy or 'E'

between ‘shamanic’ substance use and rave culture had been made (Nencini, 2002: pp. 923-939).

### **5.6.3 News and current affairs**

In 2011 there was a drop in the overall number of articles published, with the majority of these coming from politically liberal publications; *The Independent*; and *The Guardian*, as illustrated in Figure 2.4.

Adding to the wealth of travel reports documented throughout this chapter, one writer told of her participation in an *ayahuasca* ritual in a village church in East Sussex. Interestingly she claims that as she purged, in the ritual, her back pain of months was elevated, and had not returned at the time of publication (Theobald, 2011: 14).

A report of political tensions in the Amazon noted of the murder of 14 *curandeiro*. It states:

Roger Rumrill, an expert on Peruvian Amazon cultures and a government adviser, said some of the victims' bodies were thrown into rivers, to be devoured by piranhas and other fish.

He alleged that the mayor, who is an evangelical Christian, had ordered the killings on hearing that the shamans planned to form an association. He said the mayor's brother was known in the area as a matabrujos or witch killer. "For Protestant sects, the shamans are possessed by the devil; a totally sectarian, primitive and racist concept," he said.

(Collyns, 2011: 37)

This demonstrates that the tensions between natives and Catholic settlers in South America. As the author notes the serious concerns that this raises, not only for the safety of Indigenous communities in the Amazon, but also for the loss of their knowledge and customs which are typically shared verbally from *curandeiro* to apprentice.

This year brought continued celebrity endorsement. In one interview Bruce Parry is reported as crediting *ayahuasca* for allowing one to see objectively how others perceive you’ (Jacques, 2011: 7). The grunge singer Courtney Love, referring to *ayahuasca* as a ‘crazy tea’, also spoke in favour of its use. This led to the publication of a detailed feature. The piece highlights that *ayahuasca* is credited as a ‘shamanic medicine helping them [users] work through emotional traumas and depression which conventional medicine has failed to cure.’ It also notes; ‘But there is concern among health workers that repeated use of *ayahuasca* could be dangerous,

particularly for anyone with mental health issues' (Taylor, 2011). This claim lacks nuance and understanding of mental health issues. The term covers a diverse range of conditions. If we were discussing licenced pharmaceutical treatments, we would not expect a compound effective for the treatment of schizophrenia to be safe and effective for those with depression; therefore it is unfair to apply this standard to *ayahuasca*. It also highlights concerns about vomiting which is common with *ayahuasca* use. However, it neglects the Indigenous user's perception that what they term 'purging' is a cathartic part of the healing process. Another article also provided accounts from a selection of women who have moved on from a party lifestyle to one of spirituality that credit *ayahuasca* as instrumental in this (Warrington, 2011: pp. 14-15, 17).

As covered in Section 4.1.4, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2011, any romanticising of *ayahuasca* and the Amazon was interrupted by a landmark legal case in Britain. Coverage of the fifteen-month prison sentence delivered to Peter Aziz was found in an array of national news sources (Anonymous, 2011a; Morris, 2011; and Salkeld, 2011). Aziz has been acting as a shaman, promoting and offering *ayahuasca* rituals in Buckfastleigh, Devon. His premises were raided, and he was arrested following an undercover investigation for BBC Two, where he was filmed brewing and distributing the substance (Anonymous, 2011b).

This contributed to the raised awareness of *ayahuasca*, yet, not necessarily its popularisation. One important message to be highlighted in this event was the irresponsibility displayed in promoting *ayahuasca* as a cure for cancer, where there is no scientific grounding for the claim.

The incident also gave rise to inflammatory headlines such as the claim Aziz 'spiked' people with a class A drug (Salkeld, 2011), which warped the narrative and sullied the perception of *ayahuasca* users. The one, bold, pull quote on the BBC website simply stated 'dangerous drug' which is a subjective claim. Driving a car is dangerous, riding a bike is dangerous, home improvements are dangerous. The case also highlighted that 'shamanism' is not seen as a religion by the UK judicial system, and its practice is not a protected human right. This was a severe warning for those who were hosting *ayahuasca* rituals in Britain at that time. However, included in the flurry of responses to this sentencing the following was found:

I am an NHS doctor campaigning to see a re-emergence of psychedelic therapy in the UK. Drugs such as LSD, psilocybin (magic mushrooms), MDMA (ecstasy) and DMT (ayahuasca, as prescribed by Peter Aziz) can all be used safely with adequate preparation and under clinical conditions to improve people's lives and treat unremitting mental disorders. There is a growing wealth of scientific evidence and increasing medical support for this form of therapy.  
(Sessa, 2011: p. 37)

The subject of *ayahuasca* is no secret by this time. The public have access to information about the phenomenon from a variety of sources, it is referenced in an array of places. It had gone beyond fashionable and middle class. It is simply here for everyone who want to see what they can get form it.

## **5.7 2012 Business is booming**

### **5.7.1 Academic interest**

Figure 2.5 shows that academic interest dropped slightly in 2012. Amongst the academic outputs was a proposal for regulating of *ayahuasca* in both Brasil, and internationally (Labate, and Feeney, 2012). Another significant study was *Personality, Psychopathology, Life Attitudes and Neuropsychological Performance Among Ritual Users of Ayahuasca: A Longitudinal Study* (Bouso, González, and Fondevila, et al., 2012). Their paper concludes:

‘...we found no evidence of psychological maladjustment, mental health deterioration or cognitive impairment in the *ayahuasca*-using group.’

In spring, the journal *Anthropology of Consciousness* (American Anthropological Society, 2012) launched its dedicated *ayahuasca* issue. In this were seven papers dedicated to the subject offering a range of perspectives – from the fundamentals of what *ayahuasca* is, to a more detailed understanding of Indigenous use.

### **5.7.2 Popular culture**

Released in January *Vodka and Ayahuasca* (Gangrene, 2012) served to indicate that *ayahuasca* was now of interest in the hip-hop community; at least in the US since neither Gangrene, or their album, has received any recognition in Britain. It is of note as this is the first sign of *ayahuasca* use in this cultural grouping. The positionality of the brew, next to a strong,

alcoholic, spirit is not what one would expect, especially given the number of reports supporting the reverence given to the brew in its Indigenous setting, and research highlighted in Section 5.5.1 showing reduced drug use in regular *ayahuasca* users. Vodka is typically a substance of revelry and has no associations with health, or spiritual development. In addition, the hip-hop community has been associated with dance, street art, cannabis use, and spirituality only in a small number of artists such as Erykah Badu, and Jurassic 5. Stronger psychedelics that *ayahuasca* can be compared to, such as psilocybin or LSD are not typical within hip-hop.

In February *ayahuasca* was subject to a comedic treatment again. This time in a big screen movie starring Jenifer Aniston and Paul Rudd (*Wanderlust*, 2012). The depiction was criticised as portraying dangerous messages. It was claimed that the movie treats the *ayahuasca* like a ‘stereotypical acid trip’:

In “Wanderlust,” members of the intentional community don’t follow any dietary restrictions; there is no trustworthy shaman or guide (just Seth with his dubious motives), no singing, no healings and, probably worst of all, no set container for participants to find support when difficulties arise. This is, by far, the sloppiest group *ayahuasca* ceremony I’ve ever heard of.  
(Talat Phillips, 2012).

This shows that a lack of reverence, and exaltation was growing and becoming more popularised. This is representative of the imperialism that authors like Said and Spivak have warned of, as covered in Section 1.4.1. This is furthered in the fiction book *The Shaman in Stilettoes* (Hunt, 2012a). The juxtaposing image conjured by the title does not reflect the reverence and respect we have seen endorsers such as Sting put forward. In a primer of the book the author provided an account of how on a sabbatical she travelled to Peru, experienced *ayahuasca* and turned her attention towards becoming a shaman (Hunt, 2012b: pp. 38-39). It is an inviting story of transformation that would lead the reader to believe that they too could achieve similar.

Alternatively, the non-fiction *Shedding the Layers: How Ayahuasca Saved More Than my Skin* (Flaherty, 2012) offers another personal account of the perceived benefits of *ayahuasca* use. Notably, the non-fiction books on the subject are exclusively encouraging the use of *ayahuasca* and promoting its beneficent effects.

Towards the end of this year comedian, raconteur, and activist, Russell Brand enters the discussion on *ayahuasca*. He interviewed Daniel Pinchbeck and they discuss *ayahuasca* in depth. His influence on popular, and subversive culture, was, at that time, without question. It can be argued that he brought *ayahuasca* to his well-established, and sizable audience with this interview; as such contributing to the continued growth of public knowledge about it.<sup>30</sup>

### 5.7.3 News and current affairs

By 2012 *ayahuasca* tourism is a booming industry in South America, particularly in Peru. *Ayahuasca* is reported as a ‘gap-year’ activity to try while away from home (Henderson, 2012: pp. 10-11). In other words, it is something to check out while you have time and youth on your side. Furthermore:

**‘The city of Iquitos**, Peru, is a boomtown in the Amazon Basin. In 2012, 250,000 visitors travelled through the once-sleepy inland port. One of the main draws: *ayahuasca* tourism’ [bold from original] (Lavecchia, 2013). This second article notes the founding of the Ethnobotanical Stewardship Council, an organisation aimed at promoting dialogue and policy around safe and sustainable ‘traditional plant use’ in direct response to the tourism. This was timely since this year saw *ayahuasca* tourism’s first high profile fatality.

When visiting the retreat, Shimbre Shamanic Centre, featured in the documentary *Stepping into the Fire*, mentioned in Section 5.6.2, the American teenager Kyle Nolan lost his life. This raised significant concerns since, as it was reported that the ‘*curandeiro*’ Jose Pineda Vargas, attempted to conceal Nolan’s death by burying his body (Farberov, 2012). Vargas was subsequently arrested. Reports did not elaborate on the specifics of the fatality and what role *ayahuasca* had played in it.

As reflected in Figure 2.4, there was a significant drop in press reports of *ayahuasca* or *yagé* this year. The slight majority of these reports came from traditionally conservative publications. One report highlighted that connection between continued deforestation for the Amazon and *ayahuasca*:

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<sup>30</sup> At this time, I joined in with discussions of whether or not *ayahuasca* could have played a role in Brand’s radical change of public character at this time. We will consider this further in Section 5.2.10



The forest doctors of the Amazon say each plant has its "song", and that to know how to use the plant you must listen to its voice. The silencing of the rainforests is a double deforestation, not only of trees but of the mind's music, medicine and knowledge. Forest doctors use medicines the west needs so badly, and they say ayahuasca, the most profound of all medicines, guides the psyche; as I know from experience, it is the finest treatment for severe depression, the psyche's most terrible silence.

(Griffiths, 2012: 30)

## 5.8 2013 A most mainstream moiety

### 5.8.1 Academic interest

This year, *Santo Daime a New World Religion* (Dawson 2013) takes us through the migration of this *ayahuasca* based religion beyond contemporary Brazil. The only mention of Britain (or rather the UK) notes the then ongoing trial of two *Santo Daime* leaders (Dawson, 2013: 35). This is presumably reference to Freedman and Lidell covered in Section 4.1.4. Since the trial gained no attention in the British national media it has not been highlighted in this chapter.

2013 delivered the second incarnation of *The Breaking Convention* conference, now hosted by the University of Greenwich. While the roster of talks was larger than their first event, the number of talks discussing *ayahuasca*, remained as it was in 2011. There were an additional three talks on DMT. Additionally, Graham Hancock's presentation discussed *ayahuasca* throughout, although this was not clear from the talk's title 'The War on Consciousness' (Breaking Convention, 2013).

Apropos peer reviewed papers in 2013, Figure 2.5 shows that academic interest remains high. The most notable of which is *Acute Effects of Ayahuasca on Neuropsychological Performance: Differences in Executive Function Between Experienced and Occasional Users* (Bouso, Riba, and Fábregas, et al., 2013: pp. 415-424). This is a natural progression from the research team's earlier work and concluded:

'Acute ayahuasca administration impaired working memory but decreased stimulus-response interference. Interestingly, detrimental effects on higher cognition were only observed in the less experienced group'.

### 5.8.2 Popular culture

In January documentary *Aya Awakenings* (2011) was released online, followed by the accompanying book *Aya Awakenings: A Shamanic Odyssey* (Razam, 2013). It had an extensive marketing campaign across popular social media platforms, and would have reached many psychedelic enthusiasts.

The popular hip-hop act, *Run the Jewels*, confirms hip-hop community's interest in *ayahuasca*. Their June release, the eponymously titled debut album (Run the Jewels, 2013), refers to the brew in the lyrics of *Job Well Done*. The line goes;

‘Women dosed with *ayahuasca*, drum circle, and sing about us’.

Here is a snapshot of an authentic setting. There is empathic authenticity. This carries potential for promoting reverence towards *ayahuasca* in the hip-hop community, unlike what we saw in Section 5.7.2 with Gangrene. Run the Jewels are showing how it is done in the original setting. Not pairing it with a strong alcoholic spirit. They are also saying that as an act, they are so important that they are spoken about in *ayahuasca* rituals.

Celebrity endorsement continues in 2013 too. The lead singer for the indie pop band Bat For Lashes, Natasha Khan, was said to have taken part in a ‘South American *ayahuasca* medicine ceremony’ before recording their *The Haunted Man* album (Hutchingson, 2013: 8). It was also reported that the comedian, Simon Amstell's stand up show *Numb* was influenced by his experience of *ayahuasca* in Peru. An interview with Amstell states:

There is a whole routine on this shamanistic healing experience in *Numb*, where he probes why sex, drugs, food, drink and religion are used to squash feelings rather than deal with them.

"Before I left, I felt broken. [Amstell is quoted as saying]

After I came back, I didn't feel broken any more. It's not the sort of thing I thought I'd be able to talk about in standup [sic] comedy. If a comedy character had done it, it would be a hippy caricature. But that thing that happened in a rainforest was the most real thing that has happened to me."

(Iqbal, 2013: 10)

### **5.8.3 News and current affairs**

In 2013 there was low coverage of *ayahuasca* or *yagé* in the British press as seen in Figure 2.4.

Kyle Nolan's death, covered in Section 5.7.3, triggered the viral spread of *The Dark side of Ayahuasca* (Hern, 2013). It warns of fake shaman, brews with questionable ingredients, and sexual attacks, now being associated with *ayahuasca* tourism and was the first publication to give such stark warnings.

A disturbing account of a 12-member 'sect', reported to use *ayahuasca* as a sacrament was reported (Tevlin, 2013: 19). It told how their leader, Castillo Gaete, gagged and strapped a three-day old baby girl, believed to be his own, to a board before burning the child to death in a bonfire. The cult leader, aided by the child's mother, were said to have sacrificed the life in the belief that the new-born was the 'Anti-Christ'. The Chief investigator in the case, Mr. Ampuero stated that the sect was made up of 'highly-educated people'.

"We have someone who was a veterinarian and who worked as a flight attendant, we have a film maker, a draftsman. [sic] Everyone has a university degree." He is quoted.

This raises concerns over whether *ayahuasca* would have been responsible for these educated people participating in such a horrifying act, and/or whether it made them more malleable to the indoctrination of their 'sect' leader. It is unclear if they were under the influence at the time of the infanticide.

In summary, there is a dramatically polemic image of *ayahuasca* being portrayed at this time. On one hand, it is seen as the therapy of choice for many celebrities, especially musicians. On the other, it is now associated with the concealed death of a teenager, and a Cult leader who brutally murdered his own child.

### **5.9 2014 Nothing to see here**

With *ayahuasca* tourism booming, and its use outside of the Amazon firmly and widely established, this was a relatively uneventful year in the spread of *ayahuasca* use. The spread has already taken place. The growth of academic interest has been established. The point at which *ayahuasca* tourism took off has been identified. A steady trickle of celebrity endorsers

have been identified, and the chapter has highlighted how the boom in *ayahuasca* use and associated tourism is not without risk.

### **5.9.1 Academic Interest**

There was continued academic interest in *ayahuasca* as seen in Figure 2.5. Amongst these, *Interaction of psychoactive tryptamines with biogenic amine transporters and serotonin receptor subtypes* (Blough, Landavazo, and Decker, et al., 2014: pp. 4135-4144) claims that tryptamines are being abused in America, and looks to establish that tryptamines interact with multiple neurochemical mechanism, in addition it was concerned with their reaction to specific serotonin receptors.

In this year, MAPS published their first book *Manifesting Minds; A Review of Psychedelics in Science, Medicine, Sex, and Spirituality* (Doblin, and Burge, 2014) This book is not exclusively about *ayahuasca*, but it does offer a sizable collection of papers from leading names on the topic of psychedelic substances including one dedicated to *ayahuasca* as a potential treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder.

This year the International Centre for Ethnobotanical Education, Research and Service (ICEERS) hosted their *World Ayahuasca Conference* from 25<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> September in Ibiza, Spain (Ibiza Convention Bureau, 2014). It boasted four rooms holding talks and presentations from the leading *ayahuasca* researchers across the world.

### **5.9.2 Popular culture**

In June this year, *The Ayahuasca Sessions* (Razam, 2014) was released to compliment the work *Aya Awakenings* (Razam, 2013). Also, bringing a surge of attention to the topic, was the documentary *I bought a Rainforest* (2014). One review explains how the star, Charlie Hamilton James, uses *ayahuasca* in the show but simultaneously mocks its usage:

‘It’s an enlightening and profound experience that gives Charlie a clearer understanding of the forest and of himself (I think - I’m not entirely sure what he’s on about). There you go kids, take powerful mind-bending drugs for the answers.’ (Wollaston, 2014: 21).

Celebrity endorsement continues, this time by actress Susan Sarandon. One interview revealed that Sarandon uses a variety of psychedelics, including *ayahuasca* (Creighton, 2014). Also, the band The Pierces were reported to use *ayahuasca*, as part of ‘inner work’ undertaken in the development of their album *Creation* (Swift, 2014: 8). Finally, we learn of musician Richard D. James, also known as Aphex Twin, stating that he is open to dinking *ayahuasca* to ‘meet some aliens’ (Alexander, 2014).

### **5.9.3 News and current affairs**

In February of this year, *ayahuasca* was mentioned in mainstream British news again by Russell Brand. In an interview with Jon Snow (Channel 4 News, 2014) about his stance on drug policy reform, Brand made a quip about Parliament:

‘I think some *ayahuasca* might elevate their consciousness’. Whilst Brand is not the main force for *ayahuasca* information spread, or the only celebrity endorser, his repeated promotion of it, and significant audience size, does mean his contribution has been greater than any other individual celebrity in Britain.

Press coverage in this year sees a dramatic increase, as illustrated in Figure 2.4 below. One article tells us how *ayahuasca* is no longer exclusive to the Amazon region (Warrington, 2014: pp. 26-27). The author writes about those who are participating in these rituals; ‘Except, it isn't just posh hippies, and it certainly isn't just kids. In fact, by far the majority of those who "drink" regularly are grown-ups in their thirties, forties and fifties, with proper jobs’. The report, which sees the author assess whether they should participate in *ayahuasca* use, and warns of the impact of *ayahuasca* on the liver; likening it to drinking three “bottles of vodka”<sup>31</sup>. The article is both enticing, noting it as a short cut to enlightenment, yet it comes with warning that this isn’t an experience for everyone, the author included.

The spike in stories this year can be primarily attributed to the death of 19-year-old Henry Miller from Bristol. Miller had participated in an *ayahuasca* ritual in Putumayo, Columbia before he experienced a fatal reaction. One report raised grave concerns around the behaviour and attitudes of those catering to *ayahuasca* tourists:

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<sup>31</sup> The basis for this claim is unclear.

Reports suggest that Miller was with a group of foreign–tourists - all of whom had paid \$50 (£36) for the experience and who drank the brew–together - but who were ushered back to their lodgings when Miller took ill with the assurance that the tribespeople were looking after him.

His body was found dumped by a road near the southern city of Mocoa, close to the border with Ecuador.

(McVeigh, 2014: 13)

Another report attempts to draw some balance and offers a brief overview of reports and information about *ayahuasca*'s use, impact, and legal status (Cocozza, 2014: 2).

Another reason for a surge, across publications, was the release of The Pierces' *Creation* as noted in Section 5.9.2. Additionally, The Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew, held an exhibition dedicated to intoxicating plants. One write up opens by highlighting the addictive properties of tea, and psychoactive nature of coffee (Edwards, 2014, pp. 1, 3). This sets the reader up to be more sympathetic of psychoactive plants. It is a classification that contains massive diversity. However, *ayahuasca* is listed next to opium and datura, as potentially lethal. We have seen *ayahuasca* related deaths, so the claim is understandable. However, at this time it is not supported by available scientific evidence; and is complicated by the lack of regulation of the ingredients of *ayahuasca*.

## **5.10 2015 Mother meets the monsters**

### **5.10.1 Academic interest**

Three major conferences covered the subject of *ayahuasca* in 2015. The first of these *Breaking Convention*, now in its third iteration was held in the University of Greenwich 10<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> July. The Breaking convention featured 13 presentations specifically on *ayahuasca*, four on DMT and a further one covered both subjects (Breaking Convention, 2015). The 11<sup>th</sup> International Amazonian Shamanism Conference was held in Iquitos, Peru 11<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> July. The third conference was the Plant Teachers 2015 Visionary Convergence held in Los Angeles over 25<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> September.

Below, Figure 2.5 shows a steep increase in peer-reviewed outputs to include the word '*ayahuasca*' in 2015. Much of this can be attributed to a renewed interest in the therapeutic

potential of psychedelics, written about as a generalise group of compounds which included the brew (eg. Schifano, Orsolini, Papanti, et al; 2015: pp. 15-26; Majić, Schmidt, Gallinat, 2015: pp. 241-253. Tupper, Wood, Yensen, et al; 2015: pp. 1054-1059)

Most notable is *Drug or spirituality seekers? Consuming ayahuasca* (Prayag, Mura, and Hall et al. 2015: pp. 175-177) that considers the motives behind *ayahuasca* tourism in Iquitos, Peru. It highlights the following;

All participants acknowledged the growing number of tourists in Iquitos and its negative consequences on the local community (e.g., cultural commodification). Yet, a paradox exists between participants' perceptions of their own impacts as tourists and the perceived impacts of others on ayahuasca practice. Participants considered themselves as spiritual tourists while viewing recreational users of ayahuasca as drug tourists. The spiritual seekers categorised themselves as the 'good tourist' and labelled the so called drug seekers as the 'bad tourist'. Spiritual seekers perceived they had limited negative consequences on ayahuasca practice while condemning drug seekers for commercialization and 'pollution' of ayahuasca by not desiring an authentic personal transformative experience. Surprisingly, none of the participants are conscious that they, as individual tourists (whether 'good' or 'bad'), contribute to the perceived negative effects on cultural practices and local communities.

(Prayag, Mura, and Hall et al.. 2015: 176)

Another noteworthy paper of this year was *The psychedelic state induced by ayahuasca modulates the activity and connectivity of the default mode network* (Palhano-Fontes Andrade, and Tofoli, et al., 2015). It found that:

'Ayahuasca caused a significant decrease in activity through most parts of the DMN' and concludes:

'Altogether, our results support the notion that the altered state of consciousness induced by Ayahuasca [sic], like those induced by psilocybin (another serotonergic psychedelic), meditation and sleep, is linked to the modulation of the activity and the connectivity of the DMN'.

For clarity; the default mode network (DMN) is a combination of the areas of the brain that are typically more active during rest than during active task performance (Mars, Neubert, Noonan, et al., 2012: 1).

Focus was applied to considering *ayahuasca* as a potential treatment for depression at this time too. This started with a small clinical trial of six participants by a team in the University of São

Paulo, Brazil (Frood, 2015) which yielded promising results. Another paper found that *ayahuasca* ‘has fast-acting anxiolytic and antidepressant effects in patients with a depressive disorder’ (Osório, Sanches, Macedo, et al. 2015: pp. 13-20). It was also found that *ayahuasca* quickly increase emotional intelligence and slightly decreases judgemental processing of personal experiences (Soler, Elices, Franquesa, et al; 2015: pp.823-829). However, there was one important case study that presented the case of a man diagnosed with Bi-Polar disorder experiencing a manic state following use of *ayahuasca* (Szmulewicz, Valerio, Smith, 2015: pp. 1-3).

The subject, like the brew, became a fashionable field to work in by this point. Existing research explains where *ayahuasca* came from as much as it can; it is understood how *ayahuasca* works at a micro-biological, psychological, and behaviour level; benefits and risks have been evaluated and assessed; the impact on Indigenous users, and of globalisation has been reported; authentic application has been documented; intellectual property rights and ethical appropriation of its use have been considered. It has, however, become its own field of study, often crossing over with work focusing individually on DMT and MAOIs, and psychedelics in general as therapeutic tools. Yet there are many discussions that have and will continue. Such as which mental health conditions it is a safe treatment for and which might present risk. Also, to be implemented as a legitimate treatment in Britain, for instance, it must undergo the four-phase clinical testing to be granted a license by the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA).

### **5.10.2 Popular culture**

Once more *ayahuasca* was given the comedy treatment on the big screen in April 2015, with the British release of *While We're Young* starring Ben Stiller and Naomi Watts. While we saw *Wanderlust* treating an *ayahuasca* ritual as the source of humour, this movie used it as an overarching story vehicle and does not carry the same concerns relating to the disrespectful treatment of the subject.



In July, presumably inspired by his surprise appearance at the Breaking Convention earlier that month<sup>32</sup>, Russel Brand released a special DMT edition of his YouTube show (*The Trews*, 2015). In this episode he clearly identified that he has not actually used DMT, and therefore neither *ayahuasca*, due to his sworn sobriety. This cleared up any speculation as to whether or not *ayahuasca* was responsible for his remarkable change of public persona seen in the lead up to the release of his work *Revolution* (Brand, 2014)

There were two prominent celebrity endorsers of *ayahuasca* this year: Lindsay Lohan and Miley Cyrus. Neither previously represented personality characteristics that are typically expected from those on a quest for spiritually. Rather, at stages of their career, much like Brand, both have represented excess, overt sexuality, and a hedonistic party lifestyle. Both also claimed *ayahuasca* as a tool for significant personal transformation. Lindsay Lohan was reportedly claimed ‘*ayahuasca* changed my life’ (Pocklington, 2015). In the pictures accompanying the article she stands with hands in prayer position to show off her new spiritual identity. It is a far cry from her well-known arrest photographs.

In September 2015 there was widespread internet coverage of Miley Cyrus also claiming to have used *ayahuasca*. She was quoted as saying:

‘I think ayahuasca is a healing thing. I only did it one time, but I want to do it again. I loved what it did for me. We all think we’re good people, but I wanted to know in my heart, in my deepest soul. I wanted to know what outrides what: Am I really the person I think am?’ (Coscarelli, 2015). This presents the idea that *ayahuasca* can bring about personal redemption, spiritual progression and be a short cut to self-improvement. Drink this, and you are fixed. Unlike the celebrities at the start of this phenomenon their reports lacked any word of caution.

In addition, the musician Ben Lee dedicated an entire album to it, entitled *Ayahuasca: Welcome to the Work* (2015). Furthermore, one journalist admitted to his use of *ayahuasca* when writing about an experiment he participated in with Channel 4 and University College London Professor Valerie Curran, to look at the effects of cannabis (van Tulleken, 2015).

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<sup>32</sup> As witnessed.

### 5.10.3 News and current affairs

Figure 2.4 shows us that there was less coverage than the previous year yet mentions of *ayahuasca* in the press are still high in 2015. Much of this comes from what is considered ‘the liberal press’, *The Guardian* and *The Independent*. A large portion of these are reviews and promotion of the above-mentioned release of *While We’re Young*.

Comedian, Simon Amstell, spoke of *ayahuasca* again. In one article he speaks about having fun with magic mushrooms and is later quoted:

‘I drank ayahuasca in Peru a couple of years ago. It's not a fun trip, but drinking this plant medicine somehow gave me what I needed. I felt like I was part of the world, not disconnected from it’. (John, 2015)

It appears from his claims that it significantly impacted his otology. Feeling disconnected from the world reads like an isolating experience. To feel part of the world is to have a sense of community, belonging, and purpose even.

*Ayahuasca* received a mentioned in a story highlighting the concerns Indigenous South American’s Shipibo-Konibo community, of eviction from their home along the Ucayali River, Peru, too. In the 1990’s they had been forced to resettle there by the Shining Path’s Maoist insurgency. The article reads:

Lima's leftist former mayor, Susana Villarán, had promised to move the 226 Shipibo-Konibo families from Cantagallo, a ramshackle collection of wooden shacks built on a former landfill site behind an outdoor iron-monger's market, to a new riverside plot with pre-fabricated homes, electricity and running water. But Villarán's ambitious \$74m (£49m) "rio verde" (green river) programme - of which the Shipibo-Konibo relocation was a part - has been scrapped by her successor, Luis Castañeda. (Collins, 2015)

This brings with it a sympathy to the ongoing struggles of the Indigenous South American communities, which has potential to further the romanticism of their practices.

The Psychedelic Society was launched this year. A press report on the opening event tells us how it opened with a story told by ‘John’ of how ‘he learned to love through therapy, poetry and ayahuasca’. John then advised the 100 strong audience that *ayahuasca* can be found using the website Tipadvisor (Gayle, 2015).

Tragically, a British man was stabbed to death at an *ayahuasca* ritual hosted by Phoenix Ayahuasca, in Iquitos, Peru. Unais Gomes, 26, was killed by the 29-year-old Canadian, Joshua Andrew Freeman Stevens, in self-defence (Mortimer, 2015). The story highlights concerns about the impact that *ayahuasca* may have on some users and gave rise to further concerns about the safety of *ayahuasca* retreats.

It has been established that by this point *ayahuasca* is well known about, afforded significant academic interest, in receipt of significant celebrity endorsement, and has featured in a variety of media sources. It is here that this investigation can be principally drawn to a close.

*Ayahuasca* has been predominantly promoted as a spiritual, healing experience, that the media does not always treat it with the reverence deserved of an Indigenous spiritual practice. It has been presented as a quick fix to our personal misgivings and used as a public relations tool for celebrities wishing to renew their image. Legitimate, and exaggerated warnings have been released about the impact of *ayahuasca* tourism, and the dangers of this to the individuals participating in retreats. Figure 2.7 below, shows that the majority of press coverage comes from what is typically deemed ‘the liberal press’.

## **5.11 Epilogue and graphs**

Since *ayahuasca*’s presence in Britain was firmly established by 2015, there has been continued interest in it. There have been key texts and events since concluding this review. This Section offers highlights up to the point this thesis was published.

### **5.11.1 An update on academic research**

There have been various key advancements in research around *ayahuasca* since this review drew to close in 2015.

The first phase of clinical trials has been completed to see if *ayahuasca* can be utilised as a therapeutic tool for depression. Showing promising results this project involved 35 participants (Siegel, Meshkat, Benitah, 2021: pp. 71-81). While progress towards licencing, beyond this, is not identifiable at this time there has been a significant focus on the therapeutic potential of *ayahuasca* in research (Including Palhano-Fontes, Barreto, and Onias, H. et al; 2019: pp. 655-

663; Domínguez-Clavé, Soler, and Elices, et al; 2016: pp. 89-101; González, Cantillo, and Pérez, et al; 2020: pp. 1171-1182; Jiménez-Garrido, Gómez-Sousa and Ona G. et al; 2020; Uthaug, Mason, and Toennes, et al; 2021: pp. 1899–1910).

Research focus has also been given to behaviour changes in people following *ayahuasca* use (Including Weiss, Miller, and Carter, et al; 2021; Domínguez-Clavé, Soler, and Elices, M. et al; 2021). This showed that there are potential improvements in self-criticism and self-compassion because of *ayahuasca* use, and some decrease in neuroticism.

One anthropological study found that people apply their own meaning and superstition in relation to the purgative effects of *ayahuasca*, in ceremonial settings (Fotioua, and Gearin, 2019: p. 112532). And another project compared ‘God encounter experiences’ between users of psilocybin, LSD, *ayahuasca*, or DMT (Griffiths, Hurwitz, and Davis, et al; 2019: 1).

### **5.11.2 An update of pop culture and current affairs**

In the time since this review was first conducted, the Dutch Supreme Court has reneged on any protection offered to the *Santo Daime* and UDV, and rules that *ayahuasca* cannot be legally distributed (Anonymous, 2019).

Celebrity endorsement has continued, from actress Megan Fox (Chilton, 2021); American sportsman Kerry Rhodes (Timms, 2020); and actor Will Smith (Waugh, 2021). News of *ayahuasca*’s potential as a treatment for depression was reported in the traditionally conservative press (Siebert, 2021; Boland, 2021). Safety concerns have also been raised. First, about sexual attacks associated with *ayahuasca* tourism, and fake *curandeiro* (Maybin, and Casserly, 2020). Also, about the safety of *kambo* use, following the decision by Australia’s Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) banning sale and distribution of it. The TGA state that they found no evidence of its therapeutic benefit, and that it can cause fatal reactions. The list it as a schedule ten poison (Shepherd, 2021).

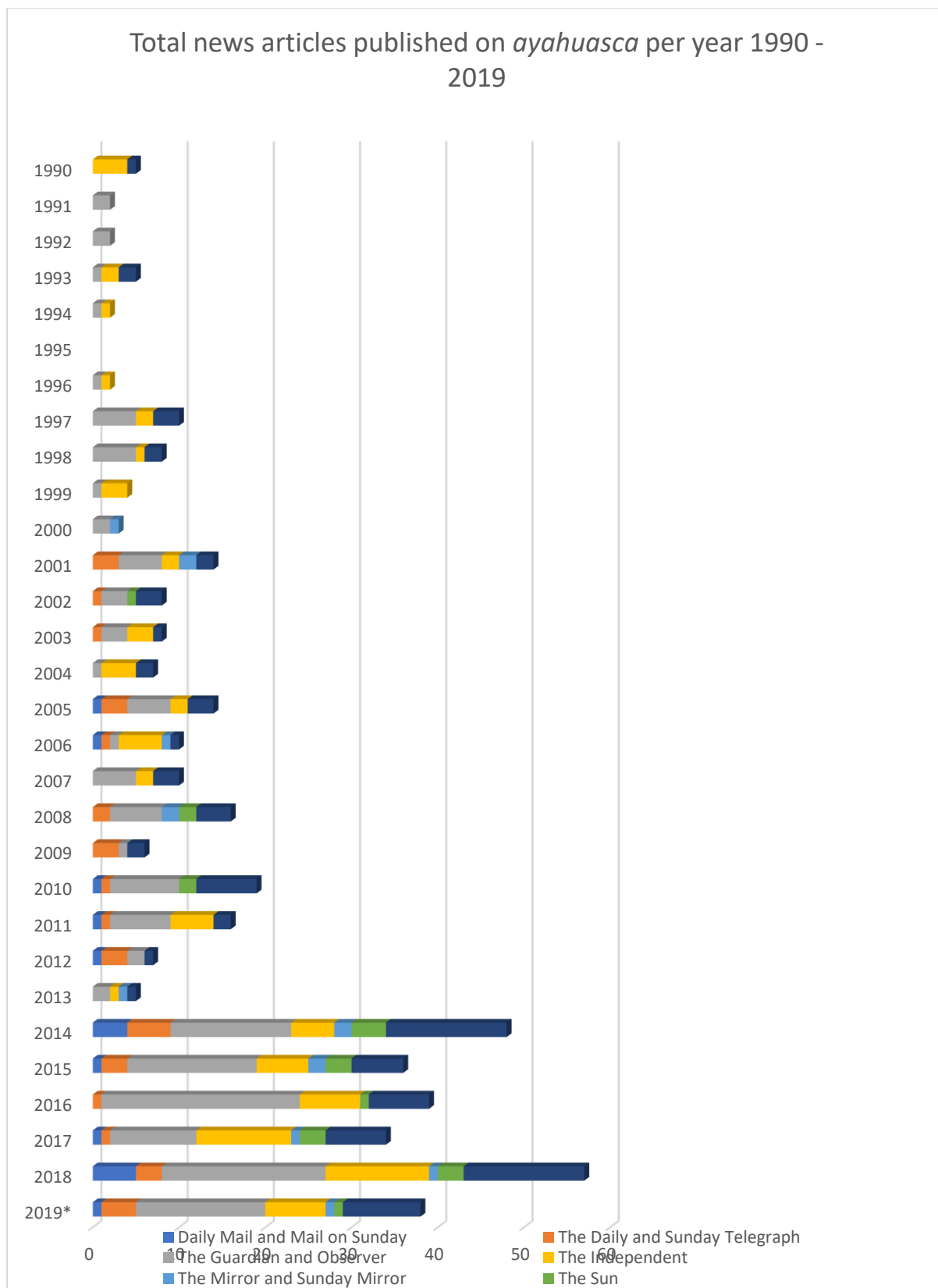


Figure 2.4

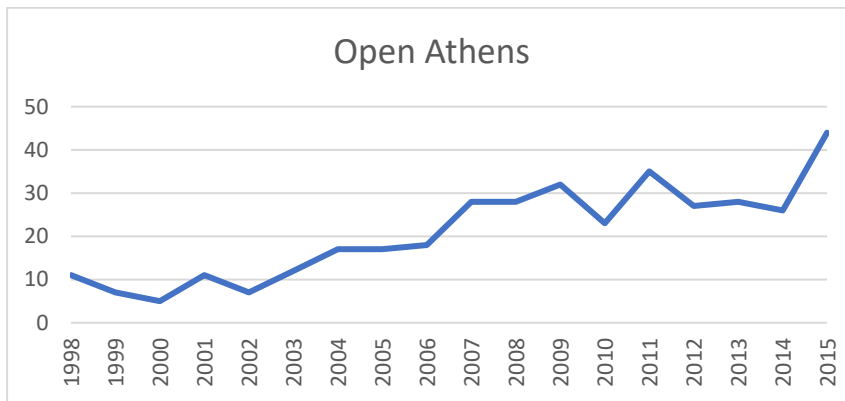


Figure 2.5

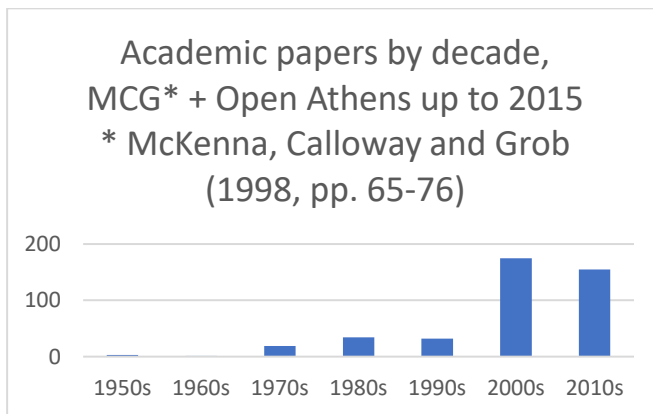


Figure 2.6

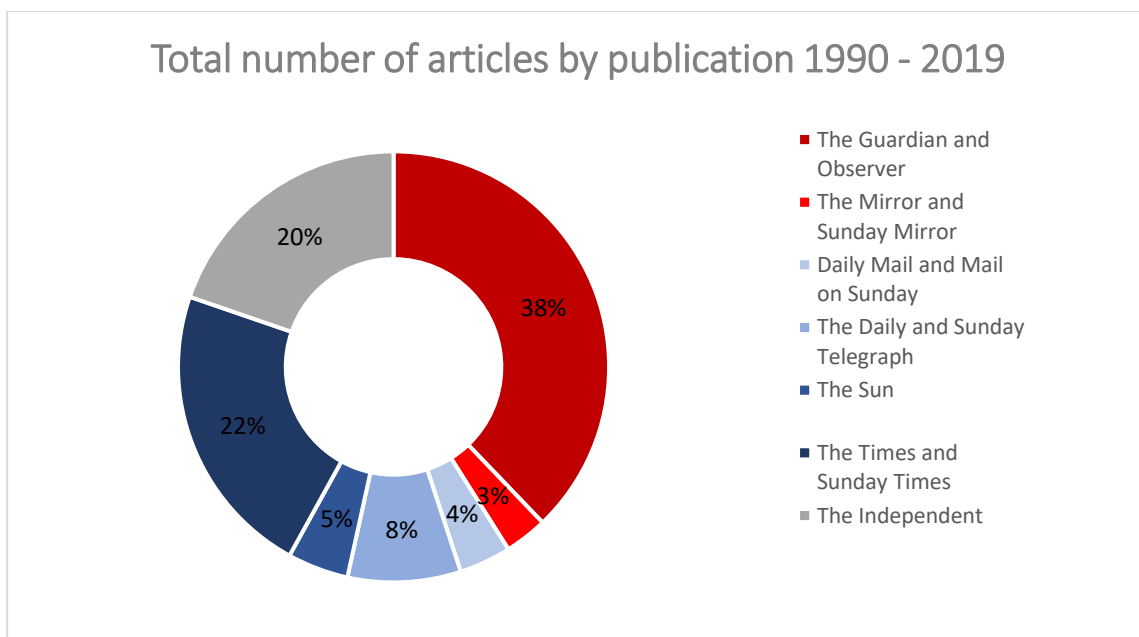


Figure 2.7

## 5.12 How might this have affected participants?

As Figure 2.7 above shows, articles were spread quite evenly across publications representing different aspects of the political spectrum, so political bias towards the practices across the press is balanced out. This chapter presents a significant amount of press articles that positively promoted *ayahuasca* use. These articles support the notion that *ayahuasca* possesses spiritual, and mental healing properties. It was seen in broadsheet newspapers most, accompanied by advertisements for Peruvian *ayahuasca* retreats; the preserve of the middle class; a chance to wash away the burdens of metropolitan modernity. Yet, articles also presented caution and even vilification of the practices too, typically in traditionally conservative publications. There have been various *ayahuasca* associated deaths, and these occasions were treated with sensationalism towards the ancient practice.

However, Figure 2.4 tells us that press interest really blossomed in 2014, which was after the data for this research had been collected. With this in mind the press is unlikely to have been the key influencer in bringing the subject of *ayahuasca* to the consciousness of participants. Moreover the press reflected what the participants were already experienced in.

The Occident first became aware of *ayahuasca* through the subject of botany, not psychology, or biochemistry, as we primarily see today. As a subject it remained elusive for little over a century. The scientific community with its ‘pay to view’ publications of old, while supporting the narrative of the pop culture, was not the real force behind the popularisation of *ayahuasca* in the public domain. Literature, exclusivity, and pop culture can take credit for that. Mention of *ayahuasca* was often followed up the critically acclaimed names of Alan Ginsburg and William Burroughs. Not Shultz, or Villavicencio, rather two well published, highly educated, central figures of the Beat Generation. A poet and novelist, respectively.

Throughout this chapter we have seen a sense of specialness, to *ayahuasca*. This alone makes it a desirable pursuit to those that see themselves outside of the metaphorical circle. The available text tells us it differs significantly from traditional psychedelic use of the metropolitan Occident. It is ritualised; it heals; it is a serious and not fanciful pursuit that one must physically and mentally prepare for with dietary restrictions and sexual abstinence. Aside from the abundant mentions of how it makes one vomit, it is easy to see how Occidental culture itself

has encouraged and grown the appeal of the substance. It was even touted as ‘rock and roll’s drug of choice’ which is an image far different from the idea of a native south American seeking spiritual guidance from their ancestors. And so we find ourselves in an era where celebrities seeking a drastic change of image can peg a new public identity to an *ayahuasca* experience and have their past actions nullified by public opinion. A fresh start and new identity are appealing to many.



## 6. Amazonian shamanism in Britain

### 6.1 Data analysis introduction

Chapters 6 to 9, inclusive, present the analysis of data collected. The aim of these chapters is to explore the sense-making approaches of participants in negotiating the complexities of the *ayahuasca* tradition and its place within British culture (as discussed throughout Chapter 5), while reconciling the ‘other-ness’ of *curandeirismo* with their own individual well-being.

The initial approach to data analysis was to work through the interview transcripts highlighting any pertinent points that were made by each participant. With each point made a thematic label was identified to capture the essence of what was being said. This led to the collection of 246 themes in total, including 13 themes noting my reflections on my practice as a researcher (Appendix 16). These themes were then grouped to illustrate relationships to each other and to help make sense of the key points to be drawn from the discussions. In formulating the overarching groups, and in keeping with Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of the rhizome, it was evident that themes and their groups often overlapped to form a complex web of connections to one another. This web was then illustrated and can be found in Appendix 3. The illustration aided the formulation of a narrative order that makes sense of the chaotic nature of the data and informed the topics covered throughout Chapters 6 to 9.

### 6.2 Notes on presentation style

Findings and analysis are presented on the left-hand side of the page throughout Chapters 6 to 9. On the right-hand side of the page are the relevant statements made by the research participants. My own reflections, the autoethnographical aspects of this research, are given as footnotes. This page arrangement maintains the ways in which the flow of practice and participants’ reasoning is inherently intertwined. It

sets my own experiences as secondary yet worthy of note, especially where differences occur. Using footnotes in this way presents a hierarchy of information. Analysis and theory remain in the left-hand column as this is more pertinent. Readers are invited to reflect on the autoethnographical information provided, as I can be seen as a community member, yet theory is derived primarily from the contributions of the research participants.

As the text in these chapters is set out in tables, the numbering of footnotes is affected; footnotes in the right-hand column follow the last footnote in the left-hand column numerically within each table.

This chapter considers the temporal aspects of the rituals and practices of interest. The left-hand column here offers a narrative to describe the observational aspects of this research, which is unique to this area of the study, rather than analysis as seen in Chapter 7 to 9.

Please note that in the right-hand column throughout Chapters 6 to 9 each new piece of dialog is indicated by the speaker's identifier being formatted as bold. Where the identifier is not bold this illustrates that the dialogue is continuous from that presented before it, though a minor edit has been employed to redact irrelevant dialogue between the two statements. Inconsistency of column width has been applied to maximise the use of space on the page.

### **6.3 The pre-ritual interview**

Prior to accepting any new community members into a ritual or treatment, this shamanic practitioner interviewed them. This section provides a description of one such interview.

*None of the research participants described or discussed the interview, or any recruitment into the practices. This space is given to statements that help us to build an understanding of participants' lifestyles, including their relationship to the use of psychedelics and non-prescribed drug use, and religious upbringing. Included are several statements that illustrate relevant attitudes too. This provides a foundational understanding of the people involved in this research.*

Nervously, the new initiate sat on the sofa of the nicely decorated, and neat, living room of the shamanic practitioner. The young children of the house ran around with playful energy as their mother prepared lunch in the kitchen. The shamanic practitioner emerged with drinks for his guests and sat them down on coasters near the feet of the initiate, and me. The shamanic practitioner identified as a member of the *Santo Daime*. He proselytised that he conducted the rituals as closely as possible to the *Santo Daime* rituals in *Brasil* and expressed pride in the flexibility of the religion to allow him to personalise the rituals, based on his environment, and what he feels will enhance the experience. A brief description of the *Santo Daime* religion was offered to the neophyte. It was explained as a mixture of native Amazonian shamanism and Catholicism. The shamanic practitioner stated that it was a ‘doctrine’ without a set religious text; instead there is a book of prayers from which readings are made before *Daime/ayahuasca* rituals. I had witnessed this sort of interview multiple times by this point. It was deemed as a pre-requisite by the shamanic practitioner, before any new initiate was allowed to imbibe *ayahuasca* with him.

### *General characteristics:*

**P1:** ‘I work two days a week for money.’

**P1:** ‘The rest of the week, which is when I do my, my real work, you know, my filmmaking.’

**P2:** ‘I’m [AP<sup>36</sup>: early 20s]’

**P2:** ‘Born and brought up in London by foreign parents, er my mom is [AP: white, European], my Dad is [AP: North Asian] and I’m er very much the baby of the family, I’ve got two much older brothers, I was a very late, um, birth. Well my mom was 45 when she had me and I was a bit of a surprise, um. Well I guess the main area of my life and it all interrelates really, with the *ayahuasca* and why I was turned to it, was I got really sick, and I got really sick quite early on as a kid.’

**P4:** ‘I don’t know, I guess I’m not really used to categorising my lifestyle.’

**P4:** ‘I’m young, like [AP: early 20s], um, yeah I dunno, I’d party every now and then, but just kind of then. Yeah, I don’t know how to define it really...’

**P5:** ‘I spent nearly three years living in South America.’

**P5:** ‘I like football, I like boxing, um I like all sorts of things really. I’m quite into, my mum’s a practising Buddhist...’

**P5:** ‘I grew up in a pub, my father was a publican and we moved all over the country.’

**P8:** ‘I’ve got a slightly different cultural makeup to other people (Self: ‘yeah?’) and you know there’s things that have, are natural to me that I would never even think about, but I guess I’m different ‘cause my mom’s from somewhere else.’

**P8:** ‘I find that really hard to label myself.’

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<sup>36</sup> Where statements have been edited to protect the anonymity of participants this is highlighted with the acronym of ‘Anonymity Protection’, AP.

This community member was not what I had become accustomed too. Previously, I had seen a variety of people with English heritage in the community. I met a few Afro-Caribbean community members, and the occasional individual with dual, Afro-Anglo, heritage too. Community members ranged in age.

We can see from the participants' own words that there seem to be no standout birth traits or specific lifestyle choices (outside of *curandeirismo*) that connect them.

Commonly the community members I met would have something about them that represented an interest in the 'New Age'; be it tie-dye, or wax batik fabrics, adorned with 'sacred' geometry, or a quartz crystal around their neck<sup>33</sup>. It was common for participants to have used psychedelic and other illicit substances in the past, but not categorically; participant 3 for instance did not use substances recreationally at all. Those that had used psychedelic compounds varied in their approach to it. For

#### *Relationship to substance use:*

**P1:** 'I had come to the shaman and the *ayahuasca* hoping that erm, I would be able to sort out my addiction problems. Specifically, mostly alcohol and weed I guess, but obviously the tobacco addiction underpinned all that anyway.'

**P3:** 'I've never done drugs, never smoked, um I used to drink, don't drink anymore.'

**P4:** 'I don't really take anything synthetic, but I guess I might have a few years ago, but, um, I just, yeah, I much prefer, like, the natural compound.'

**P5:** 'I do have history of drug abuse (Self: 'Right.') I, yeah I attended rehab, cocaine and heroin really, but (Self: 'Um.') I've always, ever since I was a young, young teenager, experimented with all sorts of various substances.'

**P5:** 'I've been clean for about six months, um, like properly clean, that's not, like no methadone.'

**P5:** 'I was smuggling quite a lot of cocaine.'

**P6:** 'I had been on antidepressants for nearly ten years.'

**P6:** '[the participant] took recreational drugs without the knowledge that there could be um, um, a spiritual element to the drugs. I know that there was a spiritual element to going out clubbing and raving because the, about being in a collective and doing that sort of thing, is sort of a tribal.'

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<sup>33</sup> I count myself among this 'type'. I had always identified as alternative in my younger adulthood, and frequented metal clubs and techno and psy-trance raves. Interest in psychedelics had started in my late teens, initially with cannabis, onto lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), and eventually *Psilocybe semilanceata* (also known as magic mushrooms or liberty caps). Experimentation in these days had been driven for a will to escape reality, brought on by a traumatic child and teen-hood. The rave scene was full of white people with dreadlocks, tie-dye, neon, and all things associated with 'hippy'. My earlier heavy metal/goth look was watered down as I integrated into this other, alternative, counter-culture scene. Within this identity shift my interest in meditation, enlightenment, and personal development began too. This shows a sense of kinship with some participants. We share similar tastes and interests. This contributes to the development of a notion of a typical type of person that may be drawn to these practices.

participant 6 it had initially been recreational, for participant 11 it was about exploring their consciousness and understanding the world from a spiritual perspective.

In this interview, the gentleman, while of English heritage, had converted to Islam. He wore a loose fitting, grey *jubba*, *kurta* and a matching *taqiyah*. While Chapter 8 provides a more concentrated analysis of participants' ontologies and religious perspectives, their statements presented here illustrate that many participants had some form of Christian upbringing<sup>34</sup>, but equally there are those that have been raised without a religion. Only participants 1 and 5 express any religious ideologies that are not what can be considered as mainstream.

**P7:** 'I've had experiences with other drugs as well that have taken me to what appear to be other dimensions um you know LSD and um mushrooms and things like that.'

**P11:** 'It wasn't until, um, my late 20s that I first had any kind of, um, er, drug experiences when I, er, smoked cannabis for the first at [AP: mid-20s] which really blew my mind and helped me see all sorts of things.'

**P11:** 'It wasn't until I was [AP: early-30s] that I, um, I met a, um, a group of people, er, who were very much into exploring consciousness, er, through the use of psychedelics, um, and, I tried LSD for the first time. And it was also at that time that I was trying to make sense of the world, um, from a spiritual perspective, um, trying to understand what spirituality was.'<sup>37</sup>

#### *Religion and spirituality:*

**P1:** 'I was spiritual before I came to *ayahuasca* but I am probably ten times more so now.'

**P3:** 'Both my parents were, um, Christians, um, my mother, um, belonged, well still belongs to the [AP: church name redacted], which is like a Pentecostal church.'

**P3:** 'We had to attend church, you know, every Sunday, twice on a Sunday morning and in, in, in the evening, um, for me personally I um, I wouldn't consider myself, um, a Christian per se.'

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<sup>34</sup> In contrast, I was raised an atheist. My mother hadn't felt it was ethical to enforce a religion upon me at a young age. She had been raised Church of England, but our family were not practising. She claimed that religion was something I needed to find for myself when I was old enough to understand them, if that was what I wanted. This illustrates that assumptions cannot be made about the religious upbringing of people drawn to these practices.

<sup>37</sup> This forms a contrast to my own experience where I came to psychedelics in early adulthood and took them as tools of escape and recreation.

I sat and observed the induction interview with great interest, comparing it to my own, conducted approximately two years prior<sup>35</sup>. Questions were asked as to what the community member wanted to 'fix'. The shamanic practitioner was looking to understand their motives. The hallucinogenic aspects of *ayahuasca* were explained. This community member was new to psychedelics, as I had seen with a number of participants. There was something different about *ayahuasca* to other psychedelics in their view. It was not a street drug, taken for folly, it was deeper than that.

The preparatory diet and abstinences were set out, including the advice that *ayahuasca* was not compatible with SSRIs and street drugs such as cocaine and ecstasy, or rather MDMA. A chance to ask questions in return was offered liberally throughout the discussion.

The principal difference to my own interview was a set of questions around the community member's faith, conversion to Islam, and how his participation in the ritual might be viewed in the Islamic community. The initiate brushed this off and did not foresee any issues forthwith.

**P4:** 'I guess throughout school and secondary school and all that sort of stuff, um kind of had a loose Christian influence but um yeah, nothing really solid.'

**P6:** 'I've been through quite a lot of different religions.'

**P7:** 'We were a single parent family. My Mom used to work on Sundays, and so, um, we needed to be looked after really, so we used to go to my Nan, my Mom's Mom, she used to take us to church.'

**P7:** 'I had lots of Pakistani friends, and so Islam was sort of, yea, I mean that made me realise that people had other religions...'

**P7:** 'Buddhism was quite influential as well, so the idea that, er, the world, the real world as we see it, is illusory and everything is connected on a deeper level, and the three dimensions that we perceive are just one way of making sense of whatever it is we are supposed to be making sense of.'

**P8:** 'I would have never really thought I was particularly spiritual.'

**P8:** 'I was brought up non-religious.'

**P8:** 'I can't say I've come into it as an atheist I can't say that I've come into it saying oh I'm going to be all spiritual and (Self: 'yep.') cleansed.'

**P9:** 'It was just normal for us to go to church on Sunday um every Sunday everybody dressed up in their Sunday best and um went to church it was just one of those things.'

**P9:** 'I actually started going to Sunday school at the local school, which was kept in the school hall, and I used to go there every single Sunday from the age of seven until I was about 15 and,

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<sup>35</sup> In many ways the interview was the same. An overview of *ayahuasca*, its uses and the associated beliefs of the *Santo Daime* were delivered, as well as the relevant safety advice. There was an air of scepticism on my part. Was this man behaving like a dealer? A pusher? Were his intentions honourable? I concluded no, no, and yes respectively. A trust was formed. He seemed to genuinely want to help people by spreading the knowledge and experience of *ayahuasca*.

It had been difficult to gauge this community member. Beyond his religious conversion there was little indication of the type of person he was, his other interests, or why he had converted. He was reserved in nature. It was clear that the meeting did not aim to assess his personality; it was to ensure that he understood what the ritual was about and received safety advice. The shamanic practitioner had discussed drug interactions, preparation, and etiquette. It was clear that he needed assurance that the event would be manageable and not lead to unnecessary harm to either himself or the new initiate.

The ritual was scheduled, and the interview was coming to a close. Drinks were finished, and for one final time the initiate was offered the opportunity to ask further questions. He thought for a moment before stating that he felt he knew everything he needed to. He stood up, brushed off his front and thanked his host for the opportunity to participate in a ritual.

The setting had been comfortable, homely, and casual; no notes or recordings were made throughout. Despite this lack of formality, it came across as a professional and ethical way to operate, even if no evidence of this was recorded by the practitioner. Although, the visual aspects of the experience were explained, I was surprised that no direct

um, and so I used to, um, read my Bible every day, most days because it felt like the right thing to do.'

**P9:** 'I deem myself as being a Rastafarian for a short period of time, and I think it was from the age of about 16, 17, I used to have dreadlocks as well and, um, probably until I was about 21, 22.'

**P9:** 'I believe in a higher power. I believe in, um, a higher being; higher supreme being.'

**P10:** 'Mum's always been Catholic but she's never been devout by any means, and my Dad's been atheist or agnostic I'd like to say I suppose, always been, knew something was there, never knew what trait to follow. My Grandfather's always been Muslim, once again not devout and my Nan's Catholic, so Catholic and Muslim either side, also the agnostic side of things.'

**P10:** '[The participant considered] every bit from every religion, and sort of applied it how I saw fit.'

**P11:** 'I went to a, um, a Church of England school, er, where they taught the Bible as historical fact and, and, which was brilliant because it led me to, er, it led me to becoming an atheist at quite an early age.'

#### *Attitudes:*

**P1:** 'I hate the western world!' [Comedic voice used].

**P6:** 'From a very early age always had, um, um, a wider under, a wider, wanting to understand my place here in Earth.'

**P6:** 'I've always had, um, a passion for other cultures.'

**P7:** 'I spent a lot of time thinking, making these kind of underlying connections, um, veganism came into my life at that time.'

**P8:** 'I don't really want to be in the city, want to just go and burn fires outside all the time. '

questions were asked in relation to the community member's mental or physical health.

The lack of recording was explained to me as being in direct relation to the legal ambiguity in Britain around religious *ayahuasca* use at that time. While the shamanic practitioner explained that it was preferable to be able to prove that all health and safety measures had been considered, the risk of this evidence being used against them was too great to make him want to risk documenting anything.

#### 6.4 The *ayahuasca* ritual

It was the same room as I had both participated in rituals and observed the interviews that proceeded any initiate's first *ayahuasca* experience. The same cosy, and neat, family lounge<sup>38</sup>. It was a far cry from the Amazon jungle and how a ritual would be experienced there. Participants 2, 3, and 5 all mentioned that they had travelled to South America to experience an *ayahuasca* ritual *in loco*. However, it was participant 5 that provided a detailed picture of these experiences even though some were considered inauthentic. They did not feel that one self-proclaimed

**P8:** '[On shamanic practices] There's nothing, nothing different to what I do, cause what I'll sit round and burn incense and accept that music can take you somewhere else and whatever.'

**P11:** 'Through my teens I got interested in cosmology, um, and how the Universe works on a fundamental level.'

*Participants described their experiences with ayahuasca in a variety of settings. These have been grouped into categories to demonstrate the range of ways that ayahuasca is being experienced by people in Britain. Some participants were known to me and I already possessed knowledge of the settings they had experienced ayahuasca in. These participants were not as explicit in their accounts upon interview, assuming my tacit understanding. These persons fall under the Santo Daime category.*

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<sup>38</sup> Having participated in up to 20 *ayahuasca* rituals this account is a combination of these experiences. All accounts mentioned are truthful, though they did not necessarily occur in the same ritual. These events have been merged to give an overview of a typical ritual with this *Santo Daime* shamanic practitioner, while allowing room to share some unique happenings that took place.



shaman was as imagined. For example, driving in a 4x4, is not felt to be shamanic at all.

I had arrived early, there was another hour or so until we expected the other community members. The practitioner, already in his white clothing, busied himself preparing the space for the ritual. He tidied and pulled a large bag of white sheets out of the utility room. Excusing myself I headed into the bathroom to get changed into my ritual dress. The practitioner, in line with *Santo Daime* custom expected all participants to dress in white, comfortable clothing<sup>39</sup>.

Heading back into that same lounge room, which was now being transformed with the white fabric draped to cover all of the furnishings, I heard the front door knock. 'Here, can you put this over there please?' I was handed a bundle of white fabric and set about covering the TV while the shamanic practitioner welcomed the other community members. They were both close friends of each other, with whom I was already socially familiar. I stood up from my work to greet them. The energy between us was light, with an edge of excited apprehension. Importantly, given what lay ahead, the familiarity between us aided a trust and comfort. An unspoken assurance that we would all be ok this evening.

*In loco:*

**P2:** 'What I found in Peru is that they did bring religion into it. The songs they sing about Jesus and Mary and whatever.'

**P5:** 'The first time I was in Bolivia in this place called Coro Coro, (Self: 'yeah?') and Coro Coro is half way up a mountain.'

**P5:** 'It's not quite jungle (Self: 'yeah?') I was with this, er, Bolivian shaman. There was a group of about half a dozen of us and we went out of the town for like his shack, which was sort of separate from the town (Self: 'yeah?') um we sat down in a group we imbibed the liquid (Self: 'yeah') and then we all sat in a circle, we had a fire um there was drumming and singing and incense.'

**P5:** 'The guy I saw in Peru was really a practicing guy, even the natives were going to see (Self: 'yeah') it made the whole thing more authentic (Self: 'more, yeah') I did feel the time in Bolivia, it was very much a gringo thing. [laughter] Yeah I felt that, that was probably why, at the time, I thought the guy was a bit of a charlatan. (Self: 'right') Like do you know what I mean? You know? He said he was a Shaman and yet pulled up in his brand new 4x4, and designer clothes, and iPhone.'

**P5:** 'We went in and he like blessed you. He, I wouldn't say he covered you in it, but sort of smoked you with incense, put incense around you, um, was playing pipes. He brushed you with certain leaves, certain

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<sup>39</sup> White was not a colour I chose to wear often, but I had formerly practiced Capoeira, which also had a white and comfortable uniform I had decided to utilise.

We chatted briefly; swapping notes on how well we did with the preparatory diet. ‘Not bad, not bad,’ one told me. ‘I did pinch a few of the babby’s<sup>40</sup> chips earlier like, but only two.’ We laughed together at the thought of two illicit chips. ‘It’s been killing me,’ I said. ‘I keep munching on nuts. I hope they’re allowed.’

Our host said little as he took back the fabric and continued to cover every inch of the furnishings with it. The two community members headed into the bathroom to change. The shamanic practitioner took exceptional care to see that the fabric was tucked into the sofa securely. He covered a coffee table and dragged it into the centre of the room. It was surprising to see that he even used a dinner knife to ensure the fabric was tucked between the carpet and skirting boards<sup>41</sup>. It seemed a little obsessive, but I admired his attention to detail.

We exchanged small talk, and one of the two friends aided the shamanic practitioner in setting up the coffee table with an array of crystals, talismans, Buddha figurines, and such like. When this was done, four small, white, *saké* cups were lined up. A colourful, laminated print of ‘sacred geometry’ was set down and used as a place mat for the glass jug of *ayahuasca* that was to transform, not only our evening, but reportedly, our lives too.

sticks. I got, very much got the impression that he was blessing the brew, (Self: ‘yeah?’) like, as he was brewing it he was like singing to it, chanting to it, and yeah, and then we all sat in a circle and imbibed it one by one. (Self: ‘um’) One guy would take the *ayahuasca* cup, it would get filled up and then pass it to the next guy, and, um, yeah, then basically we were told to sort of sit and wait. I think I started feeling a bit rough after about 45 minutes. (Self: ‘um’) So we were told to eat nothing on the day, (Self: ‘yeah’) and for some reason not to eat meat. (Self: ‘yeah, yeah’) ‘cause, um, apparently it makes you really ill if you eat meat before you do it.’

**P5:** ‘Basically we waited for it to kick in we were all lay down in hammocks, but they were like permanent hammocks, [Self: ‘right’] and it was like, um, it was like a courtyard, but with a gazebo.’

**P5:** ‘You had a little, um, like a little fire in the middle. Which, the fire was where the *ayahuasca* was (Self: ‘yeah?’) brewed (Self: ‘yeah’) and we all sort of huddled around that, and then some people got more ill and the shaman would go and sing and bang his drums (Self: ‘yeah’) and sort of make them feel a bit better really. (Self: ‘yeah’) I must admit that I didn’t really experience much of that, because I’m quite experienced when it comes to substances. (Self: ‘um’) So, I sort of, I didn’t really need, if someone hasn’t taken anything before in their lives and then take *ayahuasca* it’s probably going to be a bit of a shock.’

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<sup>40</sup> Babby is a colloquial term for child in Birmingham, England.

<sup>41</sup> The efforts being exhorted made me feel uncomfortable. Nervously I made a joke about him being a perfectionist. To this he responded, as a matter of fact, that I was correct. It did not seem to concern him one bit, nor did it appear a source of pride.

‘Right now, it’s time for us to focus,’ the shamanic practitioner instructed. ‘The time for chit-chat is over. Now we will work.’ The Brazilian accent gave a rhythmical song-like quality to his words. We three community members shared a glance, looked to him, and nodded in obedience.

The shamanic practitioner still had a few minor arrangements to make before the night properly commenced. He pulled the white sheet back from over the TV and pressed a few buttons on the game controller. He was setting up the playlist for the evening. He also placed blankets on each of the sofa seats we would be using. I took my seat and waited in silence for further instruction. The two friends took their seats in silence also. I panicked and remembered my mobile phone. It prompted the two friends to check theirs too. Having ensured our mobile phones were switched off we settled back into our seats to await the experience ahead.

The practitioner seemed ready to begin. He had been working in silence for the last five to ten minutes. In his hand he held a small, yet thick, green covered book. These were the *Santo Daime* prayers and hymns from which he was about to read.

There was a creeping noise on the stairs. The door creaked open tentatively.

‘*Filho*<sup>42</sup>, bed!’ our shamanic practitioner demanded of his curious son.

‘What does the *Daime* do Daddy?’ the little boy asked with a cheeky smile.

Self: ‘Yeah a bit disorientating.’

P5: ‘But I sort of knew I’m going to feel ill and I might (Self: ‘yeah’) vomit. (Self: ‘yeah’) So it wasn’t quite so shocking (Self: ‘yeah’) when everything goes a bit weird if you know what I mean. (Self: ‘yeah, yeah’) But there were a few people there I would say definitely benefitted from, you know, having a shaman there.

P5: ‘In the jungle there’s a lot of noise. There’s a lot of background noise (Self: ‘yeah’) and that sort of adds to it, it builds up the whole experience if you know what I mean (Self: ‘yeah’) so I’m not sure if I would be overly comfortable taking it in someone’s living room.’

*Santo Daime*:

P6: ‘Being in a room with people who are using it and listening to the words that are sung in the music, that is, um, that helps, um, with the spiritual experience and also the language before the prayers that are said. Normally when the prayers are said when, um, I’m in a Church, or, um, even Buddhist, I’d still find that there’s an element of, of fear there and control and that’s the part of religion that I don’t like. It’s the control (Self: ‘right’) and the fear that people, you should be part of this and if you’re not doing this, this, this and this, then somebody’s gonna come and strike you down. Well I don’t like that. That’s part of religion I, I despise and I stay away from.’

P7: ‘The ceremonial basis of what we’re gonna do tonight as well, it’s appealing and most of my drug use in the past has been mainly to kind of get wasted.’

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<sup>42</sup> Filho meaning ‘son’ in Portuguese.

‘It allows you to see yourself<sup>43</sup>. Now go. Bed!’ His son seemed satisfied with that answer and crept his way back up to his bedroom. We looked to each other and smiled, with repressed laughter.

The shamanic practitioner took back the floor. He stood near the table with his book now open in his hands and began to read. From our seats the three of us bowed our heads in respect and listened. This was the part that felt most ritualistic. An aspect that participant 7 expressed as of particular interest to them.

The first hymn was read in Portuguese. I recognised the name Ave Maria as being that of the Virgin Mary right away. The hymn was short and sounded quite delicate in the foreign tongue. It went:

*Ave Maria, cheia de graça.  
O Senhor é convosco.  
Bendita sois Vós entre as mulheres.  
Bendito é o fruto do Vosso ventre, Jesus.  
Santa Maria, Mãe de Deus,  
rogai a Deus por nós pecadores,  
Agora e na hora da nossa morte.  
Amém. Jesus, Maria, e José.*

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<sup>43</sup> This response made me smile. It seemed the most succinct explanation possible. It struck me how non-patronising it was, given that it was said to an infant. ‘To see myself’ I thought. ‘Yes that’s exactly what I want to do. Oh crap, can I do that? Do I want to do that? What if I don’t like what I see?’ It was already too late for such panic and paranoia.

<sup>54</sup> This statement contradicts my own account. My recollection is of the shamanic practitioner stating this at the beginning of the rituals, as we were expected to maintain silence whilst the *ayahuasca* was active.

**P10:** ‘It was really intense like, and then I think like, I just heard these singing bowls. (Self: ‘yeah?’) So I wasn’t sure how long that part of the experience was. [laughter] Fantastic, it put me, and then the shaman at the time said “right this is now time to focus,<sup>54</sup>” (Self: ‘yeah?’) and it was just perfect timing it really. As soon as it - I just broke free and then voooo [sound effect]. Then the bowls came on and I could take a breath almost. I was like wow that was intense. But I was so free, I was so alive at that point. I was wow!’  
**P11:** ‘With the *Santo Daime* although it wasn’t my thing, although it was Christian basically, a Christian ceremony, um, it was a very profound experience to have purged so heavily at the beginning of the month and then re-experienced um the *ayahuasca* state at the end of the month. That was very important to me and then I went on to have a journey with *ayahuasca* that would last 13 experiences.’

**P11:** ‘My experience with the *Santo Daime*, which showed me that by movement, and the *Santo Daime* experience involves a little dance, if you would call it that, a kind of, something that would actually get the body moving, and also singing, chanting, which gets, er, which resonates in the brain and also gets us breathing more deeply.’

None of us said ‘amen’ in response<sup>44</sup>. Participant 6 explains why they refrained from saying ‘amen’ illustrating a strong distaste towards this aspect of religion in the belief that it is controlling. This lack of response did not appear to be a problem to the shamanic practitioner. Without hesitation our host moved onto the next prayer. This time read in English and known to me as ‘The Key of Harmony’:

I wish Harmony, Love, Truth and Justice to all my brothers and sisters.  
With the united forces of the silent vibrations of our minds, we are strong, healthy  
and happy, thus making a link of universal fraternity.  
I am happy and at peace with the whole universe, and I wish that all beings realize  
their most intimate aspirations. I give thanks to my invisible Father for having  
established Harmony, Love, Truth and Justice among all His children.  
So Be it, Amen.

This time two of us responded with ‘amen’. I took the silence of the other as a sign of their aversion to religion or the idea of a ‘Father’ or God figure.

There was one more hymn to go before we could properly commence with the experience. For, in my mind, that did not happen until there was *ayahuasca* on my lips. The final hymn was also spoken in English:

In the Infinite Circle of the Divine Presence  
which completely envelopes me, I affirm that:  
There is only one presence here—it is HARMONY,

*Shamanic:*

**P2:** ‘The ones I’ve done in England have just been in flats really.’

**P2:** ‘You take all the furniture out and you lay beds down and then we have a ceremonial kind of setting like at the end of the room, where the people who are holding space will be for the drinking ceremony. Where they will come up to drink the *ayahuasca*, um, and we try to make it as comfortable, peaceful.’

Self: ‘The person who brings the *ayahuasca*, um, do they call themselves, do they call themselves a shaman?’

**P2:** ‘No, no they don’t.’

**P2:** ‘The group that I do it with are kind of adamant on not bringing religion into it. You know, they’re kind of adamant but that, that’s something from the old, you know. We need to go on to the new and like, er, they’re very much into sacred geometry which is you know you can’t interpret it. So you, it’s all about connecting to source.’

**P2:** ‘They can bring other beings and angels, whatever. But not actual religion.’

**P2:** ‘The sage [Self: ‘yep’] we um, it’s sage, and we, um, and we have, um, floures, aqua de floures<sup>55</sup> the, it’s like flower water from Peru.’

**P2:** ‘And also um lavender as well like to clean our aura and like (Self: ‘yep’) we also have lasers as well.’

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<sup>44</sup> I refrained from saying ‘amen’ because while I wanted to remain polite to our host, I did not see any courtesy in saying amen to a prayer which I clearly didn’t understand the meaning of. Although, I later learnt that the hymn was a Portuguese translation of ‘Hail Mary’.

<sup>55</sup> The participant here is referring to *agua de florida*, which is water that contains flower essence. Often petals are steeped in water which is then used as a spritz to perform a spiritual or energy cleanse. According to Beyer (2009, p.127) it is believed to have a number of magical properties.

which makes all hearts vibrate with happiness and joy.  
 Whoever enters here will feel the vibration of Divine Harmony.  
 There is only one presence here—it is LOVE.  
 God is love, which envelops all beings in a single feeling of unity.  
 This space is filled with the presence of love.  
 In Love, I live, I move and I exist.  
 Whoever enters here will feel the pure and holy Presence of Love.  
 There is only one presence here—it is TRUTH.  
 All that exists here, all that is spoken here,  
 all that is thought here is the expression of Truth.  
 Whoever enters here will feel the Presence of Truth.

Listening to the words of this hymn was very assuring to me. I had no idea whether to believe that spirits or supernatural entities were real, or if *ayahuasca* really had the capacity to allow me to communicate with such beings<sup>45</sup>. It struck me that if the reported beliefs around this brew were in any way true, then these words felt enough to protect the experience. It struck me that this was not a hymn, rather it was a consecration. I later confirmed this in learning that it is titled *Consecration of the Space*.

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<sup>45</sup> Culturally speaking, ghosts, spirits, and such like, were to me, the stuff of horror stories, and if believed in, were certainly nothing to be trifled with. Experiments with Spiritualism as an undergraduate have however, left me sceptical of any kind of mediumship. I asked myself if this was Mediumship. I felt quite anxious at the idea that I might now have the existence of ghosts proved to me. Though I did recall from Spiritualism that ghost was a term loaded with negative association, and the term spirit was preferred. I could see that this created necessary division from the Halloween tales of childhood and the notion that loved ones and guides could be with us, undetected. Still when I thought about it, I couldn't help wondering what on earth we were doing. I had flashbacks to the handmade Ouija board we all scared ourselves with at secondary school.

**P2:** 'Lasers are like extra special technology that like cleanse the space.'

**P2:** 'We dress in white too.'

**P2:** 'We paint our faces as well.'

**P2:** [describing the face paint] 'like our spirit animals.'

**P2:** [describing the face paint] 'Just blue and white.'

**P2:** 'We also play the *icaros* from the shamans (Self: right, yea') cause when you play back that music it changes your journey, it really changes your journey (Self: 'yea, yea, yea') I would say like massively um cause when you are listening to the *icaros* of the shamans and they are bringing in energies of like the plants and stuff, you can feel it.'

**P11:** 'It was one of the most harrowing ordeals I have ever experienced, it was eight hours and I drank eight glasses of *ayahuasca* overnight, I purged ridiculously. Er, I'd always known that *ayahuasca* can make one very sick and throw up a lot, and so for that reason, and the reason for the ritual, which I was never that keen on, um. It dissuaded me from going.'

*Self-styled ritual:*

**P1:** 'I have also attempted two sessions by myself. Erm. With ceremony. Made up by me.'

**P1:** 'I wanted to make my own ceremony because much as, much as I think the shaman's way is valid and has value. I felt like it wasn't personal to me.'

At last, it was time. Our 'journey' was about to commence. We were all invited to stand up and join our shamanic practitioner in the centre of the room. We stood in line and fidgeted in anticipation. Our shamanic practitioner filled the *saké* cups. One by one we picked up a cup to drink<sup>46</sup>. I noticed a variety of techniques were employed in the act of drinking. One sipped, one took it back in one big gulp, and I chose to break it down into three or four large gulps<sup>47</sup>. After drinking each of us screwed our faces at the taste, before bowing in thanks to our host.

We took our seats, pulled on our blankets, and placed our hands on our knees with pinched fingers, pointing upwards, as when meditating. Our practitioner had a few last preparations to make. First, they turned on the music. It struck me as guitar based Brazilian folk music. The vocalist was female, and the energy was reminiscent of church guitarists<sup>48</sup>. He left the room and returned with two buckets and a washing up bowl. These were placed near our feet. Our personal vomit receptacles<sup>49</sup>.

Finally, before taking his seat our shamanic practitioner turned off the lights and turned on a small lamp in the corner of the room. It was a full spectrum LED lamp. He scrolled through the colours before settling on green.

**P1:** 'It's just like you know if you are in your own space then it's more, it's kind of more comfortable. I felt I think if I went to the shaman more regularly I would get more and more comfortable with his space and it wouldn't be an issue.'

**P1:** 'I've been going on the forums on the internet and stuff and there's you know there's quite a lot of people out there you know, who also just do it by themselves.'

**P4:** 'I, I gave it like proper ritual, um, preparation like, um, yeah, just got myself like psyched up for a week, um, (Self: 'right') did the whole dieting thing where you refrain from certain foods and stuff. (Self: 'yeah') Um, and you know, I went at it with like a proper, um, yeah like ritual.'

**P4:** 'It wasn't like a recreational thing. (Self: 'yeah') I researched it thoroughly and I knew what I was getting myself in for.'

**Self:** 'So did you, did you say any prayers or anything like that or? Did you, what kind of music?'

**P4:** 'Not really, my intentions I guess, I just um, (Self: 'yeah') I just verbalised it out loud like what I wanted to get from it. (Self: 'cool') Um, I was open to learn whatever was going to happen. I was open to learn from it basically. (Self: 'yeah') Kind of like prayers but more like an affirmation I guess.'

**P4:** 'I spent a long time gathering all of like, coding a playlist, what was basically, um. I just made a playlist. I had my music sorted all the way through (Self:

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<sup>46</sup> The smell was powerful and caused a pang in my stomach. I knew that this was not going to be a palatable treat and wondered how I would get it down.

<sup>47</sup> The last gulp was the most challenging. I thought it was going to come straight back up.

<sup>48</sup> It was not at all my cup of tea. I hoped it wouldn't be the same all night.

<sup>49</sup> I couldn't help wondering what on earth I was doing at this point. Being sick had never held any appeal.

‘For healing,’ he said before taking his seat in the meditative position<sup>50</sup>.

We all sat still, and silent. We stayed this way for a good thirty minutes as the songs played. Eventually I closed my eyes<sup>51</sup>. The folk music played its course and was replaced with something I felt was more palatable, and suitable, for a psychedelic experience. It was a recording of Tibetan singing bowls. With this change of music as his cue, our practitioner stood up and filled the *saké* cups once more. We all opened our eyes and waited to be invited to stand. Once more we all drank; using our individual techniques to get the bitter tasting, pungent smelling, drink inside of us. Like before we all bowed slightly in thanks to our host.

As we took our seats, this time we were instructed that this second glass should be enough for us to start our ‘journey’, but we will be invited in another 30 minutes to drink a third cup.

‘Your stomach will tell you if you need it,’ we were told<sup>52</sup>. We nodded, and again sat down in the silent, upright, meditative position. I noticed the others closed their eyes straight away<sup>53</sup>. Our host changed the settings of his LED lamp. Now it slowly rotated through the colours of the spectrum.

‘yeah’) and I chose music that would be specifically good for like meditation and stuff like that. So didgeridoo music, Tibetan singing bowls, (Self: ‘yeah?’) um, some of the actual *icaro*.’

**P4:** ‘For the first few hours I was kind of just sitting there just having the trip happen to me and then, yeah, towards the end then you get into yeah a deeper meditative, visionary state, um, (Self: ‘um’) a little bit of moving about and like not really dancing.’

**P4:** ‘pretty much all the times I’ve had it, I’ve had it alone.’

*Other details:*

**P3:** ‘The whole, um, um, brew concoction is so, in my mind is vile, I don’t particularly care, um, for the idea of the drink and throwing up. Not that I throw up all the time, but not really keen on the idea at all.’

**P9:** ‘I was then, um, I’m not saying violently sick but I was like very, I managed to empty my, the contents of my colon. Um, I think it was in three really loud [laughter] projectile vomiting, no it wasn’t, it did go in the basin. Anyway it was like projectile when I was doing it. Um, um, like emptying my stomach it was like, um, [retching sound] obviously a lot longer and a lot louder. (Self: ‘right’) Um, but it was, it was like a relief

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<sup>50</sup> I understood his association between green and health to be related to the notion that the heart chakra is attributed this colour.

<sup>51</sup> These 30 minutes were a mixture of apprehension, anticipation, body scanning, and toleration of the folk music. I knew from experience with other psychedelics that it is best not to strain too hard in awaiting the effect to take hold. Nonetheless I couldn’t help but want something to happen soon.

<sup>52</sup> I doubted my stomach would say yes.

<sup>53</sup> I did not want to close my eyes. If *ayahuasca* was to give me hallucinations and these were said to hold meaning, I did not want to confuse them with my own imagination, or risk that I was simply dreaming. Being an experienced psychedelic user, I wanted to see these visions projected into the room. This is not to say that one method is superior to another, but it was my preferred method at the time.



Sitting and waiting, still sober, I was starting to feel a little impatient. Suddenly, out of nowhere, it hit me. In almost an instant there was no doubt to me that the *ayahuasca* had taken hold. As this space is to explain the temporal aspects of the ritual, I will refrain from going into details of how it felt, what I saw, and how I translated the experience. Benny Shannon's work *Antipodes of the Mind* provides a plethora of reports on the inner experience of *ayahuasca* and creates a taxonomy of the types of visions and experiences *ayahuasca* has brought about. This thesis makes no attempt to replicate that.

We kept our seats throughout most of the evening. Talk was kept to an absolute minimum. The friends went into the garden at one point for a cigarette, breaking the peace slightly. They returned enthused at a vision seen in the moon, much like the founder of the *Santo Daimé* faith, Mestre Irineu was reported to have received decades earlier. This time however, it was a former, now deceased, pet that was seen, not the Virgin Mary.

At times we had our eyes open, at times eyes closed, as we individually saw fit. At one point, one of the friends stood and swayed in the middle of the room. Consumed by the music and sensations he moved his arms in twisting motions similar to that seen in the dances of India, but slower and free flowing. He seemed to be completely taken by the sounds.

to get what was in my stomach out  
(Self: 'out?') because I felt that it needed to come out.'

**P10:** 'The preparation of it I stuck to the best way. From other people's experiences and how to make my experience the best it could possibly be, and I really did it strict; stuck to that very strictly, (Self: 'cool') which worked out, um, really, really beneficial. Um, I only had the two doses. I know you can have three doses of it. I had two and that was more than enough. By the second dose, I felt the first dose kicking in very quickly.'

No one purged that evening<sup>56</sup>. Participant 3 made it very clear that they did not appreciate the fact that this was a probable outcome of *ayahuasca* use. The word vile is strong, and in stark contrast to the plethora of complimentary comments other participants made about the experience. Participant 9 for example, describes what would be interpreted as an unpleasant and concerning vomiting episode<sup>57</sup>. Yet, they wrap up their reports by claiming that it was also a relief.

There were one or two dashes to the toilet throughout the evening, but no vomiting. We kept our seats otherwise. Our host was the most still and focused of the group. The rest of us fidgeted and changed seating position often. Two of us were lucky enough to have a reclining chair, so had popped those out and were laying back in comfort. At times I adopted the foetal position. It felt exceptionally comfortable.

Before we knew it, the playlist had ended. Outside the sun had come up and was shining light in through the window. Our host turned off his LED lamp and left for the kitchen. We took this as our cue that the evening was over<sup>58</sup>. The two friends opened the conversation. 'I'm starving,' one said.

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<sup>56</sup> It was common to hear the word purge used in relation to *ayahuasca* rather than vomiting or being sick. It struck me that in Occidental culture vomiting was seen as a terrible experience. The word purge suggested something more cathartic. To purge was to be rid of something bad. To purge was seen to be part of the healing on offer.

<sup>57</sup> Previously I had prided myself on experiencing *ayahuasca* approximately 18 times before I first purged. I didn't know why this was, other than I was strict in following the preparatory diet. When I did first purge it came at a time where I had been facing something very difficult in myself. A long-forgotten memory had resurfaced where I had unknowingly, and unwittingly, caused suffering to an innocent individual. I was being shown the error and flash memories flooded my consciousness. I was being shown the times that the incident had impacted this individual's self-esteem and the impact it had on my karma. The memories were of periods of misfortune I had experienced. The *ayahuasca* was telling me that they happened because I had done this to someone who was completely innocent. I argued that I was innocent too, that I hadn't intended or realised the impact of my actions, I had been acting within protocol, and thinking of the greater good. The argument went around and around in circles. It consumed my thoughts, it was like I was stuck in a loop, getting faster and faster. I wouldn't accept what it was trying to teach me. The thoughts manifested into a torus shaped hallucination. It was like a torus of space-time was sitting just out to the left of me, the size of a fist, sitting in the air. A visual representation of this circular argument. Then before I knew it the shape shot into my stomach, and in a flash I was reaching for my bucket and fiercely vomiting.

<sup>58</sup> The effects of the *ayahuasca* were still with me. Conversation would kill that off and I wanted to resist. As the others spoke, I tried to stay focused on my inner experiences. Alas, this did not last for long.

‘I need a smoke,’ said the other. We all stretched and yawned, stood, and shook ourselves off, each of us doing what we needed to feel like we were back in the here and now.

Our host re-emerged with a plate of fruit and placed it on the table. He gestured for us to help ourselves.

‘Drink?’ he asked, before listing a range of herbal drinks available to us<sup>59</sup>. With our orders he headed back into the kitchen.

We started chatting more freely now, sharing snippets of our experience, all expressing an immense relief and pleasure at the experience. We all seemed to have benefitted in some way, but in what way was unique to each of us. As we chatted, we must have disturbed those sleeping upstairs. Little footsteps trotted down the stairs, and we were joined by the children of the house. They were full of energy and smiles. This really was the end of the ‘journey’.

We stayed there for about another hour. Chatting with the lady of the house, eating fruit, and drinking our teas. We folded our blankets and helped remove the white fabric that had covered everything, before each of us changed back to our street clothing before expressing our gratitude and making our way back into our lives<sup>60</sup>.

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<sup>59</sup> I settled on camomile, though I really wanted coffee.

<sup>60</sup> The next day for me was always an experience in itself. Sometimes I would be full of energy, despite having not slept. I wanted to socialise, and to share the entire trip report with someone. I was keen to impart this newfound wisdom as I walked through my day feeling like a guru, at the top of the enlightenment tree. I wanted my experience to assist others. On some occasions I would simply go home and sleep all day. It always felt a little odd when first walking back into the ‘real world’, being amongst people that might never understand what you had done and where your mind had been.

## 6.5 Other related practices

### 6.5.1 *Phyllomedusa bicolor*

*Kambo* application in Britain is in many ways the same as it would be in the Amazon, except indoors. Also, rather than being freshly extracted from an agitated *Phyllomedusa bicolor* it has been through the Brazilian and British postal services on the back of a flat wooden spatula, similar to those used by beauticians to apply wax for hair removal.

We moved into the front room of the house and shut the door, signalling to the family that they were not to join us. The shamanic practitioner began the preparation. A few tiny dots of the wax were separated and lined up on the clean end of the spatula where a drop or two of water was added to them. In tiny, circular motions, the wax was mixed with the water before the spatula was set down on the table.

That *kambo* was mentioned by a little less than half of the participants shows that it is not seen as a vital component of their involvement in the community. Participant 1 stated no intention to experience it. For them, the experience has little, if any, appeal, which is contrasted by participant 5's eagerness towards the practice.

The community member observed on this occasion was chatty. They spoke about how they had brewed their own *ayahuasca* and made up their own ritual. Now they were looking for

*No current experience and none wanted*

**P1:** 'I haven't tried *kambo*.'

**P1:** 'It's not at the forefront of my mind. Erm, [laughing<sup>65</sup>] I guess more partly because I am more interested in the, in a psychological thing, (Self: 'yes?') and I guess, I mean, I guess I don't really know enough about *kambo*. I only really know what you have told me and a bit of what the shaman has told me as well. But it, I can understand that it's a cleansing thing. It just strikes me, perhaps it's kind of like I think the cleansing thing would be great.'

**P1:** 'It seems like a lot of pain to go through [laughing]. For something that doesn't immediately grab me. (Self: 'yeah') Like, but that's not to say I wouldn't try it.'

*No previous experience – eagerly anticipated*

**P5:** 'I'm really, really keen to try *kambo* and really, really keen to learn about that. (Self: 'yeah') 'Cause that's got potentially fantastic

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<sup>65</sup> This shared laughter was in recognition of the unpleasantness of the experience.

an ‘energy cleanse’ from the *kambo*. This quest was common amongst the applications seen. The desire to have ‘bad luck’ removed or ‘karma reset’, was typical with those using *kambo*. The notion was that one could wipe the slate clean with the trauma that was about to be experienced. On three occasions I have seen specific conditions treated by *kambo*. These were varicose veins, arthritis, and acne<sup>61</sup>.

This individual complained light-heartedly as they were made to drink another pint of water. This was the third. They reported that they had been fairly successful at fasting for the day, but had eaten a little chocolate on the way over. The shamanic practitioner asked if they were ready.

‘Ready,’ they answered while gesturing for the treatment to begin.

The room fell silent and a seriousness filled the air. The shamanic practitioner pulled up the recipient’s sleeve and slanted his head to picture where the burn marks would go. They took out a black, plastic, bottle lid and pressed it hard into the bicep and held it in place for at least 30 seconds. Once removed it left behind a perfect circle indentation in the skin. The practitioner wiped the area with a damp cloth before marking five evenly spaced, little crosses, in biro, around the circle. At this point the practitioner took out a long, thin, wooden rod, and set alight to the end. They held the lighter beneath the wood until it burned red when he blew on it.

(Self: ‘yeah’) medical potential. I really, really do.’

#### *Participant experienced kambo*

**P3:** ‘*Kambo*, um that was administered once which was a very horrible experience. I thought that I was going to die at the time, face swelling up and, um, um, and what have ya, and thought never again. Um, but yeah I done that once.’

**P3:** ‘I haven’t done any research um, on *kambo* as a whole, but again from um, the person who actually administered it um, it was the idea that it has the ability to sort of um, clear um, you know any issues and um, also sort of cleanse the body.’

**P3:** ‘Issues in terms of any, any sort of spiritual um, um, issues that person could potentially have. Um any um, um, sort of poison within the body.’

Self: ‘Physical poison, or spiritual poison<sup>66</sup>, or?’

**P3:** ‘Spiritual; any kind of poison. The, the *kambo* has the ability to cleanse the body (Self: ‘Right’) and, and really that was part of the reason, um, sort of taking, obviously with the issue, um, that I had with this spiritual entity, um, so it was, it was taken on that basis. Um, the, the experience itself, um, the, where, um, you know where my face, um, actually, um, was swollen, um, my

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<sup>61</sup> This is not to suggest that *kambo* is effective in treating these conditions.

<sup>66</sup> This might seem like a bizarre question. However, as this individual had revealed that they felt a malevolent spirit was attached to them I felt it important to clarify what they were referring to, especially given the claims of *kambo* clearing *panema*, which is understood to mean ‘bad luck’.

‘Ok?’ he asked.

‘Ok,’ the community member affirmed. ‘Agggghhhh! Jesus! Oh my god that hurt!’ There was no doubt of the pain experienced as the practitioner pressed the rod onto one of the biro marks.

The community member, to their credit, appeared to grow more determined as each mark was made. With each flinch they sat firmer in their seat and called out less. Eventually they had five, evenly spaced, burn marks. The shamanic practitioner took a piece of dry cotton wool and rubbed them vigorously until they blistered and burst; exposing the lower layer of skin. It was onto these wounds that the wax and water mix was then placed.

By the time the third dot had been applied, the signs of the *kambo* taking effect on the recipient was clear. Their complexion had turned bright red. In some cases, but not this one, there would be quite dramatic puffiness and swelling in the face, eyes, and lips too. The community member had quietened down and seemed to intensify their focus as the nausea set in. The shamanic practitioner burnt a piece *palo santo* wood and wafted it under the community member’s nose. This was to intensify the nausea. The vomiting would flush out the water that had been ingested prior to the application, with the intention of cleaning out the digestive system<sup>62</sup>.

windpipe had, had gone tight. I struggled to breathe, um, it wasn’t a very nice experience.’

P3: ‘The experience, um, lasted for about half an hour. I mean things like the tightening of the wind pipe was for a shorter period, um, but the swelling of the face um, um, was probably about 20 minutes, about half an hour, 20 minutes, 45 minutes, but yeah, I say the whole experience lasted for sort of 45 minutes, from taking it, and then um, coming out of that stage where you know one’s face comes back to its normal appearance um.’

Self: ‘Ok and did you feel, did you feel that it had the effect? The desired effect? Do you feel it cleansed those issues, those spiritual issues?’

P3: ‘No I don’t think so. The thing is, it may have done some cleansing, but I mean, um, the issue that I initially took it for, um, it, it didn’t help, but on saying that, um, what I would, had, like, many um, um, um, medicine that’s administered, um, one needs to, um, take several courses, um, you know, of a medicine, um, for it to really work (Self: ‘Uhum’) and kick in. I think the fact that, um, you know it was like, kind of a near death experience with, um, the *kambo*. I had no interest of going back there again, (Self: ‘Ok, Ok’) but, but, but sorry, not to say that it doesn’t work. I didn’t give it enough chance.’

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<sup>62</sup> In my own *kambo* ‘treatments’ I would always have an urge to resist the act of vomiting. For me it was not something I wanted to voluntarily induce. My mind saw it as a symptom of illness and not a preventative. The shamanic practitioner was polite in telling me that not vomiting was a sign of

This community member did not take long to be impacted by the distinctive smell of the wood's smoke as it was wafted under their nose. As they breathed it in, their body curled, and their arms reach out for their bucket. The shamanic practitioner jumped towards the bucket. Just in time it caught the three pints of water previously consumed, as they gushed back out<sup>63</sup>. The noise was ferocious, still the shamanic practitioner and I were silent. The vomiting was over quickly and the community member was left looking tired, a little puffy and red, but not in pain or distress. They sat with their head hung low between their knees for a while until they had collected their thoughts and were ready to re-join the room.

Only participant 3 attempted to describe the experience. Their claim that they thought they were going to die, shows that this is not done for pleasure. It can be seen as a self-induced trauma. They explain how their face swelled up and their windpipe tightened<sup>64</sup>. Additionally, we see the notion of catharsis and cleansing coming through in the explanations and justifications given. This is reflective of the native ideologies attached to *kambo* use.

**P6:** 'I heard about, was this, a frog it was, um, I think it was an excretion from a frog called *kambo* and, um, I'd seen it on, um, I'd seen it on a BBC television programme, um, called Bruce Parry, Bruce Parry, er, *Tribe*. Bruce Parry's *Tribe*, and, um, he, he'd been given this *kambo*, but I never made a connection till later on when I got involved with the *ayahuasca* that there was also this, this other medicine *kambo*, which could help remove blockages and help with any ailments inside, any illnesses, any infections that I may have and, um. I tried it once hoping that it would, it would, um, um, help in some way, remove some blockages, make me feel better, um, cleaner maybe, um, because of doing so many different kinds of medication, pharmaceutical medication.'

**P8:** '*Kambo* stuff as well, for healing and all.'

**P8:** 'There's that cathartic element, especially with *kambo*. There's a survival element to you doing it. So, then the release from that is, that you can get, so you can look at that can't you?'

**P9:** 'I just thought it was a bit of a cleansing, as well an internal cleansing, (Self: 'Yep?') um, and

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strength. It was not something I overcame throughout the research. Unlike when vomiting due to over consumption of food, alcohol, or because of an infection or virus, vomiting because of *kambo* was odourless when the participant fasted before application, and drank the advised 'few pints' of plain water.

<sup>63</sup> I can attest that my own experiences with *kambo* were equally as difficult and unpleasant. While I fought against vomiting my face would swell and my head would pulsate as if my blood pressure had become so high, I could feel every heartbeat. On one occasion I was accidentally given a double dose which hit me instantly. Right away I sensed that something was not right. I tried to stand and walk to the bathroom, however, before I took a step my legs had buckled underneath me, and I passed out. This experience is interpreted as a near-death experience. The unconscious state lasted for roughly ten minutes. I have not used *kambo* since.

<sup>64</sup> At this point I usually felt incredibly worn out. The nap that followed always felt incredibly deep and refreshing no matter the duration.

The shamanic practitioner picked up a folded blanket, shook it out, draped it over the community member and said, ‘Come on into the other room, you can lie down and have a nap for an hour.’ The community member, looking weak, picked up their arms to be guided into the other room. Once there, they sat themselves onto a reclining armchair and extended the footrest. The family’s children were hushed and obeyed. The community member looked cosy and warm and ready to rest. They were left alone in the quiet room for an hour to have a nap.

Eventually, the shamanic practitioner popped back in to wake them with the offer of a warm herbal drink. Accepting the green tea, the community member took a moment to re-focus and prepare themselves to leave. By the end of the drink, they appeared chatty, alert, energised, and they were laughing about the ordeal they had just experienced.

### 6.5.2 *Salvia divinorum*

These investigations have shown that shamanistic use of *salvia* in Britain is rare. Here, typically, the leaves are dried and smoked, for a sharp, instant, psychedelic experience. In the Amazon fresh leaves are chewed for a more mellow experience. One associate, in an informal conversation, shared how they had successfully ‘micro-dosed’ *salvia*, by chewing one or two fresh leaves each morning. This, they claimed, helped them in overcoming depression and nicotine addiction. We can

helping to boost my immune system; based on the fact that I have a few um maladies that are apparent in my life, (Self: ‘Yeah?’) and, um, I thought it would help to try and suppress those, and you know, you know nothing ventured, nothing gained, so I thought, yeah. (Self: ‘Ok’) It’s all like, um, natural stuff. It’s all like coming from a good source and yes, I wanted to experience that as well.’

**P9:** ‘I felt cleansed or purged um after the *kambo* but after the *ayahuasca* I felt, um, happy!’

**Self to P9:** ‘What was the impact on the, the, those, those things [physical maladies], how long did that last?’

**P9:** ‘Um with the *kambo*, probably about a month.’

**P9:** ‘I didn’t feel any aches and pains for about a month, (Self: ‘right, wow.’) and I thought wowee!’

**P4:** ‘I first had *salvia* actually, about five years ago.’

**P6:** ‘My first experience with Amazonian, um, herbs, was a, was *salvia*. It was some, some years ago, probably about five, um six years, five or six years ago. We’d um, purchased some, um, magic mushrooms, and on the, on the erm, the knowledge of the person who sold us the mushrooms, said that this *salvia divinorum* would um, enhance the mushroom experience, and that first experience, that was the first experience that I had with



see that for participants 4 and 6, smoking salvia was their initial route into *curandeirismo*.

On one occasion I was invited by a participant to attempt a shamanistic salvia experience. The participant had smoked it previously and had chewed it on multiple occasions. In the interest of furthering this research and my own personal experiences, the invitation was accepted.

It was a light evening, towards the end of summer. The lounge had been tidied up, and the coffee table cleared. On it was placed a variety of crystals, semi-precious gemstones, and candles. The primary lighting in the room was turned off, instead fairy lights and candles created a subdued ambiance.

We had been unable to procure fresh salvia at this time and instead agreed to attempt at reconstituting some dried salvia<sup>67</sup> which had been purchased online<sup>68</sup>. There was amusement at the thought that, while trying to be authentic, we were having to make do with the resources available to us. The dried salvia leaves were placed into a bowl filled with water. The leaves were prodded until submerged.

*salvia divinorum*. But I didn't know it was Amazonian until later.'

**P6:** 'The link with *salvia divinorum* and, um, *kambo*, come through and I've always been interested.'

**P7:** 'When I was um, at college, I actually bought half an ounce of *salvia* online and, urm, and I'd read that it was supposed to give you access to again, I don't like this terminology, but to other dimensions.'

**P7:** 'It [salvia] was all about having fun really, (Self: 'Right.') just getting wasted. (Self: 'Ok') So although I was thinking about what am I going to learn from this? Where is it going to go? What are the consequences going to be? Really it was just about getting blasted. (Self: 'Right.') So we were doing um, bongs of salvia, I was having very strange experiences um, very, yea very other worldly, [sneezes] really not being attached to things, blending into things. Being part of something else, um, being part of paving stones, or brick walls, or shadows coming alive and things like that. Being taken into another world.'

**P7:** 'We actually grew *salvia* for a while and so we were doing it quite a bit then as well.'

**P7:** 'I got quite scared of *salvia* after not too long, because it is so powerful, um, but decided to try chewing more recently, and that was an interesting experience. Definitely would like to do that with a larger dose, um, it felt like I was going to the same place that the *salvia*, smoking it, had taken me a couple of times. The most trips are very different on *salvia* but there's some

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<sup>67</sup> Following this experience, and prior to the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016, I tried to cultivate fresh salvia and found it incredibly difficult to get a plant to produce enough healthy leaves for the job. The plant is itself very resilient and can withstand heavy cropping. The leaves, however, will dry up around the edges quite severely if watering is slightly late. An entire plant of pure green leaves can be spoilt overnight.

<sup>68</sup> This was prior to the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016.

The leaves were left to rehydrate like this for roughly an hour. In this time, I asked the participant to tell me about their previous experiences.

They told me how salvia could be severely disorientating, and a fully immersive<sup>69</sup> experience and still more than a visual experience; tactile and audible too – being ‘in’ the experience rather than observing it. I was advised to remove my shoes and lock the doors to the outside. They explained how on one occasion they had left the safety of the house and tried to go out in the street. This could have led to a serious traffic accident if the participant had not been held back by their friends at the time. The removal of the shoes, they explained, was a mental trick to remind us that we were not suited to going outside. It was explained that there was little chance I would be coordinated enough to manage to put them back on<sup>70</sup>.

I was instructed to get a tea towel for each of us.

‘You can’t swallow your saliva, so you might need to spit it out, or start dribbling.’

I was told. I obliged, strained off the rehydrated leaves, bringing them into the lounge, ready for us to start the experiment.

‘Ready?’ I asked

‘Let’s do this,’ they replied eagerly.

We both took some of the soggy leaves and placed them into the buccal area of our mouths. The taste wasn’t anything to react to. It was neither pleasant nor

consistencies. There was quite a consistent feeling, um, quite a sort of childhood feeling like, um, it’s hard actually ‘cause that Scottish *salvia* that I’d linked you to, um. There’s some experience reports on there and they almost word-for-word explained the, the experience that I’d had. [Self: ‘right.’] Even to the point of saying it felt like Andy Pandy; which isn’t something I’d even told anyone before, but it occurred to me, not even, that’s weird like, not even, in those words, but it felt like it was a children’s TV programme.’

**P7:** ‘There’s definitely a regressive aspect there, and it feels like quite often, on *salvia*, that I am gonna go somewhere and not come back. (Self: ‘Right’) Um, and like, could that be time travel? I don’t know. It’s just your brain getting messed up isn’t it? (Self: ‘right.’) It’s how you interpret it. That it means something to you. So, um, so yeah, I understand the tradition. It is used for divination, um, finding out how to heal somebody, and haven’t really explored that. (Self: ‘Explored that?’) It hasn’t really given me that, but, um, perhaps I haven’t sort of studied it properly. I think chewing it would be more rewarding.’

**P7:** ‘The other method is to eat a little bit at a time I think, and chew it, and spit some out, and chew it, and spit some out. So don’t put it all in your mouth at once. (Self: ‘ah, I see, I see, I see,’) I think that might have been a better tactic. (Self: ‘Yeah’) Uh um, I mean often, even with just your own introspection, it often feels like you’re on the edge of a breakthrough. (Self: ‘Yeah?’) *Salvia* definitely feels like that. That you’re on the edge of something. (Self: ‘Um.’) I haven’t quite again it feels like I haven’t quite let

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<sup>69</sup> On this occasion the term immersive is used to describe a state where all visual perception is hallucinatory.

<sup>70</sup> Naturally, I followed what seemed like very sensible advice.

unpleasant. I chewed the leaves a little to encourage the onset of the experience, before moving the ‘quid’ back into the buccal region. I looked over and saw the participant doing similar.

myself go into it so far, like I’m being invited sometimes. I’m even being dragged backwards.’

**P7:** ‘Yeah it feels homely. (Self: ‘Homely?’) It feels like you are making such a significant transition from where you are, to where you are going, that you are scared of leaving in case you don’t come back sort of thing.’

We went on like this for some time. Occasionally we would wipe our mouths as the macerated leaf juice built up too much. We both sat and waited silently for the experience to begin. After around 40 minutes I began to sense a mild shift in my state. I was getting a slight hallucinatory experience, though it felt like I was having to work to obtain it. I looked over and saw the participant now sat with eyes closed, slouched back in the chair. I wondered if they too were having to strain for their experience.

After an hour and a half, we unceremoniously ended the experiment and began chatting again. Neither of us having felt that it had any significant impact on us. It was agreed that fresh leaves would be needed for this experience to be affective.

### **6.5.3 Less common curandeirismo practices in Britain.**

Use of *rapé* was only witnessed once throughout this research. It was the summer of 2013, and I was attending the conference Breaking Convention. Sat as part of a group, outside of the venue, on the grass, we enjoyed the searing July sun. The invitation to join a *rapé* circle was extended by a group of friends I had spent time with that weekend. There was a sense of ceremony about the occasion, though there was nothing in particular being revered or celebrated, other than the use of *rapé* itself. Approximately ten of us sat eagerly in a circle, smiling, and excited about what was to come. Experience levels of *rapé* use in the circle differed. Our

*No participants referred to the use of rapé in their interviews. Equally, there were a number of experiences discussed that were not seen in the observation aspects of this research. They are presented together in this section as less common curandeirismo practices in Britain. The participation observation account of rapé is presented in the left-hand column and participants’ accounts are here in the right hand column.*

shamanic practitioner clearly had considerable experience with the snuff, as did their closer associates who were with us. Some had experienced *rapé* once or twice, and a few of us, like me, had not had any earlier encounters with it<sup>71</sup>.

Our shamanic practitioner had a warm and open character that made it easy to give them trust. Though a born-and-bred Londoner, their ethnicity was exotic, possibly dual heritage, and difficult to pinpoint. They were aesthetically beautiful, and adorned in classic, light, and flattering 'New Age' clothing. Symbols of shamanism were evident in jewellery and feather hair accessories. I asked them what to expect, and if it was psychotropic in any way.

'No, not really, it's a mix of herbs and tobacco, it's used to clear out everything from down here,' they gestured to the chest and made the noise of someone clearing phlegm.

'It makes you feel really rooted to the earth,' someone added.

'Yeah, it makes me feel really light and like, ahhhhh,' someone else said. Their expression was one of great satisfaction.

'It's really used to clear you out,' the shamanic practitioner interjected, regaining control of the narrative. They returned to the centre of the circle and with it drew on everyone's attention.

**P3:** 'The *San Pedro*, um, it has, um, a bit like the *ayahuasca*, has the ability, um, to elicit certain experience, um, spiritual, um, experiences, um, and heighten, um, one's senses, um, when I, when I took it I, I had zero experience. (Self: 'Ok, so.') But I have known other people to take it and have had some amazing experience.'

**P4:** 'I eventually, um, came onto *changa*<sup>72</sup>. (Self: 'Right') Which is like a smokeable form of *ayahuasca*, but obviously it's not as long and intense it's more just like half an hour, (Self: 'Yeah') and yeah, um, I eventually tried, um, *ayahuasca* but using the extracted alkaloids from the vine (Self: 'Right') mixing them with mushrooms, so it's very similar to *ayahuasca* but it's called 'psilohuasca'.'

**P4:** 'Um well I think yeah again I'd had *changa* before which is quite similar, quite similar alkaloids and stuff (Self: 'um') it's obviously a lot more short lived.'

**P5:** '[About Coro Coro] took *San Pedro* cactus with a shaman there; really enjoyed it.'

**P5:** 'Well I wasn't really expecting anything (Self: 'Yeah') I have to be honest, I thought that I was going to go and drink something foul and trip my tits off for 10 hours (Self: 'Right?') and it wasn't quite like that. That's very much what *San Pedro* is; (Self: 'Yeah') you drink something and it tastes disgusting, (Self: 'Yeah') and then you know for six to eight hours you get some really cool visuals.'

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<sup>71</sup> I was anxious and didn't really know what I was letting myself in for. I had not previously encountered *rapé* and knew little of it at this time. I was placing my trust in the fact that it was indigenous to the Amazon and that I had previously had positive experiences with the substances I had encountered from that region.

<sup>72</sup> This is a form of DMT and an MAOI that can be smoked in a pipe. Here poster HotPotatoe gives an account of their experience: <https://erowid.org/experiences/exp.php?ID=103250> (Accessed: 05.05.18)

‘Ok, I’m going to start now’ they told the group, taking a peculiar looking instrument from their bag as they did. It was a long thin, curved, pipe. It looked to be made from bone and had a ribbon tied around it at one end. They explained how they would move around the circle one by one and give us the *rapé* by blowing it up our nose using the shamanic pipe. Their dialogue was peppered with references to their time training with native *curandeiro*, which added to the sense of authenticity in what we were doing<sup>73</sup>. We sat in silence and waited.

Before we would receive our dose of *rapé*, the circle was to be sanctified. The shamanic practitioner moved in silence around the circle burning white sage<sup>74</sup>. Looking around the circle I could see that some sat as though in meditation with their eyes closed, hands resting on their crossed legs with fingers pinched, palms pointing upwards. Others were sat up on their knees, eyes wide open, alert as though waiting to be called to action. With the circle smudged in sage, the shamanic practitioner returned to the bone pipe. I could not see how the *rapé* was stored but I saw a small pinch loaded into the end of the pipe.

The practitioner approached someone sat opposite me in the circle and squatted down before them. Their response was to bow their head with hands in prayer position as a mark of respect.

‘Ready?’ the shamanic practitioner asked.

‘Ready,’ the community member responded.

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<sup>73</sup> In a way, because this was quite a rare, and relatively unheard of practice, it felt like earning shamanic kudos through my participation. I was expanding on my experiences above and beyond that offered to me by my own shamanic guide. I wondered what they would make of this when I returned home.

<sup>74</sup> I have long been familiar with the burning of white sage, or ‘sagebrush’. Used by a wide range of ‘New Age’ practitioners as it is claimed to ‘transform energy’ (Alexander, 2009: 29).

The bone pipe was placed under a nostril. With one short, sharp blow from the shamanic practitioner the application had been made. Immediately the shamanic practitioner stood up and moved onto the next person in the circle.

The community member screwed up their face and shook their head before regaining composure and sitting silently in meditative position, eyes closed. This pattern repeated, community member after community member. I paid close attention to the varied reactions. One community member did not react at all, one or two reacted only with tears that streamed down their cheeks. It appeared that most were holding their reactions back in an attempt to minimise how unpleasant the experience could be. Eventually we had all been served our dose of *rapé*. The circle maintained its shape and silent composure until all community members had had their turn, and for roughly five minutes more, as we all awaited the effects of the snuff<sup>75</sup>. Most sat in silence smiling, some rocked back and forth very slightly. The silence was interrupted with coughs and splutters as people cleared out their throats. One community member especially drew my attention. They seemed ecstatic. Sitting crossed legged they ground their hips in an almost sexual fashion towards the ground. This went on for a few moments until the group began chatting again. Everyone seemed a little uplifted and refreshed by their experience. This individual seemed ecstatic. Thanks were offered to the shamanic practitioner before the group broke up and each of us went about the rest of our day.

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<sup>75</sup> The experience wasn't quite as unpleasant as having blisters burned into your skin, but it carried the sharp, stinging, pain one can imagine that snorting powdered tobacco would bring. I could feel the powder go up my nose and hit me somewhere between the eyes. It was not a pleasant physical sensation at all and it did not feel like a sensible thing to be participating in. In my personal opinion it felt like a classic example of the 'emperor's new clothes'. I did not experience anything that could be seen as psychoactive, or state shifting. I did not feel grounded or any more connected to the earth than I had previously been. I felt nothing except the sharp stinging of having snorted snuff. My eyes streamed profusely. I did clear some phlegm, once I'd left the company of the group.

## 6.5 Summary

This chapter has narrated several events that can provide a foundational understanding of this phenomenon. Participant testimonies show that they represent a range of cultural and religious backgrounds, with weighting towards what can be fairly expected within the British population; more ‘Caucasian’ participants, and a higher number of people with a Christian upbringing, as both factors are dominant in this nation. There is variety in the experience of, and attitude towards non-prescribed drug use. The chapter explored the temporal aspect of the assortment of practices that can be considered *curandeirismo* too. It illustrates that people in Britain are not adopting one specific framework or ritual design for *ayahuasca* use, yet they do observe it as a ritual rather than a recreational activity as seen with other non-prescribed psychoactive substances in Britain. This chapter also highlights that the *ayahuasca* ritual is the primary practice being adopted by the participants in the research, with practices such as *kambo*, and *rapé* not receiving the same level of interest.

## 7. Health and well-being

Throughout the research, the theme of ‘well-being’ emerged as significant. This manifested in two forms: within the discussion of motivators, and by the expression of the perceived impact of the practices on the participants. This chapter explores how this provides a more granular understanding of each.

The data here, and in Chapters 8 and 9, is primarily from semi-structured interviews and where relevant, interspersed with the findings from the visual ethnographic aspects of this project, and is supplemented with footnotes of autoethnography. Throughout these three chapters the left-hand column is used to present analysis that relates to the relevant quotes found in the right-hand column, and to discuss the results of the visual exercises employed.

### 7.1 Attraction to complementary and alternative medicines

In this section I will be using the National Health Service’s (NHS) definition of Complementary and Alternative Medicines (CAMs). That is:

‘Complementary and alternative medicines (CAMs) are treatments that fall outside of mainstream healthcare. These medicines and treatments range from acupuncture and homeopathy, to aromatherapy, meditation and colonic irrigation’. (National Health Service, 2018b)

**P1:** ‘I’ve tried to get into meditation, I just can’t.’

**P1’** ‘I haven’t tried anything else really that’s alternative.’

**P2:** ‘I’ve always had it in me to look for the alternative.’

**P2:** ‘I was at university and got into a very deep depression and anxiety. (Self: ‘Yes?’) Um, and I was just like I’ve always been, a bit of an alternative health wise. Perhaps I didn’t want to take the drugs. I’m not into that, I just know that they’re, they’re not good.’

**P4:** ‘It kind of pushed me to get more into alternative medicine and stuff like that like, um, Ayurvedic medicine, (Self: ‘Right?’) er, Chinese medicine.’

**P5:** ‘I practice things like Yoga and Reiki, um, I’m quite into crystals and energy and stuff like that.’



This definition encompasses the Amazonian practices at the centre of this research; therefore, it is important to consider any interest participants may have in CAMs, that are not native to the Amazon, as it will frame their use of *ayahuasca* in relation to their attitudes towards other treatments that are not licenced medical practices in Britain. In addition, it shows whether *curandeirismo* is seen as part of a larger, holistic notion of CAMs, or if their involvement with Indigenous Amazonian treatments is seen as something unique.

As highlighted in Chapter 6, there is a predilection within this community towards more alternative, or ‘New Age’ leanings. This is borne out in the semi-structured interviews. Only participant 1 claims to not have any interest in any practices that are considered ‘alternative’. The participants share an array of interests that fall under the definition of CAMs. Meditation was a common topic; an expression of simply not being able to meditate; *ayahuasca* improved meditation, *ayahuasca* reduced the need for meditation.

While not all participants are as bold and straightforward as participant 1, who claimed ‘I hate the Western world!’ in Chapter 6, still, overall, there is a strong belief amongst them that there is more to offer elsewhere. This means that the draw towards *curandeirismo* is set within an aversion to licenced medicines in Britain, not an attraction specific to the Amazon. The attitude of participants toward the Occident is explored further in Section 8.7.

**P6:** ‘I’ve tried alternatives and they are the main ones that I think for that reason I’ve used, acupuncture, Five Element Acupuncture and um Buddhism (Self: ‘Cool.’) and meditate and um, um hypnotherapy.’

**P7:** ‘There seems to be quite a lot of creativity attached to opening up. I suppose that kind of opening up and allowing yourself access to different possibilities, so that’s one reason that’s one motivation, one appealing... I want to be a creative person. I feel I am a creative person, but, (Self: ‘Um, you are?’) but, um, there are obstacles often, and that’s why I’ve been involved with reading up on loads of self-help stuff as well and trying to get around those obstacles what’s stopping me from being the person that I think I could be.’

**P8:** ‘I’ve found I’ve had a few issues with trying to meditate before this.’

**P8:** ‘I even looked into any of that stuff, like holistic therapies and into crystals and massage and shiatsu and reflexology and all of that so quite alternative stuff anyway beforehand.’

**P9:** ‘That feels really good, good to be up there all the time, (Self: ‘Brill’) without having to, I found that I didn’t need to meditate as much to feel like that.’

**P9:** ‘I think it’s a whole aspect of things that can help us along our journey. (Self: ‘Yeah’) um, things like, um, meditation, um, having *ayahuasca* experiences, um, learning how to balance the chakras, how, learning how to, um, balance the energy systems in your body, um, learning how to, um, keep the body hydrated.

Medicine is a subject explored further as part of the visual ethnography aspects of this research. Appendix 6 shows the first activity; the fourth theme explored was ‘Medicine’. The exercise was designed to capture quick fire responses to various, relevant, themes. The responses can be found in Appendix 11. These clearly represent alternative leanings in participants 4, 9, and 10; whereas participant 7 comes across as more aligned to licenced ‘trialled,’ ‘tested,’ and ‘overprescribed’ medicine. What is interesting here is that all four participants offer a form of warning in their word association with ‘medicine’, with participant 10 usefully highlighting them in red, a colour traditionally associated with danger in Britain.

Combining the findings from the interviews and visual ethnography, it is clear that the participants lean towards an interest in CAMs, with some having a significant investment in such. Participants 1 and 7 however, both show that this is not always the case so an interest in CAMs is not necessarily an identifying trait of a community member. For some, *ayahuasca* and *curandeirismo* is something unique in their experiences and interests, for others it is an extension of this pre-existing fascination with ‘the other’, ‘the exotic’, ‘the different’.

## 7.2 Acceptance, peace, and clarity

This section looks at the claims of participants relating to a more general sense of wellness or personal improvement. These statements do not link to a specific health condition but illustrate that participants feel their involvement in these practices does offer improved well-being.

**P1:** ‘I came out of it with this greater sense of, like you were saying earlier, this, it’s ok that the world is like this, and I can see it all now and... I did feel like I had this massive God’s eye view of the whole of creation, you know? and that like, I could see that it was ok, that shit things happen, but it is tough shit, but it’s ok because you know, it is all kind of just like a surface illusion anyway and we are all just kind of working things out.’

**P1:** ‘It has just become an accepted part of my world view now, and, and therefor it’s, like, it makes me so much more chilled out in life.’

**P1:** ‘In the morning I cried all day long, uncontrollably, but it wasn’t about that [facing a broken relationship] as such. It was like I didn’t even know why. I could, I did, I couldn’t really put my finger on where it was coming from. It was just wave after wave of just needing to cry. And it, and it was cleansing me you know? (Self: ‘Uhum’). It was really getting a lot of stuff out of me.’

Participants each have unique ways of expressing this benefit: a brutal and crude ‘tough shit’; a catharsis (relating directly to native Amazonian ideologies); a reminder to lighten up (following a traumatic diagnosis at a young age); maturing; clarity; removal of the fear of death; the ability to sit with issues (‘so fucking what?’); a firmer grip of judgement; and a bliss like state to be returned to when needed. These varied manifestations all portray the same message; participation in Amazonian shamanism has shifted individual attitudes for the better. Most participants had something significant to say of this nature.

‘Betterment’ in this case is not attributed to a specific condition, or ailment. Instead, betterment is viewed as holistic, spanning all corners of an individual’s lifestyle. It is a change of general outlook. It is an altered attitude towards others, it is acceptance and

**P1:** ‘The shaman had said something about unblocking your chakras and *ayahuasca* can help you do that. Like, I had a sense, that, that I had this sort of blockage in my, in, is it like my chest or throat?’

**P1:** ‘Rather than just um moaning about it (Self: ‘Yeah?’) or feeling helpless about it like, it felt like a real tangible thing that I could do.’

**P2:** ‘With the journeys that I’ve had, the things that I go through, it’s just like “have more fun and don’t be so, don’t take things so seriously” Because I was taking things so seriously.’

**P5:** ‘I was just sort of blundering from one crisis to another, (Self: ‘Um’) and yeah, for the last six months in Peru I led a very peaceful, tranquil life while I was living there. (Self: ‘Right’) I was living in a place called [AP]. (Self: ‘Yeah?’) Yeah, I wasn’t really taking part in anything illegal. I really, really, relaxed basically, and became a much more chilled out person, (Self: ‘Yeah’) and looking back now, I think it was the *ayahuasca*, but I didn’t recognise that at the time.

**P5:** ‘I was definitely a different person when I came back from South America. Like, I really sort of left a boy and came back a man.’

**P6:** ‘I think it alters you in a way. Not in a bad way. It alters you in a really positive way, because you can see things clearer, because you’re sorting out your inner world so you are... Once you sort out your inner world, your outer world starts piecing together and you can handle things that break down.’

**P6:** ‘You can be more accepting of a person’s behaviour.’

**P6:** ‘Knowing that I haven’t got that fear of dying because it doesn’t, it doesn’t make no difference if I die tomorrow. If I die today, um, what matters is now.’

**P6:** ‘I had a very profound and positive change in my life, um, in terms of, I don’t know, it’s like a lot of blinkers that have been taken off. (Self: ‘Uhum’) I see the world a lot more clearly now.’

**P6:** ‘It’s changed my whole outlook on life. It’s a, it’s a powerful thing, and it stays with you for a very, very long time.’

**P8:** ‘I needed something that’s just gonna stop the bullshit, the lies; that inability to actually, or the fear of being able to look directly and change stuff, even though I’m requesting changing stuff, I’m not actually doing it, it’s not happening, why is it not happening? I’m trying, trying different ways and I certainly weren’t going down, um, er, standard pharmacological routes, already done that (Self – um) know that they have the ability to change you forever incorrectly (Self – uhum) they’re not balanced.’

**P8:** ‘I think probably my tolerance for other people’s stuff.’ [Increased]

letting go. It is in a cathartic cry. It is improved musical skills, and the unblocking of intangible blocks. This list does not resemble any state or condition that one would visit a GP to discuss, yet the experiences can be nonetheless debilitating. These are the intangibles that participants felt that licenced medicines do not have the ability to reach.

It is important to note that almost all participants noted some form of general benefit. *Ayahuasca* is an aid for them, but rather than providing a solution to a specific problem – a medical ‘fix’, as it were – it assists in encouraging a healthier world view, more beneficent, and tolerant attitudes towards problems, others, and life in general.

**P8:** ‘A lot of problems come up because I’m fighting against, “oh I shouldn’t be like this”, and you just magnify it to the size of a fucking mountain then don’t ya? And actually, just sitting with it, and so what if they think you’re fucking moody, and not gone out, so fucking what, I’m not dealing with that now. (Self: ‘Yeah’) So it’s, it’s been, it’s made it almost, not quite, ok that I’m not as great as I used to be.’

**P8:** ‘People actually noticed the change in me (Self: ‘Right’) as well, (Self: ‘Brilliant.’) and, um, and the fact that I was so, just chilled and just embracing the moment more.’

**P10:** ‘I am a musician, um, and my music’s changed, er, a lot. I’m on a much more positive, er, outlet. Whereas before I was more um talking about material (Self: ‘Right’) things, and it might not necessarily be material, in a sense, where I am on about money and clothes. I never really did that, it, but it was more about girls and that sort of stuff. (Self: ‘Yeah?’) Whereas now I’m talking about a change in people’s thought patterns, (Self: ‘Right’) and talking about what I’m seeing, and I really am genuinely seeing that around people, and it’s not just... I don’t see the negatives anymore, whereas before I saw a negative in someone.’

**P10:** ‘I don’t judge as much anymore. (Self: ‘Yeah?’) I find myself much more peaceful. I don’t have a desire to judge. I don’t have a desire, sorry, an obligation to be judged.’

**P11:** ‘I was shown in my experience, was, um, a shaft of rosy light, which I was told was the centre of my being, um, my complete peace of mind, and that I could return to it at any time I wanted. Um, over the next um few days and weeks I found that my ego had been scrunched up and thrown out of the window, and I was free to be whoever I wanted to be.’

**P11:** ‘I experienced a profound sense of peace and a deep connection with my higher self.’

**P11:** ‘I sat for most of those experiences, most of that time in a sense, in a complete state of bliss, um, well, at the same time, feeling nauseous and sick to my stomach.’

**P11:** ‘I can still relate to the bliss I felt at times. I may well get lost in the daily drama of life, when I remember just to take a moment, and to close my eyes, and just say hello, a smile comes over my face. That was very important to me those three experiences with the *Santo Daime*.’

MAOIs are not typically associated with a change in world view; DMT is not currently found in peer reviewed research to be a tool of increased musicality. Participant 11’s sense of ‘bliss’ that can be returned to at will, this is not something a GP could prescribe despite their will. This is better considered as associated folklore in action.

A fundamental definition of folklore is ‘expressive material that repeats and varies’ (McGee and Richards, 2013: 211), not dissimilar to mimesis:

‘Folklorists have had a notoriously difficult time devising a definition of the word “folklore.”...the concept of the meme can help us understand both what folklore is and why it has been difficult to define’ (Pimple, 1996: 236) Here meme stands for a unit of mimesis; as the term’s originator states: ‘[the word meme is used to] convey the idea of a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of *imitation* [emphasis original]’ (Dawkins, 1989; 192). Folklores are memes, however:

‘folk culture consists of those memes clustered on the natural end of the natural-artificial continuum’ (Pimple, 1996: 237). By this it is meant, those ideas and beliefs that are passed on by lesser mediated forms of communication, such as face-to-face spoken word, rather than heavily edited forms such as tv, film, magazines and books.

These changes can only be claimed to be perceived at this stage, but this makes them no less real for the participant experiencing them. Their telling of them related to, and contributing towards, the associated folklore of *curandeirismo*. While not tangible, the benefits, in terms of the effects of a greater sense of peace and contentment in the lived experience, are something easy to express, and largely shared.

### 7.3 Physical health

The topic of physical health was an unexpected theme which emerged from participants’ responses, without being a part of the original interview schedule. None of the existing research on *ayahuasca* noted it as a potential for improved physical health. However, just under half of participants considered *ayahuasca* to be either a potential, or actual, agent to improved physical health.

#### *Ayahuasca use because of physical health*

**P2:** ‘They diagnosed me when I was [AP: later in life] with multiple sclerosis.’

**P2:** ‘It was a pretty heavy disease and yeah, (Self: ‘Yeah’) most of the Western world sees it as a very heavy disease, as a very incurable and degenerative disease. (Self: ‘Yeah?’) So that kind of like, that was a big thing in my life I guess that has kind of helped me in all areas of my life and steered me to it [Amazonian shamanism].’

Participant 2 was unique in claiming that physical health was a reason for their interest in *curandeirismo*. They do not state whether or not *ayahuasca* helped with the physiological aspects of their diagnosis, but in Section 7.2 they claim it helped with the emotional and mental aspects of their diagnosis. Seeing them describe their condition as ‘very heavy’ and ‘degenerative’, suggests a difficult condition to manage day-to-day. A condition framed in ‘the Western World’ as ‘incurable’; while the prospect of a non-Western, shamanistic view offered a hope and opportunity for this individual. There was a chance to try something, as opposed to acquiescing to what can be a degenerative condition.

For other participants the preparatory diet; a renewed outlook on life; or spontaneity within the ritual, led them to make healthier lifestyle choices too. When being forced to make dietary changes to access the *ayahuasca* experience it is naturally easier to justify and motivate oneself to exert the same efforts in everyday life. In this sense the psychedelic and euphoric effects of *ayahuasca* could be viewed as a reward for lifestyle improvements.

### *Improved physical health after ayahuasca use*

**P4:** ‘I guess one change that has sort of happened side by side with everything has been, maybe, um, a better diet. Like, um, it might, I don’t think it was completely down to the *ayahuasca*, (Self: ‘Yeah’) but it’s obviously all just happened side by side. It’s just like over the last few years I’ve kind of changed my diet, (Self: ‘Yeah?’) and cut back a lot on meat, and tried to eat healthier basically.’

**P4:** ‘During some of the *ayahuasca* trips, it’s like you know, I’ve voluntarily done like yoga stretches, or I’ve just naturally learned how to stretch and stuff like (Self: ‘Um’) in different ways. Um, so yeah, I guess I’ve tried to do more of that stuff, like just tried to be more physically active and stuff like that, but yeah, I’m actually a stone lighter, is the first thing that I can think of.’

**P5:** ‘I [Since involvement in Amazonian shamanism] meditate, I do lots of Yoga, I do lots of walking in the country.’

**P10:** ‘Biologically, health wise, um, in, er, although I’m back on smoking now I mean with my first experience, like, yeah, for straight up, or a month after, or probably two weeks after that, not touched any, any drugs and hadn’t touched anything other than, I think I had a [magic] mushroom experience about three times, a month afterwards.’

**P10:** ‘The two-week preparation that I gave myself for the *ayahuasca* experience, er, the ritual, I kinda have stuck to that since, because the benefit on my body has been incredible. Just eating plant (Self: ‘Uhum’) you know, just eating vegetables, I haven’t touched meat since.’

**P10:** ‘I’ve been using my body to exercise. I’m not just going down to the gym now, using mechanicals [gym equipment], um, I won’t jump on a treadmill. I will literally go to the woods now, with the birds, and then go for a jog, er, you know? Play with the kids [young relatives] and stuff.’

**P10:** ‘Yeah a massive change, health um mental um fitness, across the board it’s been a complete shift.’

Other than with participant 2, improved physical health is treated by participants as a fortunate side effect. Participant 9 also reported relief from physical ailments for roughly a month after using *kambo* as noted in Section 6.3.1. However, these physical benefits are not reflected in the currently available peer reviewed research and have not been previously associated with the relevant compounds. This gain is found in personal change. It comes from a new focus, attitude, or outlook, all leading to new and healthier behaviours such as yoga practice, and dietary improvements. It is not that the practices have fixed, or directly treated existing physical maladies, but *curandeirismo* has promoted an improved attitude towards personal healthcare which, in turn, improves physical health in the individual.

## 7.4 Relationships

Another unexpected theme to emerge was that of repaired relationships. Participant 1 describes an experience where they felt they were speaking to the soul, or essence, of a past partner. They describe the ritual as forcing them to review the breakdown of the relationship and see where they may have taken an alternative attitude towards the partner. They were being shown that they had tried to change the partner and that this was unfair. They explain that this assisted in eradicating their feelings of bitterness towards the other person as they were able to take ownership for their part in the breakdown of the relationship.

### *Relationships*

**P1:** ‘My most immediate thing that it dealt with in that first session with the shaman, erm,.. ‘cause I had, had, like, this relationship that had been trouble from start to finish, and had only finished a couple of months previous, and I was still kind of in a bad place about it. Erm, I sort of met, I met my ex-boyfriend in one of the visions, (Self: ‘uhum’) and we had a conversation and it was a real conversation. You know, it wasn’t just like an imaginary, oh this is what he might say. He was a, a, the spirit of him, that I believe is everywhere, as are all of our spirits are everywhere.’

**P1:** ‘I was kind of bitter about him and about the way that he, I felt that he treated me. But in this conversation that we had, he was saying to me look, you know, “I told you all along this is who I am, and what right have you got, to, and I’m paraphrasing here, “what right have you got to go, to say that I should be something else (Self: ‘Yes’) You know, I’ve come to you completely upfront, why have you got a problem with that? Don’t lay, don’t lay that on me.” That was, that’s a key phrase. That’s the phrase that really stuck on my head.’

**P2:** ‘I’ve healed relationships with my family.’

Participant 2 does not elaborate; however, they had explained earlier that their relationship with their brother had been fraught, and that childhood was difficult<sup>76</sup>. For them, their involvement in *ayahuasca* rituals has resolved some of these issues.

*Ayahuasca* has offered an opportunity to review relationships with a new perspective; a more compassionate and resolution focused one. It appears to have removed anger, and hurt, and allowed the individual to have a more objective understanding, devoid of emotional baggage. It has enabled compassion in both the participants and this researcher.

## 7.5 Mental health

Throughout Chapter 5 reports of the potential of *ayahuasca*, as a treatment for certain mental health conditions, are found. Section 5.11.1 highlighted clinical trials are underway assessing its efficacy as a treatment for depression. Additionally, Section 4.1.2 showed that MAOIs have historically been used in the Occident as a treatment for depression, anxiety, and other related conditions.

Given the strong link between *ayahuasca* and the treatment of depression, it is remarkable that only two participants cited a will to improve their mental health as a specific motivator for involvement with *curandeirismo*. Participant 7 inferred it yet was not explicit. However, most participants did report improved mental well-being as an effect of their *ayahuasca* experience.

### *Improved mental health as a motivator*

**P7:** 'It's supposed to, at least from what I've read and what I've heard and understood, to be therapeutic in itself. It's supposed to have some kind of healing, um, developing, um, opening qualities. So that is something that I'm very interested in and finding out about.'

**P8:** 'I've got a certain amount of blocks that I've been trying to work through for years, and, and, despite being able to understand them, and know what they are, I just can't seem to stop behaviours attached to it, and, and, I have a huge dissatisfaction with standard Western medicine. It's not holistic enough.'

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<sup>76</sup> My own difficult upbringing had been a significant theme in my first, and most therapeutic *ayahuasca* ritual. I do not feel that I was given any new insight into what happened to me. I wasn't shown anything I wasn't already aware of. But I was able to view the past with a feeling of compassion. This helped relieve a lot of anger and frustration I carried. For me the relationships were beyond repair, but the release of anger was enough to prevent the past causing further upset in the future.



In Section 6.3 the discussion of *kambo* raised the idea of blocks, or mental barriers; this is present here with *ayahuasca* too, such as when participant 4 talks about ‘psychological issues and stuff’. This illustrates that both substances are being used to treat matters that are unfathomable or inexplicable to the participants; something off, yet intangible and difficult to explain. It may also suggest why the participants may not be approaching typical licensed, Occidental treatments. It is difficult to be hopeful that a therapist will be able to help when you cannot trust you will be able to articulate the issue. The fantastical, intangible, and exotic world of ‘shamanism’ appears as a more reasonable place to find answers, especially if it is delivered directly into your stream of consciousness via a potent psychedelic experience. With *ayahuasca* you are your own therapist. Shame, embarrassment, fear or prejudice, guilt, will not present as barriers to communication and truth between therapist and patient. Deep within the psyche, as it traverses the often fantastical, sometimes overwhelming landscape of the psychedelic, is a place where words become irrelevant, devoid of their utility, and stripped of any meaning; in this space sits the potential for answers, hard lessons, redemption, and solutions.

### *Ayahuasca as an antidepressant*

**P2:** ‘It’s helped me, um, not... I’ve found it very hard to be here a lot of my life. You know? I’ve suffered from depression for a long time. (Self: ‘Yeah’) I had quite a difficult childhood if I’m honest and that’s probably, I see that now, as why I got sick in the first place. It’s me not, just not meant to be here. Um and I’ve had to face a lot of stuff in *ayahuasca*, and when you do it brings things up to heal right? (Self: ‘Uhum’) so it’s helped me to forgive, and it’s helped me to heal. I felt stronger.’

**P2:** ‘Yeah it’s just given me more purpose to my life, ‘cause for a long time I just thought life was just a big pile of shit.’

**P6:** ‘I suffer heavily from depression. I have done from a very early age, (Self: ‘Right’) and, um, been prescribed many different kinds of medications, breakdowns...’

**P6:** ‘Being so heavily medicated from the prescription drugs I wasn’t dealing with anything.’

**P6:** ‘Once I’d experienced the *ayahuasca*, slowly things started making more sense. Like I wanted to make, I wanted to get up in the morning at an early, at an early time.’

**P6:** ‘I’d wake up at the latest time that I could to get to university and I’d always be late. But since I’ve been doing this practice, I’ve noticed that, that isn’t happening. I’ve got an enthusiasm that wasn’t there before. I’ve got a lust for life.’

**P6:** ‘I’ve noticed over the last, since my last one which was in December um I’ve been, um, I’ve been more focused and I’ve wanted to do stuff. So, I believe that the *ayahuasca* has helped me do that.’

**P6:** ‘It’s healed me. It’s stopped me from having really heavy, heavy, heavy, bouts of depression, and, um, suicidal thoughts.’

**P11:** ‘*Ayahuasca* certainly has an antidepressant effect, er, that’s without a doubt, um, but that’s not, that’s not the entire picture.’

Participants 2 and 6 have especially impactful stories that claim their *ayahuasca* use as significantly life changing. Participant 2 looked for physical relief yet found an altered mindset and attitude towards their condition helpful instead. Participant 6 shared their long history of depression and the treatments they received. Their situation reads as hopeless. They speak of their prescribed medication as more of an hinderance to their well-being than an aid. They claim that *ayahuasca* helped them to make more sense of their situation, and provided the motivation needed to have more structure to their day. Even more remarkable is the claim that it stopped them feeling suicidal<sup>77</sup>.

Participant 8 notes how they felt the impact tapered off as time passed between them and their last ritual:

‘like not seeing somebody’. They experienced improved mental health temporarily. To participant 8 this is not a miracle cure (akin to a ‘pill’ or ‘medicine’ in the Occidental sense), but a practice that requires maintenance to prevent the effects wearing off.

### *Other effects on mental well-being*

**P4:** ‘It wasn’t like I had a specific issue, but, um, obviously yeah it brings up issues for you. (Self: ‘Yeah?’) It brings up your issues to have a look at probably.’

**P4:** ‘It’s not like, I mean, everyone’s got psychological (Self: ‘Yeah, yeah’) issues and stuff, and I knew they would come up, but yeah it wasn’t like I had specific, um, (Self: ‘Yeah?’) intention just to set anything straight in my mind that needed to be, like, looked at again. (Self: ‘Yeah?’) That hadn’t properly been digested in the past or something like that.’

**P5:** ‘Suddenly my sort of insecurities around stuff like that just really melted away.’

**P8:** ‘I don’t think it’s necessarily altered what was going on in my head anyway about stuff. I think it, maybe it’s just made it a bit clearer.’

**P8:** ‘It’s [the perceived efficacy] declined since Christmas, with the seasonally affected disorder and you know, if you don’t do something that’s like not seeing somebody innit? It’s like they don’t exist anymore and you drift, it gets fainter the more distance there is in time.

**P8:** ‘Yeah so it removed a block, it must have done.’

**P10:** ‘I don’t feel restricted anymore (Self: ‘U-hum.’) so I can just talk and talk, and I can talk sense. It always makes sense in one way or another, whereas when you ask me a question now, I give it a straight answer, whereas before I’d mumble, or I’d be very withheld from making my case clear.

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<sup>77</sup> [CN: Depression] This fits in well with my own story of *ayahuasca*. My first experience came following a period of very severe depression and suicidal ideation. I was reluctant to use the SSRIs prescribed by my GP as I had seen first-hand that they reduce attentiveness and could prevent the experience of happiness. Furthermore, I was concerned about claims that fluoride, of which many SSRIs are made, could slightly reduce general cognitive abilities. I had recently started a programme of cognitive behavioural therapy and was told to expect it to take a year before things changed for me. I did not feel I had a year to wait, I was quite desperate. Having previously experienced the psychedelic state, and following a little research, I did not feel that there was anything to lose by trying *ayahuasca*. Following my first experience, it felt as though it allowed me to go over some past traumas with a fresh, matured, and compassionate perspective. This for me was an exceptionally therapeutic experience and took away the worst of my depression at that time. The change in my outlook was vast.

There was also a noted ‘block’ removal, but similarly this benefit required upkeep to maintain<sup>78</sup>.

‘Mental health’ is a term applied to a variety of psychological conditions that present with an array of symptoms. The participants in this research focused in on those issues related to depression and anxiety, which is also reflected in the autoethnography. When we consider the efficacy of current treatments for this type of mental health concern, we start to see a cultural reason for the participants to seek solutions that are ‘out of the ordinary’. For example, only low-quality evidence supports the efficiency of antidepressants when compared to the use of a placebo, and only moderate evidence to support the claim that antidepressants reduce alcohol consumption in these cases (Agabio, Trogu, and Paolo Pani, 2018). This highlights that involvement with *curandeirismo* is not necessarily a will of the individual to be different, or rebellious, so much as explore alternative options available to them for their elusive, and intangible barriers. This is also reflected in participant 2’s account in Section 7.2, where a sense of fatalism from the Occidental framing was countered by the hope offered by *curandeirismo*. In this sense, it may be that for some participants it is inconsequential that *ayahuasca* is exotic, or that it produces hallucinations; what is more important is that their mind-set and lived experience is improved by exploring an alternative to the conventional methods on offer through, for example, the NHS.<sup>79</sup>

To compare this to the findings of the visual ethnography data turn to Appendix 8 for details on Activity 3. The exercise explored how closely participants related to, and how important they found, certain aspects of Occidental Culture. Relevant here are the reactions to pharmaceutical medicine and the NHS. The resulting images can be found in Appendix 13. Participant 4 shows us that they link the NHS and pharmaceutical

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<sup>78</sup> [CN: Depression] Where I felt great relief to my depression after my first use of *ayahuasca*, the upbeat and motivated lust for life I felt tapered off after a few weeks too. The depression was no longer debilitating, but it still felt like life was more difficult for me than most. In the summer of 2015, I experienced a very traumatic event which triggered severe depression, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. At this point I was unable to access *ayahuasca* and was forced to use conventional occidental methods as treatments. SSRIs coupled with EMDR therapy helped me through this difficult experience.

<sup>79</sup> As already highlighted, this was the primary motivator for my own experiments with *ayahuasca*. The 12 months I was told that CBT would take to become effective was too long to live with the state of mind I was experiencing at the time. I felt it necessity to seek a more immediate solution.

medication intrinsically. The positionality in the image shows that these aspects are perceived as having importance and though bound in a protective casing of family and friends that they are close to the individual when compared with government, religion, or science. Alternatively, participants 9 and 10 illustrate a closeness to the NHS, but not to pharmaceuticals. This shows us that there has not been a complete abandonment of Occidental healthcare. The NHS is still seen as important and participants feel some relationship to it, but not all treatments available.

## 7.6 Addiction

Returning to the interview data, three participants discussed the impact of *ayahuasca* on their addictive behaviours. As with depression, there was existing discussion amongst the academic, and *ayahuasca*-using community about the potential of *ayahuasca* in treating addiction prior to this research.

Participant 1 speaks of alcoholism, and as seen with participant 8 above, it is claimed that *ayahuasca* delivered some initial improvement, but this was not sustained long-term. Participant 1 rationalises the improvements as being connected to the preparatory diet. This pairs with that seen in Section 7.3 where participants highlighted improvements to their diet and fitness regimes. The same assertion fits here; being instructed to follow such extreme dietary restrictions for the ritual is acting as a gateway for community

### Addiction

**P1:** 'I got a lot of value out of the *ayahuasca*, but unfortunately that very same week, erm, a tragedy happened and I started drinking again.'

**P1:** 'Because I had had to do the cleansing, purifying thing in preparation for the *ayahuasca*, and, erm, I was kind to committed to carrying that on, but then I kind of let it slip because of the tragedy.'

**P1:** 'I have got a communication blockage, you know, this is partly why I drink too much, because I don't feel like I can communicate properly without it, and erm, so, it's like somehow it felt like that crying was helping to unblock that as well. It didn't cure it all in one go, obviously, because you know I still carried on drinking for ages.'

**P5:** 'I've been clean for about 6 months, um, like properly clean, that's not like no methadone.'

**P5:** 'I really sort of got my life stable again.'

**P5:** 'I think based on my own research and what not, I know how it, it, I'm convinced it could really help people with addictions, or even mental illness (Self: 'Yeah?') 'cause it just un-learns your behaviours.'

**P5:** 'I'm a lot more aware now of like, um, as a being, like, um, every single little thing that you do has a consequence, (Self: 'Yeah?') but

members to self-enforce beneficial changes to their lifestyle<sup>80</sup> irrespective of their initial motivators. Participant 1 is candid in reporting that these beneficial changes were short lived, and decline was triggered by an unexpected tragedy. While the benefits may be perceived as significant and life changing by some, for others it is a temporary aid; suggesting, as highlighted in Section 7.4, that the ongoing practice is a key feature of the experienced efficacy.

that's like a power that you have to do good. If that makes any sense to you. (Self: 'It does, yeah.') Yeah, I definitely think *ayahuasca* tuned me to that, like, I was very, um, after the second experience my, um, using the coke it definitely curtailed it measurably. (Self: 'Uhum') Like, um, I don't recall that thing like a conscious decision I made. It just sort of filtered out really.'

**P11:** '*Ayahuasca*, yes, may help addicts of alcohol, addicts of alcohol, um, I don't know whether it would help, er, opiate addicts. It didn't help me from my particular thing, which was very close to alcohol addiction.'

The story of participant 5 alternatively, illustrates the potential that these practices have in dramatically changing lives. This individual went to Bolivia, specifically to traffic cocaine. 'That's not like no...' was the start of an abandoned thought. The word 'no' here creates a double negative and can be fairly interpreted as a claim to still be using methadone. Yet, given that they later allege to only seek out plant-based medicine, shows that their intention was instead to communicate that they are no longer using methadone. Initially, not only were they committing an act of self-destruction, but also planning to profit from the detriment of others. In the eyes of both law and society this was an exceedingly low ebb. They did not set out to use *ayahuasca* to treat addiction. However, they do profess that the *ayahuasca* experience provided insights and perspective that helped them curtail their use and become free of addiction.

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<sup>80</sup> When I first experienced *ayahuasca* I was a smoker, I drank moderate amounts of alcohol and would occasionally use MDMA. The rituals themselves did not mention any thoughts or feelings around these activities. However, one day while having lunch at work, eating plain brown rice and steamed cabbage in preparation for my next ritual, a colleague began to question my choice of food that day. Rather than reveal my true reasons for the diet I simply said, 'I'm detoxing'. Their response struck me as the simplest, yet most obvious logic, that I had not considered myself. 'Well then why do you smoke?' they asked. They were correct to ask this. What was the point of all this 'work' and effort to improve my mental and spiritual self, if I abandoned my physical health? With this perspective I found no difficulty in stopping these behaviours. This abstinence was sustained substantially.

## 08. Ontology

‘The ideas, reflections, and insights that the brew generates may be of a personal and psychological nature, intellectual ones pertaining to whatever domains are of interest to the individual in question, and general philosophical and metaphysical ones. The latter usually have to do with what may be characterised as the fundamental riddles of Existence [sic]- the ontology of the world, the nature of life, basic questions regarding the human predicament, the meaning of history and culture, and - last but surey not least - with mysteries pertaining to the Divine’. (Shanon, B. 2002: pp. 50 -51)

To understand better how this chapter holds the meaning of ontology, the following punctuation to Shannon’s words above offers clarity:

‘The fundamental riddles of Existence - the ontology of the world: the nature of life; basic questions regarding the human predicament; the meaning of history and culture; and last but surey not least - with mysteries pertaining to the Divine’. Ontology is not a separate riddle; it is all of them.

‘Ontology’ is a neologism coined in early modern times from Greek roots. Its meaning is easy to grasp; *on* is the present participle of the Greek *einai*, which means ‘to be’, and *logos* derives from *legein*, ‘to talk about’ or ‘to give an account of’ something. Accordingly, ontology is the discourse that has being as its subject matter’ (Hennig, 2008: p. 39). Being is a nebulous concept and as such the term ontology has been interpreted and applied in a variety of ways throughout the history of philosophy. For the purpose of this thesis the term ontology is used to represent the way in which participants interpret their reality and make sense of the relationships between different aspects of their identities, which expands further than religious ideologies alone to include political beliefs, personal philosophies, and idiosyncratic standpoints.

The participants of this research did not identify as members of the syncretic religions associated with *ayahuasca* that were covered in Section 3.2.2. However, some did take part in the rituals of the *Santo Daime*, as far as the rituals they attended were honourable reproductions. The accounts of Chapter 6 illustrated that these were delivered by someone formally indoctrinated into the faith, and within the confinements of circumstance, in Britain. Other participants experienced guided ‘neo-shamanic’, or, self-designed, rituals. Given the varied forms of ritual,

and varied ideologies, it would be too restrictive to focus on ‘religious beliefs’ alone. To incorporate the wider spectrum of philosophy and thought displayed by participants, the term ‘ontology’ is more relevant. By analysing participants’ ontology, we can see the links between the paranormal, religion, folklore, and metaphysics: The fundamental riddles of existence.

Section 6.1 provided details of the early religious, and spiritual, influences, and perspectives, of the participants. For a minority of participants, these were influences not native to Britain, yet for a slight majority they were typical Christian and Catholic teachings. This insight into their early teachings and influences is a foundation for the focus of this chapter; where the development of their understanding of nature can be seen - nature here is defined in the broadest sense of the word. By comparing their earlier influences and later points of view, we can see where there are shifts of opinion, and where this might have been influenced by *curandeirismo*.

## **8.1 On mainstream religions**

Discussion of religion, especially mainstream religions, was significant in the interviews. Not just because of focus on participants’ religious upbringing, but also because they had lots to say about it in the present. No participants were practicing the religion impressed upon them as a child in adulthood. Many of the participants described themselves as spiritual in some way prior to involvement with *curandeirismo*. Each participant’s story involved elements of liberation, and transformation with respect to their religious beliefs. Their current thoughts on mainstream religion, at the time of interview, can be broken down into three categories: control, resistance, and spiritual scrapbooking.

### 8.1.1 Control

This section illustrates a significant criticism put out by a small group of participants about the exercise of control by mainstream religions. Participant 2 was pressured to attend church at an early age. Yet they, as an individual, did not see any reason for it. To them there was no benefit in a hollow act they were made to perform.

Participant 3, in expressing that religions are a construct, i.e., manufactured, insinuates that in respect to their individual ontology, religions have limited, or little value. This is an interesting perspective to take if we consider that it is only possible for humanity to translate such matters through its available faculties. It suggests that this individual recognises the limitations of the human condition and interprets any attempt to assert ontological, perspectives based upon them as futile, or lacking validity.

**P2:** 'It was just forced upon me and it was just normal going to church, but then I was just kind of; "why am I interested in this? It's just boring.'"

**P3:** 'Religion for me is just another form of control, and like many other things they're just constructs, human constructs.'

**P6:** 'Hinduism, Buddhism um, um, um Hari Krishna, Christian what is it, the Christian God things but they were a bit, they were cultish and um and I still think a lot of religions are cultish.'

Participant 6 goes as far as listing a range of contrasting mainstream religions and branding them 'cultish'. This term carries considerable connotations. These are seen in a justification of the term 'New Religious Movement' (NRM):

The term, NRMs' is generally used by academics, because, first, it is considered to be neutral and value-free, unlike the terms 'cult' or 'sect', which have assumed negative connotations in popular usage, especially when combined with adjectives, such as 'bizarre' or 'destructive'. They imply that groups with this label can be submitted under one heading and thus share a set of characteristics, an implication which academics working in this fields have sought to counterbalance. Second, in the sociology of religion, 'cult' and 'sect' are used as technical terms to describe types of religious groups which are distinct from NRMs. Some argue, however, that the term 'cult' has become unusable for social scientists because it has become lumbered with baggage and politicized [sic]. Finally, academics want to use language which reflects understanding of the phenomenon - in this sense the term 'NRM' has political implications. However, some social scientists have used the term 'cults' in reference to NRMs. (Arweck, 2002: 323)



This participant was not referring to NRMs in using the word cult, so it can be found that their intention was to convey negative connotations. The term evoked an image of a group under the coercion of cunning, and charismatic leaders who abuse their power. The most infamous and disturbing cult is the case of the People's Temple. In 1978, the People's Temple leader, Jim Jones, successfully instructed over 900 followers to participate in a mass suicide by drinking a soft drink laced with cyanide (Edmunds, 2011: pp. 16-17). This type of influence is not obtained without coercion and control. For participant 6, once you are in and indoctrinated to a religion, you have little hope of mental independence, thanks to the associated power dynamics and pressures.

This is also reflected in participant 7's response to the visual ethnographic Activity one, found in Appendix 11. None of their associated words are favourable in response to the theme 'religion'. 'Control' is featured explicitly, as well as 'controlling', and 'submission'.

### **8.1.2 Resistance**

A small sample of the participants resisted the idea of organised religion too. Two participants denounced the notion of being part of an established religion entirely. It could not be clearer than for participants 5 and 6 that it is not for them.

This is found in the visual ethnography responses to activity one's prompt 'religion', found in Appendix 11 too. Participant 7 sits unambiguously with participants 5 and 6 in a resistive stance towards religion by stating 'not important to me'.

**P4:** [On religion] 'There's always gonna be spiritual truths, or actual truths in these things, but the way people act about them is kind of like hypocritical, in a way 'cause they're trying to teach you a lesson, but then not displaying it.'

**P5:** 'I consider myself somewhat of an atheist.'

**P6:** '[I've] Fallen out with religion many a time, denounced the belief system in God, um, on a number of occasions.'

Participant 10 lists a host of horrific concepts that relate to religion yet also manage to find room for complementary comments too. This participant is of Muslim and Catholic heritage. As they say in Section 6.1, this tapered off in their parents' generation. They themselves were open to new theories and ideas at the time the data was collected and did not appear to be against religion in their interview, though

the visual data clearly shows they see faults in it. Turning to *curandeirismo* was not a rebellious act to this individual, they did not shun their heritage. They were finding their own path and exploring different religious ideas, of which *curandeirismo* was a part.

Participant 4 shows a similar dualistic view towards religion. They present three strong and bold compliments towards religion in their visual ethnography responses. Sympathy is conveyed in the view that religion is used as a scapegoat. Simultaneously, they highlight that it can be weaponised, and that its teachers can be hypocrites. This shows an attempt to be fair to the concept of religion, rather than focus on intolerance. There is a room for religion in these responses, but it is not an innocent and entirely beneficent aspect of society.

Alternatively, participant 9's visual response to 'religion' shows no resistance at all. It shows a love towards religion, and a distinct connection to both the earth and celestial bodies. This participant has not translated the term religion in the same way as other participants. They depict what they personally chose to worship. They show that religion is worship, not the common beliefs and the organisation of a group. They embrace, rather than resist religion, in part owing to their liberal interpretation of the term. This is a development from their earlier religious leanings as they shared in Section 6.1. As a child they were taken to Sunday School, and as a young adult they identified as Rastafarian. At the time of the interviews, they showed reverence to nature and celestial bodies as part of their worship.

### 8.1.3 Spiritual scrapbooking

Participant 6 expressed what may be termed ‘spiritual scrapbooking’. This is the act of choosing aspects of mainstream religions, to create a collage of beliefs depending on what best aligns with how the individual interprets their answers to the fundamental puzzles of existence. It is not the practice of changing religions, it is that of taking elements from a range of religions into one’s own practice, or ontology.

In Section 6.1, under ‘Religion and spirituality’, participant 10 also revealed their practice of spiritual scrapbooking. Considering the varied religious influences they had from their family this is likely to be a natural progression for them. There are also signs of spiritual scrapbooking from participant 9 in their response to the prompt ‘God’ in Activity one of the visual ethnography (Appendix 11). They mention both the Bible, from Christianity and Catholicism, and Sri Yantra from Hinduism.

**P4:** ‘I respect a lot of religions.’

**P6:** ‘I’m a bit like a magpie,<sup>81</sup> so I take a little bit of that from that religion, and (Self: ‘Yeah’) from that religion, and that philosophy, (Self: ‘Yeah’) and bring them all, and try and hopefully develop my own well-being.’

**P6:** ‘It has to be about a positive thing really to me, um, that makes me think, ah that was, that was beautiful, I’m gonna keep that.’

To a small degree this was also seen in participant 4 in their respect for all religions, ontologically speaking, although there is no clear sign that they adopt any practices from the religions that they encounter either.

This links to the ‘theory of learning’ within individualised, postmodern religious practice:

‘Individualized forms of religion tend to adopt unplanned and undirected rhizomatic networks of producer-consumers, which both result from and enable their culture of radical personal autonomy’ (Wanless, 2016: 11). Metaphorically speaking, spiritual scrapbooking is the

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<sup>81</sup>The notion of being a religious magpie fits with my own approach to established religion. For me religion represents someone else’s view of how the world works. Something we as a species have been unable to define with certainty. Established religions all contain some elements of good moral guidance. However, by their nature they become abused, misinterpreted, and used to defend, tribalism, hatred and violence. I have ‘window shopped’ many mainstream, and a few not so mainstream, religions in my own quest for spiritual guidance. In each I have found good ethics, and yet contradictions, or claims that require a vivid imagination to accept as truth too. In taking the elements that fit well with my pre-existing ideologies, and rejecting those that do not, I too have formed my ontology by way of spiritual scrapbooking.

practice of illustrating one's ontology with the help of pictures found in the magazines of others who have attempted to depict the intangible. It is therefore marked by the creative process which the participants used to construct an individual ontology. This might accompany an act considered 'cultural appropriation' to some, yet being faith based it is fundamentally separate from colonial ideals of cultural domination or superiority. It could also be interpreted as a post-imperialistic sentiment with religions typical in the Occident being considered equal, or inferior, to those other cultures.

This breaking away from the traditional Christianity, and Catholicism practiced in Britain is part of a much broader phenomenon and not specific to those moving towards *curandeirismo*. One study of the changing religious landscape in Britain tells us:

'The declining influence of religion – particularly Christianity – in western societies [sic] has been a chief topic of the study of religion for over a century, but in recent years the emergence of something called 'spirituality' has – increasingly – demanded attention' (Heelas, Woodhead, and Seel, et al, 2005: 1). This study is underpinned with the theory of 'The Subjective Turn' which is explained:

'The turn' is shorthand for a major cultural shift of which we all have some experience. It is a turn away from life lived in terms of external or 'objective' roles, duties and obligations, and a turn towards life lived by reference to one's own subjective experiences (relational as much as individualistic)' (Heelas, Woodhead, and Seel, et al, 2005: 2).

The work focused on the area of Kendal, in the northwest of England, and found no evidence of a significant spiritual revolution that might immediately threaten established religions in the area, or in Britain. However, it did find several 'mini-revolutions', where those involved in the newer 'spiritual milieu' now outnumbered every major denomination, except the Anglicans (Heelas, Woodhead, and Seel, et al, 2005: 46). *Curandeirismo* does not feature in that research, yet it is, nationally, part of this spiritual milieu identified.

When considering the reason behind the nascent shift, it states:

The basic premise of the subjectivization [sic] thesis is perfectly simple. With ever increasing numbers of people having come to value what subjective-life has to offer, the tendency is for forms of associational activity that locate the sacred within to be doing well. For when the sacred, or spirituality is experienced as lying in the heart of who you are, as coming from 'You' (not least by way of relationships) it can hardly dictate or constrain who you are.  
(Heelas, Woodhead, and Seel, et al, 2005: pp.125-126)

This is exactly what we see with *ayahuasca*. The experience is deeply personal, unique, and comes from within. The *curandeiro* does not drink on behalf of the individual and carry message to them through it. Rather, the individual drinks for themselves and traverses their own, individualised, subjective experience. Furthermore:

'The time in which we were the social reflection of our parents is gone. Their religion, ethnicity, class, political affiliation, taste and distaste are no longer so easily transmitted from one generation to another. Even if there are exceptions, the trend of today is to create one's own biography/identity. People in this modern age pick and choose what suits them for their identity at a specific time and place' (Possamai, 2007: pp. 20-21)

These broader shifts in spiritual practices help to frame why, despite the prevalence of Christian influence in many of the participants' early upbringing, their personal views, and affiliation with religion have shifted significantly. Not because they found *curandeirismo*, but they found *curandeirismo* because of it. With a will to find a personal ontology, irrespective of family or community, the idea of direct communication with 'the divine' the Indigenous *curandeiro* claim, could not be more individualised, or internalised.

## 8.2 God and spirit

Almost all of the participants supplied a description of their idea of God, or Spirit, as a means of understanding, and explaining how the universe and nature operate. Their words represent a range of ideas and attempt to articulate what is an infinitely vast and abstract concept.

In Section 8.1.2, participants 5 outright declares their atheism, as does participant 11 in Section 6.1. Here, participant 9 states that they do not believe in any particular God. However, this is not a decree of atheism, instead they go onto explain a belief system closer to polytheism, using the term 'higher powers' instead of 'Gods'. None of the descriptions of 'God' put forward fit with the Abrahamic religions, which is of little surprise given the sentiments shared about organised religion in Section 8.1. Still, most do allude to, or

God

**P1:** 'I kind of don't make the differentiation between myself and God, or anyone else and God,'

**P2:** 'God is all source.'<sup>82</sup>

**P2:** 'I asked from the [*ayahuasca*] experience, what God was, (Self: 'Yep?') basically, because I was giving an intention (Self: 'Yep,') and what happened was it was like I fell into a loop of just infinity and in that moment I understand infinity my brain wasn't having a struggle finding out understanding it.'

**P2:** 'God, or whatever you want to call it, is just this expansive creativity.'

**P2:** 'I have a problem saying the word God to you, because I think [word unclear] I think an old man in the sky that we were taught you know.'

**P5:** 'I would definitely say now that I was touched by an entity greater than myself. I would call it a God but the word God doesn't really do justice to what I felt.'

**P6:** 'It was always about this romance. Is there some higher being there and helping the hu, human race and everything on the Earth to grow, and flourish, and die, and live, and re-birth? and so I was always, always interested in that, and still am.'

**P9:** 'I don't believe there's um any particular God.'

**P9:** 'I think there's lots of higher powers out there (Self: 'Yeah?') and it's just down to us to, um, cram our heads with [word unknown] from that [Laughter] to be able to give ourselves a broader aspect on what life is or what is the real meaning of life or what is our purpose.'

**P10:** 'God is within us.'

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<sup>82</sup> This quote sums up my own approach to the notion of God. Unlike some participants I am not averse to using the term but use it as shorthand with the knowledge that it can misrepresent what I am trying to describe. The all power, the creator, the essence within and behind nature, this is God. Having been a practitioner of religious scrapbooking I prefer the Hermetic teaching that God is living mind the most. The explanation given within the Kyballion makes a lot of sense to me.

describe, a higher, universal, power in some form, *Spirit*

including the notion 'God is all'.

In addition, more than half of the participants expressed a belief in the existence of a spirit. They either referred to their own spirit, the spirit of the deceased, or energy and entities. Participants 1 and 2 share the notion of a universal spirit, linked to participant 2's earlier claim that 'God is all source'. Clearly there is cross over in the meanings of 'God', 'Higher power', and 'spirit'. While individually participants have unique ontologies in this respect, they agree that there is something beyond what is experienced via human senses.

**P1:** 'All of our spirits are everywhere.'

**P1:** [On a recent bereavement] 'It's like the spirit that was in her, concentrated into this physical form, has then sort of like evaporated and gone back into everything. You know, it's in the trees and the grass and the mushrooms and everything.'

**P2:** 'I do believe in spirits.'

**P3:** 'I don't particularly care for the term animism, um, but I like the idea, um, of the concept in terms of everything as energy, everything as spirit, and I've kind of coined my own kind of term, which 's nectarism.'

**P3:** 'Perhaps my higher self; my spirit thinks I'm not ready.'

**P6:** 'Spirits I have experienced but I've, what I believe to be a spirit, entering, enters the room on a couple on two occasions.'

**P9:** 'Spiritual healing is something that everybody should have as part of their timetable.'

**P11:** 'We connect with entities which are very real but in a non-physical reality.'

### *Other belief systems*

**P2:** 'Well the Universe was always guiding me.'

**P11:** 'In terms of my belief systems, um, I'm a very much a pragmatist, and very much a scientist.'

The visual ethnography data in Appendix 11, and the responses to the word 'God', shows that while participant 7 affirms their atheism, the other participants embrace the notion. Participant 7 also shows that they equally feel that 'God' lacks meaning, is misunderstood and is beyond understanding. This shows that they have tried to grasp 'God' as a concept, from a variety of prospects, and yet found it too vast and intangible.

Participant 4 tells that the word ‘God’ carries negative connotation, and open to interpretation. Uniquely they also see God<sup>83</sup> as a verb. One is God through one’s behaviour. We also see an outpouring of complimentary associations from participants 9 and 10, the latter going as far to arrange their words into the symbol of love. They embrace the concept of God as a beneficent force, writing ‘self’ as an indication that this force is within all of us.

When considering the interview data and visual ethnography in combination, it is clear that most participants embrace a belief in ‘God’ in some respect, however they have individualised understandings of what this means: God is within; God is the self; God is soul; God is spirit; God is a verb. As a religious phenomenon, for those that approach it in this respect, *curandeirismo* in Britain, appears to be a subjective practice and open to unique interpretation. For them it is not a religion at all. It is a spiritual practice in keeping with what has been seen in the wider religious landscape of Britain as highlighted in Section 8.1.3<sup>84</sup>.

### 8.3 Innate powers

Some participants wanted to share the belief that we all have innate, spiritual, and ‘shamanic’, powers. At times, their words make no separation between spirit and God. Entities are spoken of as manifestations of the mind and simultaneously as separate to it.

Participant 1 is suggesting that prayer is not talking to a separate, paternal God, rather, it is talking to your inner self and guiding

*It is already within us*

**P1:** [on prayer] ‘It’s not a specific thing to one religion, or, well, lots of different religions pray, but it’s not about religion so much as it’s about re-connecting with that inner, wise, wizard, you know? Um, and quietening yourself down so that you can really sense what the right course of action for things is.’

**P4:** ‘There’s non-physical planes of existence on the Earth, and (Self: ‘um?’) all at the same time, these beings can be influenced by your own subconscious. That’s where it’s a bit of a grey area, because some of it’s your own subconscious projections, (Self: ‘yeah’) and some of it is actually

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<sup>83</sup> It is understood that in this instance God would not be capitalised. However, it is written here to represent how it was presented in Activity One of the visual ethnography elements of this research.

<sup>84</sup> As seen in the quote by Heelas, Woodhead, and Seel, et al, 2005: pp.125-126.



your own actions. We also see this idea of an innate power spoken of as an infinite reservoir of love that can be accessed when needed by participant 11.

Another side of this discussion concerns the use of innate human powers and the ability to enter shamanic-like states of trance without the use of psychedelic substances. This was raised by two individuals and speaks on the perceived efficacy of the rituals. They assert that the learning and benefits they gained from these practices went beyond the psychedelic experience alone; anything these rituals may do with the substances, we have the innate ability to achieve without them. The substances are seen as short-cuts; a tool to speed up and enhance the attainment of special states and experiences.

For these participants there is more to the human condition than what is typically acknowledged by both society, and mainstream religion. We are our own ‘God’, with *ayahuasca* we access our inner spirit/God self easier and quicker. This is a fraction removed from the Indigenous notion of spirit guides, so denotes a stratification from *curandeirismo*. For the Indigenous Amazonians, the brew offers humans the ability to receive help from a connection to the spirit world; to some British users it is a short cut to a pre-existing, individual, innate power, which would otherwise sit dormant. There is a humility in the Amazonian’s translation. They are but human and these blessed plant

like an external presence, like other than yourself, that’s sort of coming to interact with you.’

**P11:** ‘They [entities] once told me very directly, that all the love that we’ll feel in our lives, our love for our parents, our grandparents, our siblings, our children, our partners, all that love that we will ever feel in, throughout our lives, actually comes from within us. It cannot come from outside. It’s within us. It’s a bottomless well. It’s there to be tapped into.’

### *Shamanic states of trance without substances*

**P2:** ‘I see it definitely as guiding me and eventually I hope to one day be able to get into that state without needing it.’

**P2:** ‘I have kind of I’ve fallen into journeys without having to take anything but it takes training and meditation and stuff.’

**P5:** ‘You could take the substances away and I would still be a shaman. (Self: ‘Yeah?’) I would still practice my beliefs. Do you know what I mean? (Self: ‘Yeah’) Like, um, and I would say it’s a very spiritual thing. It’s like, I can’t really explain it. I didn’t get up one morning and decide to be a shaman, do you know what I mean? (Self: ‘Yeah’) It was very much a re, re-birth, (Self: ‘Yeah’) a reincarnation. It feels like, like I’ve been reincarnated. It feels like I was always a shaman.’

gives them a chance to speak with their ancestors. For the British they are but human but can become greater humans by using these plants to access what is there, but typically unused. It is not about the ancestors, and what has been before, it is about individual capacity.

The combination of two disparate cultures, and their legacies, morph into a new plateau on the rhizomatic network of phenomena. It is an empowering sentiment too. God, and the formidable power that many are raised to believe, and trust in, is nothing more than oneself. This framing offers an individual the perception of tremendous control over their personal fate.

## 8.4 Matters paranormal

Within the complicated rhizome of interrelated ontological archetypes, there was significant reference made towards the supernatural. This is to be expected within the context of Amazonian shamanistic practices. Spirits, entities, taboos, and ritual, are all firmly established elements of the divine *logos* in shamanic cultures:

‘Reports of paranormal experiences with *Ayahuasca* [sic] abound. Practically everyone who has had more than a rudimentary exposure to the brew reports having had telepathic experiences’. (Shanon, B, 2002: 256)

Participants mention of out of body experiences, entities, past lives, re-birth<sup>85</sup>, clairvoyance, telekinesis, and psychic abilities. These beliefs were put forward without any hint of frivolity or jest and appeared important to those that

**P2:** ‘[On *ayahuasca*] ‘It’s just being allowed to leave your physical vessel for a while.’

**P3:** ‘It has the ability to um clear um unwanted entities.’

**P3:** ‘I know people who have had a past life experiences, um, and for me it’s not a case of having the experience to, and I’m not going to say believe, but to know, because I know it’s a reality.’

**P3:** ‘Not necessarily the Bible, but reading um, um, things like past lives, um, things like, um, out of body experience, um, things like near death experience and all that kind of stuff, that has helped, kind of shaped, um, the way now I see myself and the world as a whole.’

**P6:** ‘Through my experiences um I’ve died and I’ve been re-born.’

**P9:** ‘That’s what I was looking for, um, soul cleansing and probably, um, extracting any negative energies that may have lting themselves on my (Self: ‘Yeah?’) being or psyche.’

**P10:** ‘I had um a massive um out of body experience.’

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<sup>85</sup> It is unclear here if the participant 6 is referring to a metaphorical, or spiritual re-birth, or reincarnation.

mentioned them. There was little doubt or shyness in the participants as they declared these matters as part of their ontology.

On one occasion I sat awaiting an *ayahuasca* ritual with participant 9. When I asked why they had come to *ayahuasca* I was told a story of paranoia, fear, and a long running struggle with a powerful, yet unprovable, entity that had been plaguing them.

The participant was matter of fact in their delivery of their tale<sup>86</sup>. They told me of the thousands of pounds that had been spent on treatments, rituals, and practices to remove this entity, and how none of them had worked.

## 8.5 Vibrations and dimensions

The subjects of other worlds, alternative realities, and the existence of multiple dimensions are rarely far from the discussion of shamanistic cultures and behaviours. This is reflected here, in the discourse of the participants, who emulate *curandeirismo* in Britain.

Participants came across as confident when describing nature in terms of ‘frequency’. The language of physics and mathematics supplies firm

**P10:** ‘If you leave your body for an instance during meditation, or through one of those experiences, um, you can see everything else that’s around you.’

**P10:** ‘How many levels of consciousness would we have to, er, achieve, say if I can go to a new level of consciousness and I can see spirits, or I can do clairvoyancy, or psychic, or telekinesis, and that sort of stuff, (Self: ‘Um,’) um, how many more stages will I need to go to know the lot? (Self: ‘Yep?’) Almost a Christ level consciousness.’

### *Vibration and energy*

**P3:** ‘When I’m under the influence of *ayahuasca* I can see waves of energy, whether, um, this thing is actually in, and I presume it’s in another dimension, because my, um, sort of concept of reality is really, we have reality, or this physical, um, universe, but we have also, um, um, other realities running through this dimension, so I often think we are not alone.’

**P3:** ‘Whether it’s alive or whether it’s a solid object animate or inanimate (Self: ‘Uhum’) it has spirit, everything is just vibrating constantly at different frequencies.’

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<sup>86</sup> I had no doubt that this issue was real, and troublesome, to them, and could see how available services in Britain would be viewed as to not have the sensitivity, or approach to resolve this person’s issue which was likely influenced by their cultural upbringing, rooted in African spirituality and taboos. Where would they go for this? I wondered. To the church that they had denounced as a child? To the doctors, to be declared mentally unwell? It felt as though for them, *ayahuasca* was a last resort attempt to rid themselves of this matter that tormented them.

foundations for the discourse. Typically, you do not have to share the same faith-based perspectives as another to reach a mutual understanding of the physical sciences. We commonly know that atoms vibrate, and this has a frequency. Participant 3 also mentions dimensions, and when coupled with frequency evokes the notion of string theory, and super string theory (TED-Ed, 2013), yet they also equate vibration with spirit and so merge the material sciences with spirituality, and faith-based ideas. The participants have smiles and wide, open eyes when they excitedly explain such grounded ideas. Confidence seen in the straight backs and open chests that support their words. To a lesser extent, participants discuss the effect of *ayahuasca* in terms of multiple dimensions, or realms, too. The positioning of faith-based ideas next to modern theoretical physics acts as a process of validation for participants.

By discussing the fundamental understanding of nature in terms of physics shows us that participants are thinking through a lens that is rooted within a culture with foundations in the European Enlightenment period. It is to be expected that a British person would think this way. The confidence shown in using these terms tells us how they can frame new spiritual understandings harmoniously with their own cultural upbringing. It shows that using the language of physics offers legitimacy when

**P9:** 'XXXX [Participant spoke about self in third person perspective] believes that everything is energy and we're all made from energy we all vibrate and resonate at different speeds and the only way that we can um resonate at the speed that we wish to, or we're supposed to resonate is, is um by being close to nature, absorbing nature, ingesting nature and being at one with nature.'

**P10:** 'I understand now the reason how you and me can communicate is by, via um frequency (Self: 'Yea?') I let off a vibrational frequency whatever kind of wave that is and you can hear that, the reason you can hear that is because you are vibrating on the same frequency.'

### *Transportation to different realities, realms, and dimensions*

**P3:** 'I'm in some kind of spiritual realm um, um, on several occasions um by taking this *ayahuasca*.'

**P6:** 'It sort of expands it and highlights things that weren't normally there, and also you feel maybe you're in a matrix, like the film Matrix, it feels like that, you're being, you're being taken to another altered state, but an altered state that is ultimately spiritual.'

### *Other*

**P10:** 'Pixies and fairies, you know the fairy land? This whole kind of fantasy world we have built around, these ideas had to come from somewhere (Self: 'Right?') you know? We hear about ghosts, we hear about negative ghosts, we hear about poltergeists, or we hear about positive, um, spirits and stuff, or aliens, or entities, or whatever you wanna call them, that we can't always see, or we get a glimpse of, um, through our peripherals or what not, when

describing *curandeirismo* to others in the same cultural environment. They have taken the language of the Amazonians, that of spirit worlds, and mapped it over their own teachings from Occidental schooling.

you focus on something our human brain doesn't tune into that particular frequency.'

**P11:** 'I know that there is, there are, levels of reality um mostly, most of them non-physical matter realities um which are, which we, with which we can communicate in the right, in the right um, in the right state of consciousness.'

## 8.6 Rhizomatics

More than half of the participants mentioned the same underpinning, fundamental ideology about the nature of the universe, and reality. This can be summarised in the simple statement: 'everything is connected'. Each participant has their own way of explaining or illustrating how it makes sense to them. They attempt to verbalise this abstract and intangible concept that their experiences have presented to them as a reality. As noted in the abstract of this thesis, and Section 1.4.3 it is this part of the data that drove the decision to incorporate the theories of Deleuze and Guattari's (1988) *ATP*, in this work.

The tree-like system of phenomena that is criticised in *ATP* would not map onto a reality where everything is connected to everything else.

On the side of the object, it is no doubt possible, following that natural method, to go directly from One [sic] to three, four, or five, but only if there is a strong principal unity available, that of the pivotal taproot supporting the secondary roots. That doesn't get us very far. The binary logic of dichotomy has simply been replaced by biunivocal relationships between successive circles. The pivotal taproot provides no better understanding of multiplicity than the

**P1:** 'We're all sort of connected by this, if you imagine like a shooting bit of like stream of light coming out of your solar-plexus, (Self: 'like Donnie Darko style?') yeah, [laughter] and we're all connected to each other like that, and so we send out certain energy.'

**P2:** 'When you take *ayahuasca* you realise that you are connected to everything, and every thing [emphasis on 'thing'], (Self: 'Yea?') the whole universe. There's no separation between you and the table.'

**P6:** 'Everything's linked isn't it? So (Self: 'right?') um, but because of things being labelled, (Self: 'right,') um, yeah they would be separate.'

**P6:** 'It's a thread a fine thread that links to everything else.'

**P7:** 'This kind of unifying force, I mean it's the only, it seems to be the only way to explain things, and I can't really make it a very concise explanation, but everything exists, but it's the only thing that exists, is everything, which means that it's all the same thing, so the idea of separation is just the only way through the range of experiences to be able to happen, (Self: 'Um, yea?') because things have to appear to be separate so that you can, you know? The only way to appreciate good things is for bad things to happen, and the only way to appreciate,

dichotomous root. One operates in the object, the other the subject. Binary logic and biunivocal relationships psychoanalysis (the tree of delusion in the Freudian interpretation of Schreber's case), linguistics, structuralism, and even information science. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980: 4)

By its nature, a tree-like system, like that seen in the mapping of linguistic development, would create phenomenological cul-de-sacs. It creates avenues and rivers that head off in disparate directions, never to meet again. Deleuze and Guattari's principle argument within *ATP* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988) is for a theoretical system that maps out phenomena like a messy, organic web. A network of plateau, or nodes, or phenomena, which stratify in various directions, or lines of flight, to form new plateau, nodes, phenomena. The potential is there for everything to be linked to everything else, despite this not necessarily being what Deleuze and Guattari argue. Their claim is that things are not linked in a linear fashion, not that everything is universally linked. What the participants describe fits within the messy web and sees a stronger unifying connection of all things too.

The notion of universal connection goes against the prominently Christian and Catholic upbringing that most participants experienced. Section 8.1 illustrated that participants felt Christianity resembled a linear, top down, tradition, where a central power controlled those connected to it. This reminiscent of the 'arboreal model' of tradition:

'The arboreal model claims that various sub-traditions branch off from a central, original tradition, often founded by a specific person' (Flood, 1996: 16).

um, having something, is not having it first, and the only way to appreciate success is to feel failure, those kind of things. (Self: 'Um?') So you know it is, there are lots of paradoxes isn't there, I think life is kind of based on paradoxes.'

**P9:** 'We are all part of each other or all feeding into each other in some aspect and you know when people's minds are cleaner their thinking clean and it just lifts everybody else.'

**P11:** 'With *ayahuasca* they [rituals], have all been over a period of maybe a roughly a decade or so, have allowed me to tap into that love and recognise the unity of all that is; um, and feel, at least at times when I remember to, that I'm connected with everything, and that everyone is just an aspect of me and, and deserves all my love.'

**P11:** 'Non-duality, or not two, um, there, there is oneness is; um, er, oneness is a difficult concept because we are so used to separation and multi, multiplicity, um, and one of the things I said to you the other day is that BBC 1 didn't exist at all until BBC 2 came into existence. It was just BBC television, (laughter), um, and so this oneness of which there is nothing else, um, er, is all that is, all that was, and all there ever will be, but it's comprised of many parts, many inter-related parts.'

The fundamental sense of universal interconnectivity has potential to affect participants' day-to-day decision making and lifestyle. At its most benevolent it is a means of curtailng one's behaviour. Thinking of all as connected, all life as entwined, all that is external as an extension of what is internal to oneself, will lead to compassionate living, and increased mindfulness. It is an appeal to our innate ego; hurt something else and you hurt yourself.

Section 1.4.3 illustrated that the notion of interconnectivity is commonplace in the broader psychedelic using community of the Occident, and not specific to *curandeirismo*. However, for the participants to raise it in discussions about *curandeirismo* illustrates that these practices reinforce and validate the belief for them.

## 8.7 Disdain towards the Occident

In justifying their decision to put faith into these rituals and practices roughly half of the participants displayed an aversion to what they refer to as 'Western culture' and what this thesis has argued to term 'Occidental culture'. There was a look that formed on participants' faces when they hit this topic. It communicated that they did not like the thoughts that were conjured. These participants calculated the multiple facets of what *curandeirismo* means to them, all the time comparing it to what Great Britain and the Occident represents. For them

**P1:** 'The government is like the parent and they're fucking up their health, their physical health of the planet that we live on which is our body, you know? So they're fucking up our major body it starts to feel pointless (Self: 'Um,') to do anything about the health of your own specific body, you know? So it was, it's definitely like, I've heard it called the addictive system, this whole western world.'

**P1:** 'I feel like the drinking [alcohol] is a part of that whole [hegemonic, Occidental] system (Self: 'Yeah, yeah') it's all their fault, it's not mine.'

**P1:** 'I feel so powerless in the, in this society. It's all just gone out of control and you know, the people who have got the control, are so far out of our reach, and so impervious to any sort of political action that we might take...I lost faith with going through you know the sort of system way of dealing with these problems, like, you know, protest marches or whatever, I lost faith with those ages ago, but, it's still like we need to do something.'

**P1:** 'It's kind of tough living in the Western world. I know we are all luxurious and whatever, but we are cut off from the meaning of, of existence you know? We are cut off from nature, we are cut off from everything.'

*curandeirismo* offered an interesting, more attractive, alternative.

‘The West’ emerged within participants’ responses not so much as a geographical location, but as a sweeping term for an array of interconnected systems and philosophies. An identity, a tribe: the government; the health care system; education; how we treat each other; capitalism. This picture of the Occident was not painted on quiet, soft words. It was often delivered with a vehemence, and at times, pained confusion.

Participant 1 is scathing in their discussion of Occidental society. Yet, with all that powerful emotion, their words eventually turn to despair. They see society in the Occident as unhealthy, for the earth, humanity, and the individual. There is a sense of desperation in this. They feel change is vital but have lost hope in achieving it, so they drink. First turning to alcoholism, and then to *ayahuasca* as an antidote. For them alcoholism is a symptom, and *ayahuasca* has been a cure, for the condition of Occidental

**P1:** ‘It kind of gives you that kind of boost, to give you the strength, to go on in this meaningless sort of shithole Western society.’

**P1:** ‘The more I found out about it, it seemed like the only thing that’s gonna cure the ills of the Western world.’

**P4:** ‘Nowadays it’s [Occidental Health care] less about treating people, it’s more about revenue, and like, profits.’

**P4:** ‘There’s some things you’re gonna wanna, um, have what the West can offer. (Self: ‘Yeah?’) But yeah personally I would just go straight to the alternative stuff. (Self: ‘Right, right.’) Um, just ‘cause I know, yeah, it can be treated, things can be treated that way.’

**P4:** ‘A lot of medicine comes from nature anyway.’

**P6:** ‘We are so dumbed down.’

**P6:** ‘A lot of people in this country because of the media, because of the fear of, um, drugs, illegal drugs, which I believe used in the right way, aren’t harmful, they’re um, but it’s just the way that we practice, people practice it in this country, because of the rules, the laws, the fear of being caught and imprisoned, and, um, has a really major, major impact on the freedom to, to experiment, um, so with England and Western countries they’ve got this fear of, of old ancient, um, old ancient remedies, or they’ve, they’ve got an idea of them, and to my mind they bastardise them, bastardise them they strip them down to, to nothing, so you are getting some chemicals, some, some impact but you’re being dumbed down by it, but you’re not given, you’re not being told the full story, (Self: ‘Uhum.’) whereas with um, with this practice you’re being told everything.’

**P8:** ‘There’s something massive missing isn’t there, from the way that we live here.’

**P8:** ‘It’s like the people are hypnotised here isn’t it?’

**P8:** ‘I genuinely think I’ve noticed that there’s something missing from the way that I had done hallucinogens. Even back in the day, ‘cause my thing’s always to be outside, and stars, and nature and a bit of clocking the unusual stuff, rather than it just bein’ oh let’s tear up the place, let’s rage it up, even though that’s what you do and that. But I think it’s just ‘cause that’s the way it’s introduced to you, it’s all about, it’s being a bit of party animal.



society. In the Occident they are a fish out of water looking for a remedy.

**P9:** 'I don't really see it as a religion, I see it as a way of life more so, (Self: 'Ok, yeah?') um, something that needs to be harnessed by people to, um, experience instead of fucking killing themselves, [Laughter] drinking alcohol, or, you know, or smoking cigarettes even.'

Participant 8 reflects that the way he has been introduced to psychedelics in the Occident. Feeling that both the Occidental environment and approach to psychedelic use is missing something. For them, psychedelics had originally been about partying, hedonism, escape, and intoxication. Now these compounds offer spirituality, an opportunity to figure out how the universe works, and better health, representing a matured attitude towards psychedelic compounds<sup>87</sup>. There is also a view within these participants that an alternative culture has a better way of approaching matters. Participant 9 explains that *curandeirismo* is a replacement for what they see as unhealthy and wrong about the Occident and typical life here.

Participants' attitudes towards modernity in Britain were displayed in two visual ethnography exercises, Activities 1 (Appendix 6) and 3 (Appendix 8). The results for these exercises can be found in Appendices 11, and 13, respectively. In the rapid responses of Activity 1 participants shared their immediate views about the topic 'culture'. They neither mention, nor were asked to comment on culture in the Occident specifically. However, their views have been formed within the context of culture in Occident. While an element of their response is generalised, it will offer insight into their views towards their own cultural environment.

Participant 7 offers a range of words to consider. They have presented their words in two loose groups. Positioned physically above 'culture' are more favourable terms and below are critical notions. They have a dichotomous relationship to culture<sup>88</sup>. Some words

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<sup>87</sup> I personally feel that fun and frivolity are equally as healthy and therapeutic as taking a spiritual approach to psychedelics. Laughter is not to be overlooked in exchange for meditation and prayer, each has their place, so we can see there is no one standpoint on the matter.

<sup>88</sup> I see myself in this. A love for socialising and connecting with people, yet also a desire to hide away from others where life is more predictable. I possess both a pride and a shame for my culture because I like to think of myself as fair, and realistic.

presented even contradict each other. However, important to our analysis here are the words ‘depraved’, ‘desperate’, ‘lost’, and ‘deprived’. Their perception of culture is overwhelmingly negative.

Participants 9 and 10’s responses do not show any aversion to or disapproval of culture. Participant 9’s responses are all positive and give the sense that culture is about being part of a collective group. It is about belonging, diversity, and acceptance. Participant 10 alternatively, focuses more on what they feel defines culture: film, music, and clothing.

Participant 4’s responses are a little more enigmatic. It is unsure what is meant by presenting the word art in this way, but the use of red to highlight shows that this is of significance to them. The quote ‘is your operating system’ is recognisable to fans of Terrence McKenna. While the true source of this quote is unclear, McKenna can be found discussing the principle briefly in his lecture *Light of the Third Millennium* (Deus Ex McKenna ~ Terence McKenna Archive, 2011, 20:00). This participant is acknowledging the immense influence that culture has on an individual yet has refrained from presenting any view or judgement of their own.

When considering the visual ethnography data presented in Activity 3, it can be argued that any member of the public, when asked, would place friends and family in closer relation to themselves than bodies of the state such as central and local government. However, if we look closer at participant 9’s response we can see that their depiction does reinforce the attitudes presented throughout this section. Most items are clustered around their avatar, other than the two government bodies and pharmaceutical medicines. Those items from the list that best symbolise the Occident are pushed out. There is a clear disconnect illustrated. Similarly participant 10 pushes out government. While it can be argued that government does not equal the country, it is made up of the citizen’s chosen representatives.

## 8.8 Nihilism

This is a philosophy that can sometimes feel uncomfortable at first. On the surface it could translate that there is a lack of care, pleasure, or motivation. There could be the presumption that nihilism is an empty feeling.

‘Nihilism is the belief that all values are baseless and that nothing can be known or communicated. It is often associated with extreme pessimism and a radical skepticism that condemns existence. A true nihilist would believe in nothing, have no loyalties, and no purpose other than, perhaps, an impulse to destroy’ (Pratt. 2020).

The mannerisms of the participants never appeared to shield a profound emptiness, neither did they reflect either scepticism or pessimism. None gave the impression that they had given up on loyalties, and there was no evil glint in the eye denoting a destructive nature. Theirs was a different type of nihilism.

**P1:** ‘Nothing really matters you know? He [Carlos Castaneda] talks about erm, controlled folly... You choose to make certain things matter and that is your controlled folly.’

**P2:** ‘In the end nothing’s actually important.’

**P8:** ‘I don’t need to have this belief system or need to have this political leaning.’

**P8:** ‘I don’t really care about the big picture I guess.’

Theirs were words of tranquillity and acceptance<sup>89</sup>, they denoted a sense of baselessness, ‘nothing is actually important’, yet there was something different to this established, bleak, definition of nihilism. They were the words of someone who had let their imagination jettison off across the galaxy to look at things from the perspective of another dimension. From back there little does matter. It does not matter if someone jumps the queue in front of you at the shop. It does not matter if the printer is out of paper when you reach it. It is important to

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<sup>89</sup> My own experiences, an *ayahuasca* experience left me feeling that everything was as it was supposed to be. Everything was as ‘God’ intended. This felt like a cushion of relief and relieved a significant amount of anxiety I had been feeling prior to the ritual. You could be excused of the stress of responsibility if things were as they were meant to be. Acceptance was something I had learned a few years earlier meditating with a Buddhist teacher too. It felt like a comfortable state to inhabit, yet I also recognised that from there one can easily slip into apathy. If accepting ‘all as God’s will’ one could ignore atrocities such as genocide, and torture. This is, not comfortable to me. Since I came to realise that a healthier perspective is to care about the things and contribute to change, where this meets your personal values and available resources. Otherwise, we are carrying unnecessary burden and anxieties for things we have no power over. Unlike the participants that raised these views I came to believe that it is only the things we have no power to change that we must find acceptance for, but not a universal acceptance of all that is, again highlighting that the community has no unified voice on this matter.

remember that many participants were seeking to overcome psychological ‘blocks’. This absence of applied values speaks more to a sense of acceptance; a call to stop worrying and reduce anxiety. The immersion of the *ayahuasca* experience, the contrast between it and their everyday waking state of consciousness, behaving as an anchor on which to tether a new sense of being, a renewed control over stress triggers.

This serenity, as seen in this form of nihilism, brings to mind the practice of Buddhism:

Buddhism, as known to us from its canonical books, in spite of its great qualities, ends in Atheism and Nihilism...

...Nirvâna suggests rather the idea of a Mohammedan paradise or of blissful, Elysian fields. Only in the hands of the philosophers, to whom Buddhism owes its metaphysics, the Nirvâna, through constant negations, carried to an indefinite degree, through the excluding and abstracting of all that is not Nirvâna, at last became an empty Nothing, a philosophical myth.

(Müller, 1869: pp. 5-6, 14-1)

This illustrates that the concept of nihilism is compatible with the notion of contentment and peace even if it is a concern to think that nothing, not one thing, matters. The reference that participant 1 made to Carlos Castaneda and the notion of controlled folly is explained in a dialogue claimed to be between the author and his *curandeiro* teacher Don Juan.

‘I am happy that you finally asked me about my controlled folly after so many years, and yet it wouldn’t have mattered to me in the least if you had never asked. Yet I have chosen to feel happy, as if I cared, that you asked, as if it would matter that I care. That is controlled folly!’ (Castaneda, 1971: 78)

He continues:

"With whom do you exercise controlled folly, don Juan?" I asked after a long silence.

He chuckled.

"With everybody!" he exclaimed, smiling.

"When do you choose to exercise it, then?"

"Every single time I act."

I felt I needed to recapitulate at that point and I asked him if controlled folly meant that his acts were never sincere but were only the acts of an actor.

"My acts are sincere, " he said, "but they are only the acts of an actor."  
"Then everything you do must be controlled folly!" I said truly surprised.  
"Yes, everything," he said.  
"But it can't be true," I protested, "that every one of your acts is only controlled folly."  
"Why not?" he replied with a mysterious look.  
"That would mean that nothing matters to you and you don't really care about anything or anybody. Take me, for example. Do you mean that you don't care whether or not I become a man of knowledge, or whether I live, or die, or do anything?"  
"True! I don't. You are like Lucio, or everybody else in my life, controlled folly."  
(Castaneda, 1971: 79)

Following concerns raised about a total absence of care, Don Juan concludes:

"Perhaps it is not possible to explain," he said. "Certain things in your life matter to you because they're important; your acts are certainly important to you, but for me, not a single thing is important any longer, neither my acts nor the acts of my fellow men. I go on living, though, because I have my will. Because I have tempered my will throughout my life until it's neat and wholesome and now it doesn't matter to me that nothing matters. My will controls the folly of my life."  
(Castaneda, 1971: 80)

It is difficult to ascertain whether participants 2 and 8 were also influenced by Castaneda, or Buddhism, in their nihilistic views. However, their experiences with *curandeirismo* have exposed a tranquil form of nihilism as a coping mechanism taken up to help in everyday life.

## 8.9 Summary

As broad as the subject of ontology is, so is the data that relates to the participants' ontologies, or the ways in which participants interpret their reality and make sense of their being. Strong themes have appeared in this section, though there is no one fixed worldview that would define members of this community. Ontologies presented formed individualised perspectives on the intangible aspects of how existence, the divine, and the universe work.

There is a clear aversion to mainstream religion, yet participants did display what could be considered religious beliefs. Some believe in God, and some in spirit; while some took elements from a variety of mainstream religions into their own philosophies, views, and behaviours. There is a significant presence of belief in paranormal phenomenon too, such as clairvoyance, and spirit entities. Roughly half felt that people may have innate powers that are not typically exercised but may be accessed through *ayahuasca* use.

Amongst the discussion, of matters that have so far not been proved through empiricists measures, many of the participants did evoke the language of empirical sciences, especially physics, to ground their ideas and provide firm foundations for the structure of beliefs they presented. This may be to aid validation to themselves, or to aid communication in a cultural environment that holds empirical sciences as infallible, crucial, and even iconoclastic.

Regarding their relationship to others, there some participants represented a common belief amongst psychedelic users; that all is connected. That in an unfathomable, esoteric sense, each person is connected to another, and to all other things be they organic, or synthetic. This may serve as a comforting idea, motivate community centric behaviour, and override any anti-social tendencies. In contrast to this was a strong presence of disapproving towards their own cultural environment too. They did not feel that the Occident had the answers they needed or that it represents the attitudes they prefer. They felt a disconnect here; ‘something’s missing’. Alternative cultures offer the potential to find what is lacking, an opportunity to develop, or heal, and take on fresh, more beneficent perspectives. Although participants did not present as having ambition to relocate and place themselves into a culture where more shared their perspectives, particularly the Amazon region. Instead, there was an implied, yet not explicit, frustration that more people in Britain did not see things as they did.

Finally, a small number of participants displayed what I will term ‘peaceful nihilism’, a sense of universal acceptance that nothing has value. This is quite a significant shift in perspective brought on by their involvement in *curandeirismo* that serves as a tool for managing stress and anxiety in everyday life, in turn improving mental health and providing room for personal progress.

While those that proclaim membership of the *Santo Daime*<sup>90</sup> religion do claim Catholic beliefs, we can see that this is not true of these participants. The *Santo Daime* have supplied the opportunity, to some of the participants, for an experience but had not gained new initiates. Instead, individualised systems of belief have formed in each community member; and while there are strong themes within this, there is no established, fixed guide, or rules on what those beliefs should be. This is not to say that in the wider community of *ayahuasca* users in Britain that the *Santo Daime* have not gained any new recruits.

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<sup>90</sup> The UDV, and other related religions, are excluded here as this researcher has not found any evidence of their presence in Britain.

# 9. Mimesis

## 9.1 Why mimesis?

Few areas of recent research have shed as much light on our understanding of human nature as those that address with fresh insight the unique and foundational properties of human imitation. Far from being the simple and mindless act that we typically associate it with ("monkey see, monkey do"), imitation is now understood as a complex, generative, and multidimensional phenomenon at the heart of what makes us human.  
(Garells, 2011: 1)

This is mimesis. Mimesis is not simply about replication, copying or mimicry either. Taussig's (1993) work *Mimesis and Alterity*, and Deleuze's (2014) writing *Difference and Repetition* both explain that mimesis is the act of replication, whilst adding something new in the reproduction.

If repetition can be found, even in nature, it is in the name of power which affirms itself against the law. Which works underneath laws, perhaps superior to laws. If repetition exists, it expresses at once a singularity opposed to the general, a universality opposed to the particular, a distinctive opposed to the ordinary, an instantaneity opposed to variation and an eternity opposed to permanence. In every respect repetition is a transgression. It puts laws into question, it denounces its nominal character in favour of a more profound and artistic reality.  
(Deleuze, 2014: 3)

Taussig writes about his own *ayahuasca* (*yage*) experiences in terms of mimesis:

... I want to draw attention to the active yielding of the perceiver and the perceived – the perceiver trying to enter into the picture and become one with it, so that the self is moved by the representation into the represented: "they are armed, and they form up. And I try to raise myself...so that I too can sign with them, and dance with them, me too. Then the healer...with the 'painting,' [*ayahuasca* induced vision] he already knows that I am trying to go there, to sing and dance with them just as we are seeing.  
(Taussig, 1993: 61)



Mimesis involves a stratification from a phenomenon. A line of flight must be drawn, a difference occurs, and a new version of the original emerges. An alter forms; a new plateau, part of a greater rhizome made up of multiple other related but unique plateaus. This is what is happening in the migration of *curandeirismo* in Britain, and in all the non-native environments that *curandeirismo* has reached.

[CN: racist terminology] Taussig, (1993: pp.73-99), also explains to us how Charles Darwin argued that the act of mimicry carried out by the Fuegian, and other previously undisturbed cultural groups, was illustrative of their primitiveness. Darwin's language exposes a racial bias. It is unlikely that he would have been so rude in person upon first contact. Some of the examples Taussig provides are: 'savage and civilised man'; 'dirty, copper coloured skin'; 'Their language does not deserve to be called articulate'. Taussig also shares accounts from less biased reports of first contact with ethnic groups, by other anthropologists; these included reports of a mimetic reciprocity. In attempts to establish communication, both parties would mimic one another; for instance dances were often copied between sailors, and the people with whom they made contact. This would foster a connection of empathy. Darwin's anthropology was without merit. Mimesis is a fundamental aspect of human interaction.

Indeed, in part, this research is an exploration of mimesis by essentially considering the customs, beliefs, and practices that originated in one community state, being taken up by an 'other' state. As Section 3.2 illustrated, Amazon's people hold significant differences in philosophy, lifestyle, history, and social structures to those in Britain. The communities of the Amazon have maintained their heritage and the legacies of the past, for centuries, through non-written communication; by teachings given by plants, passed down through generations. These customs have come from bodies of people primarily protected by the forest, until their early mixing with the urbanised communities surrounding them at the time of the rubber boom. Alternatively, Britain is built from a long history of invasion, conquering, and alongside the oldest known occupants, the Celtic Britons, a mix of European peoples, going back centuries. In the past century Britain has been joined by a diverse range of cultures primarily from Commonwealth immigration.

‘The United Kingdom began the post-war [WWII] years with a non-white population of some 30,000 people; it approaches the end of the century with over 3 million, whose origins extend from Africa, the Pacific Rim, the Caribbean, and the Indian Subcontinent.’ (Hansen, 2000: p.3). Each shift in human geography bringing with it a new wave of mimesis. A new wave of replicated, and adapted, customs, ideas, and behaviours.

‘Even the dietary habits of the English have changed greatly (one shudders at the thought of eating out in England before migration); a curry is among the most common of English meals. All of this and much else that escapes attention because it is taken for granted, would not have happened without Commonwealth migration (Hansen, 2000: p.4).

In short, here are two disparate communities: The first primarily unchanged for centuries, ethnically homogeneous, passing on its knowledge and tradition verbally between generation. The second defined by change, the product of waves of immigration bringing with it a plethora of exchanged cultural legacies, here enacting the mimesis of *curandeirismo*. The following sections consider in greater depth the nature of this mimesis, with focus on what drives it and how it manifests.

## **9.2 Motivations**

Chapter 7 provides a substantive insight into one principal motivator for the participants’ involvement in *curandeirismo*: that of improved well-being. The health-related factors were separated out as they took such a substantial amount of space in the research’s interviews. This section will consider additional motivators to provide a more thorough understanding of the drivers behind this mimesis.

### 9.2.1 Curiosity and romanticism

Curiosity was a significant theme in the participants' justification of involvement with these practices: The magico-religious packaging; the claims of therapeutic efficacy; the exoticism of it being from communities deep in a rainforest; the novelty of the psychedelic experience. All this contributes to a romanticised notion that this is somehow special and unlike like other psychedelics, therapies, and religious or spiritual practices. This aligns well with the romanticism of *curandeirismo* in the press, as seen throughout Chapter 5.

There are three principal strands in the philosophy of curiosity's motivational nature:

1. curiosity is a kind of deficit motivation: It motivates people to fill gaps in knowledge, reduce unpleasant uncertainty, and minimize [sic] aversive states of drive.'
2. 'curiosity is a kind of intrinsic motivation: It motivates people to explore and learn for their own sakes.'
3. There are 'individual differences in curiosity: Variation in curiosity translates into big differences in behaviour and life outcomes, although models disagree about the motivational nature of between-person variation.

(Silvia, 2019: 157)

Section 7.2 illustrated how participants struggled to articulate exactly what it was they were looking to address with *ayahuasca*. This shows that the concept of 'deficit motivation' is what is present here. Participants are motivated to fill the gap in their understanding of how to overcome their issues. They are looking to fill, what they perceive as, a gap in available services and treatments in Britain.

P3: 'I think it's just curiosity really.'

P5: 'I was going there purely out of, I don't know, inquisitiveness.'

P6: 'I was intrigued about this new, new medicine that had come into, come into, my um, into my thoughts, really via somebody else's enthusiasm.'

P6: 'I found the sort of maybe a romance, a romantic side of me that wanted to try something exotic.'

P7: 'A lot of my sort of literary heroes and, to a certain extent, my music heroes as well, although I'm not a massive music fan in general, but um, have been drug users.'

P10: 'I just thought well that's, that could be a great place to go and explore, um, My psyche, you know? and maybe get in touch with my, um, being a psychonaut, and exploring, my inner-self.'

P10: 'I started getting information given to me by what I could only describe as extra-terrestrial or other, other realms, spirits, vibrations, if you like I guess, and so I never had a specific, um, it's hard to explain. I just knew the way of the shaman was the most key way of getting in touch with that, and finding out, um, I don't know, finding out what's going on.'

### 9.2.2 Destiny and synchronicity

Two participants saw their involvement as destiny, or synchronicity. The concept of synchronicity occurred frequently in discussions of *ayahuasca* outside of interviews<sup>91</sup>. Synchronicity is: ‘... manifested in the co-occurrence of two events that cannot be explained in the normal casual fashion; typically, this co-occurrence is highly improbable, and it is associated with special meaningfulness. Indeed, coincidences feature very commonly in the stories of Ayahuasca [sic] drinkers (myself included)’ (Shanon, 2010: 245).

**P3:** ‘The whole Peru experience was really, um, on the basis of, um, of um, synchronicity or kind of being led there.’

**P6:** ‘I knew that there was something there because my heart was, was responding in a really positive way.’

Given the commonality of reported experiences of synchronicity amongst *ayahuasca* users in South America, where Shanon based his research, it is surprising that this was not raised by more of this research’s participants. The magico-ideologies surrounding *ayahuasca* feed into the orientation well. Indeed, it is possible that these experiences of synchronicity are merely coincidence, but that is not as romantic. It does not motivate to the same extent as ‘having a destiny’. Instead, it moves towards a more humanist ontology. While this is acceptable to some, it does not fit in with the belief systems associated with traditional *ayahuasca* use. With synchronicity rather than coincidence there is a suggestion that time is unfolding as it should be. This allows one to relax and have confidence that everything is going exactly right, thus reducing friction, tension, and anxiety out of day-to-day interactions. Some may deem the notion of synchronicity as fanciful folly; others may simply claim ‘it helps’.

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<sup>91</sup> Indeed, when I was using *ayahuasca* regularly I was able to see synchronicity in events far more frequently than I do since. Even my acceptance on this PhD programme and the subject matter of it felt very much to be ‘destiny’ and everything lining up as it was meant to be.

### 9.2.3 Spirituality and the supernatural

Two participants raised the spiritual and supernatural as means of explaining their motives although both quite differently. Chapter 8.4 identified that participant 3 has a strong belief that they had attracted an entity that had been causing them difficulties, and that *ayahuasca* was another in a line of costly experiments to end the situation. Theirs is a more intimate experience of a spirit. It is attached to just them. It interferes only with their life. To someone with spiritual or religious beliefs, a spiritual or religious tool will appear an appropriate solution. Following various unsuccessful experiments, involvement in *curandeirismo* is bringing change. Now they have been able to see the entity.

The significance of this in relation to mimesis is that the participant was driven by pre-existing beliefs that aligned, in part, with the *curandeiro*. It was the similarities between their own beliefs, and *curandeiro* are that drew participant 3 to the rituals. The differences; the setting, and adornments, were circumstantial. What mattered was that the experience offered a key that could unlock the problem in terms the participant understood to have potential to help them. The alignment presented an opportunity for improvement, that they had not previously found in the established systems of either religion, or healthcare, available in Britain. Seeing the entity gives it a new dimension to its existence. It now has form. As something more tangible, it presents as something easier to address which provides hope that there will be a resolve to the issues it has caused.

If, as I have suggested, it is useful to think of mimesis as the nature culture uses to create second nature, the situation now is that this famous second nature is foundering and highly unstable. Veering between nature and culture, essentialism,—and constructionism - as evidenced today everywhere, from the ethnic surge in politics to the delight in artifactualization, [sic] as one after the other new identities—are spun into being - the mimetic faculty finds itself on the verge of dramatic new possibilities.  
(Taussig, 1993: p.252)

**P3:** 'It has the ability to explore consciousness, spirituality, um, on a different level.'

**P3:** 'It's given me the ability to see this thing.' [an entity]

**P9:** 'It looks really quite interesting, um, from a spiritual aspect 'cause I thought that it would be able to help me to, um, deepen my spirituality by looking at, um, other, um, indigenous, indigenous culture um cultural ways of um harnessing the um spirit of the Universe.'

### 9.2.4 Self-improvement

Chapter 7 explored how important the topic of well-being was to the research's participants. This section looks at the motivators that can be classified as self-improvement that are not as explicitly linked to well-being. These relate to a range of skills: the ability to let go; creativity; being more spiritual and metaphysically minded. It can be argued that working on any of these factors would in turn improve self-esteem and mental well-being in an indirect way. The crucial point is that participants have not gone to *curandeirismo* with the will to work on specific things that can be linked to the chemistry of the plants, as one would with licenced, prescribed medicines. The participants have turned to *curandeirismo* with the belief that it will simply help, regardless of what unique situation they were in.

**P4:** 'To learn how to sing, to learn how to eventually incorporate those Shamanic practices with other people.'

**P7:** 'One of the motivating factors [is] trying to sort of break through onto some kind of creative realm I suppose, um, I don't think it's hero worship really, and I don't think it's like wanting to be like an idol or anything. It's like they've shown that there's this possibility, I want to know what it's like.'

**P7:** 'I'm looking to kind of achieve my potential.'

**P7:** 'Or I'm looking for permission to let go a little bit.'

**P11:** 'I got into the reading, er, spiritual philosophy and metaphysics, and that in conjunction with my psychedelic use, er, which gave me direct experiences of something other than my, my conventional sense of self, and my conventional sense of the world.'

The Office for National Statistics makes no mention specific to psychedelic compounds other than cannabis, which it notes is the most used, unregulated, drug in Britain, and new psychoactive substances which it notes are: 'newly available drugs that mimic the effect of existing drugs such as cannabis, ecstasy and powder cocaine' (Office for National Statistics, 2020). There is no mention of *ayahuasca*, *kambo*, *rapé* or any of the other substances that can be linked to *curandeirismo*. The Global Drug Survey (2021) did not report on motives behind use either.

One online survey (Kettner, Mason, and Kuypers, 2019: pp. 304-320) looked at psychedelics along with stimulants, alcohol, and nicotine. It found 23 reasons why people used these substances, displayed in Figure 3. Here we can start to see the pictures coalesce. The survey

lists a variety of health, well-being, and self-improvement related motivations given. The survey covered a broad spectrum of unregulated drugs including Cocaine, LSD, MDMA, and *ayahuasca*. This inclusion of *ayahuasca* allows triangulation with this research's findings. The increased public discussion of the therapeutic potential of psychedelics compounds, as seen in the reports of Chapter 5, in part explains the findings.

**Table 1.** Investigated Motives for Drug Use.

Item Number	Item	Motive Name
1	Make yourself feel better when down or depressed	<i>feel better</i>
2	Help you stop worrying about a problem	<i>stop worrying</i>
3	Help you to relax	<i>relax</i>
4	Help you feel elated or euphoric	<i>euphoric</i>
5	Just get really stoned or intoxicated	<i>get stoned</i>
6	Enhance feelings when having sex	<i>enhance sex</i>
7	Help you stay awake	<i>stay awake</i>
8	Help you lose weight	<i>lose weight</i>
9	Help you to sleep	<i>sleep</i>
10	Help you enjoy the company of your friends	<i>enjoy company</i>
11	Help you feel more confident or more able to talk to people in a social situation	<i>confidence</i>
12	Help you lose your inhibitions	<i>disinhibition</i>
13	Help you keep going on a night out with friends	<i>going out</i>
14	Help you to concentrate or to work or study	<i>work/study</i>
15	Enhance an activity such as listening to music or playing a game	<i>enhance activity</i>
16	Help make something you were doing less boring	<i>less boring</i>
17	Improve the effects of other substances	<i>improve other</i>
18	Help ease the effects of other substances	<i>ease other</i>
19	Help you to broaden your consciousness/take a different perspective on the world	<i>broaden consciousness</i>
20	Induce or enhance a spiritual experience	<i>spiritual experience</i>
21	Help you to escape from reality	<i>escape reality</i>
22	Help you feel more connected to nature	<i>experience nature</i>
23	Because it is linked to the social context	<i>social context</i>
24	Other—please specify	<i>other reason</i>

Figure 3  
(Kettner, Mason, and Kuypers, 2019: 307)

### 9.3 Alignment of beliefs

Chapter 8 reviewed the ontological perspectives of study participants. In this section the focus is on beliefs and ideas around how these practices work, and their efficacy, to find any alignment with native *curandeiro*. This is significant in understanding the mimesis of *curandeirismo*, as they set out the nontemporal matters that have survived the phenomenon's transition into an alternative cultural environment. The comparisons provide insight into what ideas have travelled, and those that have been challenged, or changed, along *curandeirismo*'s line of flight, through the stratification of this phenomena from the jungles of South America. It also provides insight into how participants translate their experiences. It will highlight their attachment, or detachment from tradition, and show the level of influence that native *curandeirismo* has had on them.

#### 9.3.1 Interpretation of how the practices of *curandeirismo* work

Three main themes stood out when participants explained how they felt that these practices, particularly *ayahuasca*, work. These themes have been categorised as: Consciousness; Empirical epistemology; and Reality and metaphysics. Each is considered in order.

##### 9.3.1.1 Consciousness

For participants one and two there is no separation between God and the self. Their reasoning was that both we experience, and God is, consciousness. This is one way to interpret God's form and it is a concept found beyond this research. The philosophy follows the belief that God is consciousness, and since we experience and operate via consciousness, we are God, or a part of God. It is not an idea exclusive to those involved in these practices either.

**P1:** 'It had been...more of that sort of loving, kind of floating feeling of expanding consciousness.'

**P1:** 'What I think is happening, to a large extent is that it takes, the, the, er, chemistry of the plants gives you access to deeper realms of your own psyche that is, is like that little chunk of God, and universal everything that's in you.'



The idea of God as consciousness is the central tenet of *The Kybalion*, a quasi-religious text popular amongst occultists, and claimed to have been written by Three Initiates of Hermes Trismegistus, aka Thoth, a character spanning Greek and Egyptian mythology, although this is an example of pseudepigrapha. It states:

1. The Principle of Mentalism

"THE ALL IS MIND; The Universe is Mental."—The Kybalion.

This Principle embodies the truth that "All is Mind." It explains that THE ALL (which is the Substantial Reality underlying all the outward manifestations and appearances which we know under the terms of "The Material Universe"; the "Phenomena of Life"; "Matter"; "Energy"; and, in short, all that is apparent to our material senses) is SPIRIT which in itself is UNKNOWABLE and UNDEFINABLE, but which may be considered and thought of as AN UNIVERSAL, INFINITE, LIVING MIND.

(Three Initiates, 1912: page number not available)

In fact, *The God of Metaphysics* explains how this was fundamental to numerous philosophers including: Baruch Spinoza, Georg Hegel, Thomas Hill Green, and Josiah Royce (Sprigge, 2006).

For Green the *Eternal Consciousness* was properly called 'God', though clearly his conception of God differs from that of standard Christianity. The basic difference is that each of us is in some sense identical with God, of the Eternal Consciousness; that is, *the Eternal Consciousness* is somehow operating through us in all that we do.

(Sprigge, 2006: 7)

**P1:** 'What it does is it taps you into that universal consciousness.'

**P2:** 'In a way when people say you've hallucinated, it's not that you're hallucinating that things are real. It's because you are closer to your God self; which is just the ability to manifest itself into anything you want. You can, your mind makes things up, and you, I don't know it's hard to describe in words, but when we're here, on this three dimensional, normal plane, everything is much slower, vibrations are slower, and our consciousness is higher, and that's why everything feels solid, and we think we know. Just ask Einstein.'

**P4:** 'It's a combination of bringing up like the subconscious memories that um, cause obviously everything that we do in life, every little detail, every daily thing, is like stored in our subconscious.'

**P11:** 'Amazonian shamanism, um, is very much involved with the plant teachers or plant teacher of *ayahuasca*.'

The notion of ‘Divine Consciousness’ is also found in the Hindu principle of Brahman too.

The world is a cyclic movement (*saṃsāra*) of the Divine Consciousness in Space and Time. Its law and, in a sense, its objective is progression; it exists by movement and would be dissolved by cessation of movement. But the basis of this movement is not material; it is the energy of active consciousness which, by its motion and multiplication in different principles (difference in appearance, the same in essence), creates oppositions of unity and multiplicity, divisions of Time and Space, relations and groupings of circumstance and Causality.

(Sri Aurobindo, 2003: 22)

In terms of mimesis, there is a sense that it is a move towards a shamanic perspective, there is a clear move away from monotheism which has dominated theology in Britain for centuries. However, the notion of God as consciousness is not present in *curandeirismo* or shamanic traditions, yet the notion is closer to shamanism than the culturally dominant monotheism. This is a difference that is being integrated into the stratification of this phenomenon into a new plateau.

Participant 11 makes a clear reference to what we know as a native *curandeiros*’ understanding. Their reference to ‘plant teachers’ is directly taken from the cultures of the Amazon. The idea that the plants have a consciousness of their own, with which to educate those that consume them, is well established among native *ayahuasca* users.

...your true icaros [covered in Chapter 3.2] come directly from the spirit of the plants. These are the basis of any healing power. You must, however suffice yourself with the icaros of your teacher until the same time as the spirits of the plant decide it is time to teach you, for ultimately your real teacher is not the curandeiro, it's the spirit of the plants.

(Shoemaker, 2014: 780)

The congruence between old and migrated belief systems is clear here. That the plants have a consciousness that interacts with the drinkers is an idea that has travelled well with the phenomena. Still there is room for the plant, spirit, and the concept of ‘God’ to be independent of each other. While one is, the other uses, consciousness.

Participants are using religious ideas to explain the *ayahuasca* experience, yet in their words are attempts to draw on the rational, or positivist, too. With mention of the ‘chemistry of the plants’ something firm is offered that one can pin understanding onto. The evocation of Einstein, and note of the intrinsic vibrational qualities of matter, is an attempt to mesh that which is understood and typically prized in the Occident; the rational scientific process, with a more mystical and intangible set of understandings that appear more intuitive.

### 9.3.1.2 Empirical epistemology

Empirical epistemology refers to the forming of understandings based in positivist principles. The scientific discipline of chemistry is an example of a field of research that holds an empirical epistemology. It forms its understandings from the measurable; things that can be observed by some means.

Participants drew from a range of scientific lexicon to explain their interpretations and understanding. We have already seen a glimpse of participants’ attempts to explain the intangible with more trusted, empirical epistemology in Chapter 8.5. Here we can see these efforts more broadly. The participants have not entirely rejected Occidental influenced perspectives in exchange for a belief system that aligns exactly with that of the *curandeiro*. There are clear attempts to combine the two in their efforts to understand what they have experienced. This tells us that there is no specific compartmentalisation. To the participants there is no ‘Occidental’ or ‘South

**P1:** ‘I do wonder if it is just a chemical thing, that, but at the same time, even if it’s just chemical; Well it’s not.’

**P2:** ‘I understand on a scientific level ... is that my pineal gland is filled with dimethyltryptamine, and you know, it creates hallucinations or whatever you want to call it, and different sensations, and different states of consciousness.’

**P3:** ‘I haven’t actually done, um, any great research on *ayahuasca* as a, as a whole, but I understand that there’s this thing, D, DMT I think it’s called, um, which is um, um, is functioning, um, causing some effect within the brain, um, the pineal gland, um, um, which is, is causing it to have some kind of out-of-body kind of experience, or experiencing some, some you know, various dimensions.’

**P6:** ‘It’s the chemical compound that helps to get a spiritual experience, but if you’re seeking out spiritual experience, you’re already on that path anyway, and you’re gonna get it from it (**Self:** ‘Uhum.’). So it’s, it’s all about intention and thoughts.’

**P11:** ‘As far as I can tell from my experience of altered states, my third eye, or my pineal gland was activated and I, and which produced dimethyltryptamine and pinoline.’

American' way to understand things. Instead, both coexist and contribute to each other, to enhance their understandings.

**P11:** '*Ayahuasca* seemed to have a different character, um, from what I could, from what I understood, from friends of mine who used that compound and that brew.'

The nature of how this data was collected may also have had an impact in how the participants chose to explain their understanding too. Although Section 2.1.2.2 offered a rationale for using semi-structured interviews in this research, participants may have envisioned a purely logically minded audience, that places a higher value on empiricism, for their words, given that this forms a Doctoral thesis. If so, this would have influenced how they chose to explain their beliefs. It would lead them to employ concepts and language felt to be favoured by the empirically focused reader if that is the audience they believed the work would reach.

### 9.3.1.3 Reality and metaphysics

Initially covered in Section 8.5 here we can see that the belief in alternate realities and dimensions is key to the participants explaining how *ayahuasca* has the effect that it does. Theory around the nature of multiple realities is not unique to *ayahuasca* users in Britain.

Overall *ayahuasca* induces a comprehensive metaphysical view of things. I would characterize [sic] it as idealistic monism with pantheistic overtones. By this view, reality is conceived as constituted by one, non-material substance which is identified as Cosmic Consciousness, the Godhead, the ground of all Being, or the Fountain of Life. Coupled with this is the assessment that all things are interconnected and that in their totality they constitute a harmonious whole. This, in turn, entails an experienced realization [sic] that there is sense and reason to all things and that reality is invested with deep, heretofore unappreciated, meaningfulness. (Shannon, 2010: pp. 163-4)

P3: '*Ayahuasca* appears to sort of allow me to see into this other dimension.'

P3: 'I haven't actually done enough research to fully appreciate or speak on the subject matter in terms of what it does but certainly, um, from drinking the *ayahuasca* brew, um, the experiences, um, allow, certainly me, and, and all those who I have actually spoken to, um, to experience, um, various realities, um, um, that I think exist right here within this physical, um, this physical, um, realm. I've also been, taken, um, um, [there] has been kind of a knowing that I'm in some kind of spiritual realm, um, um, on several occasions, um, by taking this *ayahuasca*.'

P3: 'It has the ability, certainly to, um, elicit, um, other realities um and even spiritual realms.'

Shannon goes on to compare this to the belief systems of Hindus, and various classical philosophers including Plato, and Hegel. Indeed, as seen in Section 3.1, the two-world notion is central to shamanic traditions.

P4: 'It essentially kind of shatters a lot of your beliefs of what is real and what is not.'

#### 9.3.1.4 Miscellaneous

In addition, there was a range of explanations for the efficacy put forward. To participant 1 the key to *ayahuasca* is love. The brew does what it does by emitting love to the consumer. For participant 3 the higher self, as spirit, filters what information is passed through the experience. This suggests a source of all knowledge, from which part of our psyche selects what is necessary. Like a cosmic librarian sorting through the cacophony of information to seek out the required elements. Whereas participant 10 describes it as being like a download of unclear information, absent of any element of oneself acting as a filter. What participant 11 describes is something akin to Dicken's *A Christmas Carol*.

#### Miscellaneous

**P1:** 'Ayahuasca's all love and happiness and whatever, but th, then it's in a loving embrace of tough shit.'

P1: 'Ayahuasca can bring you this grounding sense as well that you know, there's nothing particularly special about you, you know don't place yourself above anyone 'cause anyone can have this experience in, in different ways.'

**P3:** 'In terms of the information that comes through, it's not actually [long pause] led, or what comes through isn't exactly directly of the control of the individual. Um, I might be wrong, but I think it's the higher self, the spirit, that decides what is going to be presented to the individual.'

P3: 'It was as if, um, I was being operated on, um, and I couldn't see anybody.'

**P4:** 'The rational mind of the West would, would say, yeah it's

just your brain on a chemical reaction, and you're creating the whole thing.

(**Self:** 'Um?') But, um, like for so many people, so many people share similar experiences of like what they will tell you, the appearance of what these spirits, or beings look like, and like everyone sort of has similar descriptions.'

**P9:** 'I just wanna open my third eye a little bit better [laughter] (**Self:** 'OK, yeah.') and in order to be able to do that I just need to cleanse my body a little bit more. (**Self:** 'Cool.') It's all part of the, I see it as a journey (**Self:** 'Cool.') and I see it as a cleansing journey.' – used in 6.2

P10: 'I had this download of info and I didn't really know what the info was at the time. I just knew I was being given info from the cosmos.'

**P11:** 'I had a tremendously meaningful experience, er, I was um shown my past, my present, and my future. I was shown my death, um, in two different ways.'

The experience took them on a journey through time and shown that there can be more than one destined path. They appeared unshaken by seeing their own death; they seemed lifted by the experience. Neither excited, fearful, or disturbed.

Further interpretations were put forward in the range of responses to the visual ethnography Activity 2 (Appendices 7 and 12). Most point to an experience as being brought to the user from an external force. The results and experiences within the ritual are therefore not reliant on a combination of chemicals interacting with our physiology in a specific way. Alternatively, there is something external from which the visions and insights, and teachings are brought forth. There is no one theme that stands out from the responses to the visual exercises. There is the appearance of eyes over multiple responses; this could be insight, foresight, or be emblematic of the *ayahuasca* being all knowing. Interpretations for how these practices work is clearly diverse.

### 9.3.2 Perceived efficacy of *curandeirismo*

When discussing if the participants felt that *curandeirismo* is effective, three themes stood out. These can be described as statements of confidence, scepticism, and uncertainty.

The claims of confidence are unambiguous. Those that found efficacy were keen and excited to express it. Alternatively, scepticism was delivered less excitedly. There was not the same passion or urge to impart critical feelings. Participant 11 does not claim that *curandeirismo* is ineffective but offers a warning that it can present the illusion of change and improvement that can fade over time.

#### Confidence

P4: 'It gave me a direct connection with spirits like, like tangible spirits. I could see it obviously, dramatically, (**Self**: 'Yeah?') altered my perceptions of things like afterlife and (**Self**: 'Yeah?') dimensions, and all that sort of stuff. So yeah it did definitely (**Self**: 'Yeah?') change my world.'

P4: 'If it's worked in the Amazon for thousands of years, like there's got to be something to it.'

P4: 'It can dissolve your cultural vices, and your opinions.'

P6: 'I know, and I truly feel that the *ayahuasca* has done something to me, it's made me, it's given me a physical response, and a psychological response, which I can only say and it has enhanced my um outlook on life.'

P6: 'If you've come in with no knowledge, prior knowledge of it, I can guarantee anybody that they'll have a spiritual experience from it...not saying specifically God...an inner world experience, and it helps

This is not a denouncement of *curandeirismo*. It is an observation that those using *ayahuasca* can leave the experience with a false sense of change<sup>92</sup>. With the mystery and superstitions surrounding *ayahuasca*, there is an opportunity to ‘peg’ change to this experience, as a placebo. To some, me included, there is a belief that simply taking part in *ayahuasca* rituals can drive improvements or alternatives that you have been looking for in life, simply by doing something out of the ordinary. In addition, it acts as a strong justifier for change to close friends and family who may be surprised by any shifts in character or attitude.

These three mindsets tell us that participants have no fixed ideas regarding efficacy. Some are clearly convinced, some do not give these practices the same credit, and one participant was unsure. It is fair to imagine, from the outset, that more participants would claim its efficacy, if only as a means of justifying their involvement. Yet, that participants are confident to question efficacy and are happy to highlight potential pitfalls, shows that critical thinking was engaged in their assessments of the experiences.

you delve into that inner world just that little bit more deeper, and, um, freer.’

**P10:** ‘Ever since then, I have been able to constantly re-confirm all the answers that She [*ayahuasca*] has given me as true. I understand now why this is this, this is this, and that was only because of *ayahuasca*.’

**P11:** ‘We connect with entities which are very real but in a non-physical reality.’

### *Scepticism*

**P3:** ‘*Ayahuasca* hasn’t really, um, um, hasn’t changed my whole perception on divinity, spirituality, (**Self:** ‘Uhum?’) that is the foundation, and that’s really occurred through research, and through reading, (**Self:** ‘Uhum’) all that *ayahuasca* has done is just really kind of re-confirmed, and built on the foundation that was already there.’

**P11:** ‘It can have the illusory effect that it is moving us on when actually all it is doing is, it’s perhaps stripping us of certain, um, certainties, and, um, and making us feel uplifted for a certain amount of time, and we feel we’ve moved on, and yet, then over time, over the next few days, and weeks, and certainly months, we return to our old patterns.’

### *Uncertainty*

**Self:** ‘Do you feel that the *ayahuasca* has, um, you were looking to get rid of this [alcoholism], (**P1:** ‘sure.’) um, and do you feel that the *ayahuasca* has helped in that at all?’

**P1:** ‘Um, whether it has got rid of it I’m not sure as yet, what I would say, um, like I said; it has the ability, um, to, to um, it’s given me the ability to see this things (**Self:** ‘Uhum’) which nothing else, um, has been able to do, so, um, so I don’t know.’

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<sup>92</sup> Based on my own experience there is worthy cause for this warning. There was an afterglow from the *ayahuasca* experience where folly and fantasy can thrive. This lasted at minimum the entire day following a ritual.

This is a suitable juncture to consider the visual ethnography Activity 5, found in Appendices 10, and 15. The task asked participants to choose one word to summarise what *ayahuasca* has given to them, and illustrate that through typographic techniques. The three words presented back were ‘healing’, ‘vision’, and ‘remind’ and one participant chose not to respond. Participant 7 offered the following explanation as to why they omitted a response:

‘I don't feel I have enough to say about the topics you're asking about’. This could be that they did not feel that their experience with *curandeirismo* was extensive enough; that they did not feel that their involvement had given them anything; or both.

The three responding participants show that they feel there is some efficacy and they each provided a keyword to illustrate : ‘healing’, ‘vision’, ‘remind’. The first two lack ambiguity. Health, is being achieved by a move from darkness into light. An eye projected over the Earth with the word ‘vision’ represents seeing the world. They see the world as it is, with clarity; *Curandeirismo* has offered an unclouded, purer, perspective to this participant. ‘Remind’ is however, a verb. How might this be a gain? It is my understanding that participant 10 is a writer who enjoys wordplay. What they are depicting here is not necessarily that *curandeirismo* reminds them of something once forgotten, their submission does incorporate that. Their answer relates to re-minding. Where minding is a process of coming together and finding clarity within oneself and one’s convictions. They are using the word remind, much like the term ‘second skin’. It is a refreshment of one’s mental state. Yet, equally it could be interpreted as being a way of encapsulating that there is knowledge that we have lost here in Britain, that we have forgotten our magico-spiritual roots, where we had a closer connection to nature<sup>93</sup>. By delving into that of the Amazon’s people, and through the teachings of the brew, one can be ‘reminded’ of this. The spirit of the plant, the universal consciousness, are facilitated by the drinking of a pungent stew to bring back knowledge that have been lost in the pursuit of progress in the Occident.

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<sup>93</sup> This comment is related to the political landscape of a time. For many environmentalists there has been a feeling of being in a minority. As these words age this statement it is hoped that this becomes an outdated mindset.



### 9.3.3 Ontological alignment

While Chapter 8 provided an analysis of the overall ontology of the research's participants, this section serves to consider participant belief systems that are specific to the practices of *curandeirismo*. Chapter 8 showed how participants have changed from their largely Catholic or Christian influences of childhood and showed thoughts about oneness, interconnectivity, forms of *dharma*, and a spiritual element to psychedelic drug use. Importantly, there was no uniform set of beliefs displayed by the participants; yet there were many similarities. There is typically no set teaching that comes with these activities, other than that which may or may not be received within an *ayahuasca* experience. There are no texts shared between community members. It is both subjective and interpretive in nature. When considering how well participant's views align with the belief systems of the native *curandeiro* they are not identical, nor are they incongruent. They are presented as their own unique, profound, perspective; individual and yet still connected by similarity to the rhizomatic whole.

Participants incorporate what feel they know confidently from their environment in Britain, and what they have been either escaping or looking for in reaching out to an alternative culture's traditions. They are individual. This is not to say they are wrong, or bad, for not being identical, or aligned. It is to say that they are the same, and yet different; a copy, yet changed. There is no set, prescribed, and tangible set of beliefs that define *curandeirismo*, rather a loose set of concepts, that are, within their own Indigenous communities, individualised. What we

**P1:** 'I don't conclusively believe that, erm, there is a specific plant spirit, right, and that there is a leaf, a vine spirit, and a leaf spirit and all that, because, I kind of feel like all the spirits in everything are all just like one big blob.'

**P1:** 'The more that we can purify that thing that we send out, and make it a good thing, and raise the vibrations, or however you want to put it, um, the more that's just gonna seep into the rest of the world, the 'Western' world (**Self:** 'right, ok.') and make things better.'

**P3:** 'There is an inner knowing that this is the spiritual realm.'

**P3:** '*Ayahuasca* for me is a book of information. (**Self:** 'Uhum') What one does with that book is no different than picking a book off the shelf and reading it, and one of the, one of the confusing things, um, is its interpretation.'

**P7:** 'I could always kind of appreciate there was some kind of, I suppose I call it spiritual; I'm not totally happy with the word spiritual, but (**Self:** 'Ok.') but it doesn't really matter, um, some kind of spiritual aspect to drug use.'

**P7:** 'It's all an illusion so really spiritual has (**Self:** 'So it doesn't necessarily...') it has the right connotations but...'

**P10:** '*Ayahuasca*; I knew that that would take me to where I needed to go.'

see here is an extension of that, moving out into alternative communities around the globe. The stratification and reforming of a phenomenon. The repetition and difference. Mimesis in action.

## 9.4 Value

Another aspect of understanding the mimetic nature of this phenomenon is to consider what value our participants place on these practices. It is here the last part of the research question: ‘what it means to them?’ is best considered; in terms of the importance participants place on *curandeirismo* in their life, not what they interpret it to be. Native *curandeiro* are raised with these practices as fundamental to their cultural identity and lifestyle. The participants have not experienced this and from the offset, it is not expected that the same value is placed on the practices by participants as someone who was exposed to them from birth. In looking at the value participants place on these practices the aim is not to apply a set of moral judgements, by comparing to native the *curandeiro*; it is to understand how important the practices have become to the participants and how they might feel about not having access to them.

In this section, a range of attitudes were put forward, and groupings have been presented by theme not viewpoint. First is how much participants felt *curandeirismo* to be a part of their life. Two extremes are presented here. For participant 3 *curandeirismo* is a passing interest. It is not of great significance to them beyond its utility. They have a problem to solve and a solution is all they sought. Participant 4 has a casual attitude towards their

### *A part of life*

**P3:** ‘I wouldn’t really say it’s a part of my life. It’s something, I mean, I can live with or without.’

**P4:** ‘It’s just one of those things that I’d do once or twice a year kind of thing.’

**P4:** ‘I’ve always been interested in, um, the shamanic sort of approach to life.’

**P6:** ‘I believed from the very first experience that it would be in my life forever, (**Self:** ‘Wow! wow.’) and I can’t say that about anything else.’

**P8:** ‘It’s very important that I um have the ability to go and do it, very important um and I have a desire to do it and to learn more and to find out more.’

**P9:** ‘I see it as something that I want to embody, and something that I want to take on as part of my (**Self:** ‘Wow.’) journey through life.’

### *Not religious*

**P3:** ‘The actual church [Santo Daime] itself, I had no affiliation.’

**P11:** ‘Because it was such a rigid ritual, a devotional, um, ritual that, er, a devotional prayer for several hours to the mother Mary and Jesus Christ, and has a very strong Christian basis, I’d always been reluctant.’

### *Integration*

involvement too, however their reported affiliation to the general concept of shamanism shows that they feel a greater connection to this lifestyle, and it is more than a passing interest. Participants 6, 8, and 9 are at the other end of the value continuum. It is something they want to fully incorporate into their lifestyle. They see themselves as having regular, long-term involvement with *curandeirismo*. This has become an important part of their repertoire.

For some, as also seen in Section 6.2 from participant 2 and 11, there is an aversion to the religious overtones of the *Santo Daime*. For these participants access to the practices was granted by members of the religion, and so participants compromised their own positionality in exchange for the experience. Yet, in that same section participant 5 said that they were drawn to the ceremonial elements of their experience of *curandeirismo*. Not the religious element, but the repetition of tradition, the setting, and adornments. The religious aspects were not relevant to the participants at all.

Some participants also claimed to have had a difficulty in integrating what they have taken from their experiences into everyday life in Britain. They were unable to talk openly about the experiences with friends, family, or in the workplace. The people around them were unaware of their quest for personal development, or what that meant on an individual level. In participant observations for this research the rituals provided an opportunity immediately afterwards to discuss the experience with others in attendance. However,

**P3:** 'The only problem is, is often like everything else, you go on a course, you learn something new, the most difficult part of that course, of that information, is putting it into practice, (Self: 'Yea, yeah.') and the fact that we, we live so called "normal" lives, in terms of work, family, we have to go back into that environment, and the fact that there is no structure, or there appears to be no structure in terms of, um, kind of finding time, and that and taking time Out, and, and you know? sort of organising these things. There's no-one really, there doing that for you, most people will fail (Self: 'Um') because they'll go back to normality (Self: 'Yea?') um, and struggle to put any of the information that came through into practice.'

**P11:** 'We need to find a way of integrating them [the lessons taken from *ayahuasca* experiences] into our daily lives, um, otherwise it becomes almost like any other drug, and it can become, and I've seen this happen, in several friends of mine, it can become a crutch.'

#### *Miscellaneous*

**P1:** 'I'm open to ideas like you're upsetting the vine by, by not doing it properly.'

**P3:** 'The most important thing, um, is, is an appreciation, an understanding of this idea of consciousness, and divinity being in and around us constantly.'

**P9:** 'I wouldn't say it's a drug culture.'

**P11:** 'My rational mind also had another perspective which was that in some ways *ayahuasca* was no more than a glorified, um, psychedelic, anti-depressant,

once one is back in the flow of everyday life, it is easy to become distracted by more pressing calls for one's attention.

There are hints of respect to the native communities here too: not wanting to upset the vine; the importance placed on accepting congruent beliefs; rejection of this being classified as 'drug culture', alongside images of cocaine barons, and ecstasy ravers. For those involved in *curandeirismo* it stands apart from any non-prescribed substance use previously known in British culture.

Participant 11 stands out with their rational perspective, coupled with appreciation for the community they have been part of through this element of their life. This is the only sign of a cohesive cultural grouping that has been present throughout the entire data set, yet they do not appear to be influenced by any viewpoints that are not grounded in a positivist scientific perspective.

because the harmine which is in the *ayahuasca* vine is a Monoamine Oxidase Inhibitor.'

**P11:** 'I had a whole social network who were keen on sharing that, sharing our understandings and also experiencing, um, shared experiences, meeting up and having, er, having psychedelic experiences together.'

# 10. Conclusion

## 10.1 Validation

This thesis set out to better understand the motivations and perceptions of British citizens who choose to engage in ‘Amazonian shamanic’ practices. As far as I am aware, this is the first British-focused research into this subject. The question this research asked is:

**What understanding can be formed about people in Great Britain, who are engaged in shamanic practices originating from the Amazon jungle, and what their involvement means to them?**

Four subsequent questions, used to formulate an overall answer, were set out in Section 1.3. These questions are not exhaustive, in fact, using a post colonialist approach, as explained in Section 1.4.1, it is recognised that the research participants should be empowered to drive the direction of the data. These questions provided a firm foundation in the investigation. They are listed here next to the coordinating thesis sections that address them.

### Question:

### Section of the thesis:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. What motivated the participants to get involved in these practices? | Throughout Chapter 7 and Section 9.2.                         |
| 2. What are the belief systems of the participants, if any?            | Participants’ quotes in Section 6.1 and throughout Chapter 8. |
| 3. What is the perceived impact of these practices on the participant? | Sections 7.2 – 7.6, 8.6 and 9.3.                              |
| 4. What is the perceived value of these practices?                     | Section 9.4   |

Ethnography was presented as the most suitable methodology for this research in Chapter 2. Ethnography’s broad data collection methods allowed a wide angled view to be formed, rather than a predetermined investigation. This matched the aims of the thesis to map out the complexities related to studying the subject in this setting and providing a platform for future study of different elements of this map. However, Section 2.1.2 highlighted some of the limitations associated with traditional ethnographic data collection. While participant observation does allow the researcher insight by acting as their participants do, interpretations are still filtered through the researcher’s standpoint epistemology, and not the participants’.

This may, at points, find itself at odds with the ethos of the work. Additionally, semi-structured interviews, while informal and conversational, are still an unnatural setting. Participants may present what they perceive the researcher is looking for and shape their answers accordingly.

Overcoming these limitations led to the inclusion of visual and autoethnographic methods. Their inclusion allowed triangulation of findings, and a way of documenting the often-non-linear reasoning and connections made by both the participants, and as part of my own reflections, in the highlighting of themes. The visual ethnography offered an opportunity to return to themes that stood out in the interviews that warranted more investigation. The activities also provided an opportunity for more creative, and free-form communication. Autoethnography benefitted the research by allowing a space to expose biases, and either support or challenge researcher experiences, views, and interpretations in relation to *curandeirismo*.

There were some aspects of this approach that did not work so well. For example, in relation to the visual ethnography data collection, the returns from participants were low, with only four participants taking part. However, there were still sufficient responses to be useful. This may have been avoided if it was possible to invite the participants to a centralised location and carry out activities as a group, rather than in alone in their own time; this was not feasible due to the need to maintain participant anonymity.

The most useful data collection methods were the participant observations and interviews. Observations provided an insight into the rituals and practices that would not have been possible any other way. Recording devices were not welcome in rituals and typically impact the behaviour of those being recorded. The interviews were an opportunity for participants to share their own, unique, story and contribute to the overall tapestry of this ethnography. They were conversational and relaxed. Participants were very forthcoming with information and viewpoints.

A participant has reviewed this thesis to ensure what is reported is a fair and balanced representation of their contributions. All participants involved in the visual ethnography

element were invited to comment on the assessments made of their submissions as they relied on interpretive analysis.

## 10.2 How *curandeirismo* reached Britain

Throughout this work, the theory of the rhizome from *ATP* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988) has provided a useful way of conceptualising, how *curandeirismo* came to be in Britain.

...in all things, there are lines of articulation or segmentary, strata and territories; but also lines of flight, moments of deterritorialization and destratification. Comparative rates of flow on these lines produce phenomena of relative slowness and viscosity, or, on the contrary of acceleration and rupture. All this, lines and measurable speeds, constitutes an *assemblage*.  
(Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 2)

First *curandeirismo* developed organically, in its place of origin, the Amazon jungle. Chapter 3 shows the stratification and merging with Catholicism to form the Santo Daime, Barquinha. And União do Vegetal faiths. In more recent decades we have seen it stratify further and move out of Brazil into a range of countries including Britain.

Still, it is not religion alone that is responsible for the spread of *Curandeirismo*. It was not just rubber tappers, but also botanists and anthropologists that introduced the Occident to *curandeirismo*. A curiosity to academics, soon it reached the attention of the elite beat culture of 1950's America. Slowly and steadily knowledge of ayahuasca has grown in the Occident until eventually we see it penetrating both hip-hop, and pop culture.

The *Santo Daime* did not buy buildings or run coordinated recruitment drives when its members established themselves in Britain. Purveyors of *curandeirismo* mainly avoided public attention, admitting people into rituals upon invitation only. They relied on personal references, trust, and protection from the European Union's Human Rights directives to protect their freedoms. Still, marketing opportunities, to specific, sympathetic, groups were seen at small festivals and talks organised by subversive, spiritual, and psychedelic communities. The stringent laws applied to the possession and distribution of psychoactive substances in the UK mean that the associated culture is naturally secretive. This has slowed the spread of ayahuasca here and meant that initially the experience was typically the preserve of experienced psychedelic users.

Chapter 5 is dedicated to looking at how this stratification took place in Britain; considering academic research, pop culture, and press reports of *ayahuasca*. The chapter provides the most detailed analytic of media representation of *ayahuasca* published at this time. It was demonstrated how the British media has shaped the image of *ayahuasca* in particular, and largely promoted it as not only an elite, middle class, and new age endeavour for personal betterment, but also of the zeitgeist, with claims that it is the new drug of choice for rock stars. This has been framed as an aspirational activity and romanticised in numerous instances. *Ayahuasca's* visibility has especially been increased thanks to popularisation by varied musicians and raconteurs.

### 10.5 Why turn to curandeirismo?

Many of the motives presented in this research mirrored what can be expected from reviewing existing literature as seen throughout Chapter 5; spiritual advancement, improved mental health, creativity, and in rare instance, novel psychedelic experience. The aspects related to health were examined throughout Chapter 7, however, section 9.2.2 illustrated that in some cases participants felt it was their destiny, or they had been called to the experience. It simply felt right for them; or they wanted to improve something not explicitly linked to health. Overall, participants approached *curandeirismo* in a place of need. They felt stuck in life; mentally blocked, creatively stunted, or drifting and in need of change. They were looking for a way out of something difficult. Most felt that they found it, if only temporarily, with *ayahuasca*.

*Ayahuasca* has presented a variety of potentialities; a chance to improve; to heal; to meet God; to expunge an unwanted spirit entity; and to experience something not offered elsewhere. Two participants were on a mission to become shaman, one claimed to have become a shaman, others knew their involvement would be passing.

*Curandeirismo* is rare in its fusion of the psychedelic experience, reported health benefits, and spiritual milieu. No other psychedelic compound had explicitly offered that in the UK until the arrival of *ayahuasca*. Research into the therapeutic advantages of Psilocybin and LSD were some way off at that time *curandeirismo* took root in Britain, as was the prescription of cannabis for a variety of medicinal use.



Some participants demonstrated a strong distaste or distrust in the licenced medical interventions available to them in Britain. Yet in the visual ethnography data, seen in Appendix 13 the NHS was clearly valued. Likewise, British society was seen as lacking in something, and participants felt that *curandeirismo* could fill the gap influenced by the romanticism seen in Chapter 9, influenced by the media, as demonstrated throughout Chapter 5. Furthermore, Chapter 7 illustrated that traditional methods of self-improvement, typical in Britain, have not worked for the participants. This is an area that warrants further research. Why haven't they worked? What does *curandeirismo* offer that those traditional British methods do not? Can we integrate *curandeirismo*, ethically, into British culture to reap any benefits it has to offer?

### 10.3 What makes a community member?

Data provided throughout Chapters 6 to 9 shows that there is no clear cut haecceity in this community. There are no established conditions for membership, and no universally shared traits. The only thing the participants of this research had universally in common was their experience of *ayahuasca*. However, even this is not a strict requirement in the wider scope of Britons involved in *curandeirismo*. Although *ayahuasca* is common, some may only participate in *kambo* treatments, or *rapé* rituals. This has not been encountered in the course of this research and would be rare.

There is no typical image we can conjure of a British person involved in *curandeirismo* either. As with the wider psychedelic communities of Britain, it is dominated by the largest ethnic group in Britain, those with West European heritage; although it includes a smaller number of people with Caribbean/African heritage, and a smaller group of people with parents representing both ethnicities. This is not to say that people of other ethnicities are taking part in *curandeirismo* in Britain, but they were not found to be in this study.

Section 8.7 showed that almost half of the participants held strong critical views against Occidental culture. The participant quotes of section 6.1 showed a significant presence of Christianity or Catholicism in the upbringing of roughly half of the participants. Most had moved on and developed new religious, spiritual, metaphysical ideas and were interested in entertaining alternative ideas, prior to their introduction to *curandeirismo*. In section 8.1 it was noted that some have developed strong views against religion, while others practice 'spiritual

scrapbooking’. It was also found throughout chapter 8 that participants hold an array of beliefs including that all people have innate, unlocked powers; belief in the supernatural; and multiple dimensions of reality.

Indeed, there was no sign of participants having an interest in *curandeirismo* to make friends, or to be part of a group. The data did not show this to be about identity or belonging for the community members. Throughout chapter 7, and in section 9.2, the two areas of the thesis focusing on motives for involvement, it was shown to be individualistic; wanting things to be different; taking control of achieving beneficial change; and a little bit of romanticisation of what is culturally alternative, novel, and curiosity. The warnings and requirements that accompany *ayahuasca* use are not typically attractive to recreational psychedelic users, who otherwise are happy with escapism as their *raison d'être*. The week-long restrictive diet, abstinence from sex, a list of incompatible pharmaceutical medicines, all act as a filter, ensuring most purveyors taking part in these rituals are serious about it.

While lacking any traditional core community identity, communal relationships develop around a particular ritual provider as people experience *ayahuasca* together. There can be a sense of intimacy after a ritual, especially when sharing details and interpretations of the experiences. At a time when *curandeirismo* was new in Britain there was a greater sense of connection when encountering someone else that understood the topic; as though knowledge of *ayahuasca* was esoteric, or exclusive. If you knew, you were ‘in the know’. This creates a duality, a world where people understand and acknowledge this impactful and immersive experience, and a world where it feels safer keeping it a secret to avoid misconception, judgement, and conflict. As *curandeirismo* has been covered more in the press and more people know about it, this sense of exclusivity and secrecy waned. Many people now have some knowledge of *ayahuasca* who may have never previously been interested in psychedelics, *curandeirismo*, sub-culture, or counterculture.

The participant quotes presented in section 6.1 show a range of experiences in, and opinions on, non-prescribed drug use. A predilection towards CAMs was also noted in section 7.1. For many *ayahuasca* has offered an alternative lens from which to peer into the cosmos or review their life. To some it provided the chance to have a dialogue with ‘God’. Notably, the Catholic

trimmings of the Santo Daime saw little resistance or reverence within the sample group. They were simply accepted as necessary by virtue of circumstance.

Goh (2006: pp. 216 – 231) argues that the absence of community in *ATP* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988) denotes anti-community which provides reason for the nebulous sense of community found in here. Goh rallies against the rigid ideas that the term ‘community’ evokes:

We will be anti-community just so to create a clearing for a free space of thought for another thinking of community. We will have to be anti-community not so that we will stop thinking about community but to return community to a proper thinking, a thinking that is always open to its futures, a thinking without horizon.  
(Goh, 2006: 219)

It continues:

The State [term used interchangeably with ‘community’] imposes a homogeneity of thought. It discourages, represses, and sometimes suppresses deviations. The State captures thought as its rationalizing interiority, and through which "thought is [thereby]<sup>95</sup> capable of inventing the fiction of a State that is universal by right, cl elevating the State to the level of de jure universality" ([Deleuze and Guattari,] 1987, 375). It appropriates thought so that it can lay claim to be a force of an enlightened institution, an institution that none can disagree with. And to maintain that, along with its will to establish spatial integrity, sovereignty, or security, the State also limits the freedom of movement of people within its territory.  
(Goh, 2006: 220)

Furthermore:

Communities have become overcodified [sic] by their linguistic idioms, customs, economic practices, political inclinations, etc. Membership into the community is predicated only by the knowledge, acceptance, observance, adherence, and communication of these codes. Community has taken on a politics and an economy, and it has come to signify a circuitous flow.  
(Goh, 2006: 221)

As was shown in Section 8.7, participants held strong views against Occidental culture. The culture in which they have been predominantly immersed. It would make little sense to create a new community group, overcodified, politicised, with rules of belonging, that serves as a synecdoche, alternative as it is, to Occidental culture; especially when the primary motivation is to enhance well-being.

## 10.4 How curandeirismo is enacted in Britain

In Britain, there are practitioners committed to continuing the doctrine of the *Santo Daime*, and those keen to shed any religious connotations while demonstrating a sense of ritual and reverence to *ayahuasca* traditions. The participants' quotes of Section 6.2 show that they all maintained a sense of ritual in their *ayahuasca* use. Some attended rituals set out by *Santo Daime* practitioners, while others attempted to create their own personal ritual. The rituals described by participants were varied, but the notion of ritual appeared as a note of reverence, formality, and a sense of exceptionality in relation to the experience. Holding ritual help in compartmentalising *ayahuasca* from experiences from other psychedelic compounds.

*Curandeirismo* has been practiced in several settings too. As previously noted, there are no purpose-built churches available in Britain, and certainly no jungle clearings, and as such the settings were dictated by the British climate more than any tribute to authenticity; living rooms, community halls, tipi, and flats rented for a weekend. This is another circumstance that required acceptance on the part of the community member: while setting and ritual was important to the *Santo Daime* practitioners witnessed in this research, and welcomed by some participants, it was of less importance to them.

Alignment of belief systems between research participants and what is understood about native *curandeiro* was not absolute, yet section 9.3 proved that there are many congruences. Where participants moved away from their largely Christian and Catholic upbringing, they moved towards shamanic ideologies.

## 10.6 The perceived benefits of Curandeirismo

Most participants espoused that they found *curandeirismo*, especially *ayahuasca*, to be of significant value to them. Throughout Chapter 7 *ayahuasca* was presented as a solution for the intangible, difficult to communicate, barriers, and blocks. It gave one participant 'the gift' of improved musicality. One participant, previously presented with a diagnosis of an incurable, degenerative, disease, found hope with *ayahuasca*. Improved relationships, from renewed perspective were reported, as was an improved attitude to diet and fitness. Two participants even reported that they overcame addiction; one permanently transformed from cocaine

importer to shaman; and one temporarily experienced relief, until a relapse was triggered by trauma.

There was a sense that benefits waned over time, and that regular use of *ayahuasca* was needed for improvements to be maintained. This is another area that may benefit from a phenomenological, or further, study. Why do the results wane? Can they be sustained without regular *ayahuasca* use, are there any other factors at play which determine the longevity the benefits.

## 10.7 Closing thoughts

If the findings of this research are to be summed up in one word, it would be ‘change’. The main reason given for participation in *curandeirismo* was the need for change, of some sort. The cultural heritage of *curandeirismo* is a significant shift from life as experienced in Britain. The effect of *ayahuasca* facilitates a change in perspective, in mental state, in vision. Community members want different, and *curandeirismo* delivers, in multiple ways.

*Ayahuasca* appeared as a peg on which to hang the coat of change. A chrysalis in which to turn to goo and reform, moth, butterfly, bee, or fly. The experience is ineffable enough to avoid the critical questions of close friends and family who may serve to stymie personal progression. It is awe inspiring enough to conjure a shift in the participant. It served as a kick in the psyche, or a jolt out of a rut. It electrified ambition no matter how small or intimidating. It offered parental guidance from the cosmos itself.

Future research is warranted in a number of areas in addition to those highlighted at the end of Sections 10.5 and 10.6. More focus is required on *kambo* use in Britain; both from an ethnographic perspective and a clinical one. It is currently unregulated, and we know little of the effects of long-term use in this cultural environment, the verifiable benefits, or how to standardise doses. Likewise, as this thesis took a wider look at *curandeirismo*, in which *ayahuasca* use dominated discussion, a similar study focusing on *kambo* would provide a further insight into why people use it, what they get from it, and any beliefs or feelings around it.

Benefit can be gained from a phenomenological approach to *curandeirismo*, and *ayahuasca* in Britain too. A phenomenological analysis on the essence of these practices from the perspective of both native users, and non-native users would provide a depth of insight not currently found in literature. In addition, it will be interesting to see the development of clinical research into *ayahuasca* too; to see how it may be integrated as a licenced mental health treatment in Britain in a way that is ethical to patients, the natives of the Amazon region, and the environment, if it can be proved as more effective than currently available treatments.

This ethnography concludes here:

‘One does not imitate; one constitutes a block of becoming. Imitation enters only as an adjustment of the block, like a finishing touch, a wink, a signature.’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 355)

# Appendix 1

## Document E4H

Please circle your level of experience  
in conducting research.

1 = No experience

2 = Some experience

**3 = Experienced**

4 = Very experienced

NO:

University of Cumbria 

## APPLICATION FORM

### Request for Ethical Clearance for Research with Human Participants

*The attention of researchers is drawn to the University's Code of Research Practice and related documentation. **This document should be completed with reference to both the Ethical Clearance Checklist and the Notes of Guidance***

*This form, **completed in black type**, is to be submitted to the Research Office. Please do not fix with staples. **Applicants will receive a response within 30 days***

## RESEARCH TEAM

<b><i>First-named Chief Investigator *</i></b> <i>Rowberry, Miss, K.J.</i>  <i>(Surname, Title, Initials)</i>	<b><i>Faculty/School/Service</i></b> <b><i>Health, Lancaster Campus.</i></b>
<b><i>Other Investigators</i></b>	<b><i>Faculty/School/Service</i></b> <i>(for students include enrolled degree details)</i>

(Surname, Title, Initials)	
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\* Outcomes of this request will be forwarded to this person

## **DECLARATION BY FIRST-NAMED INVESTIGATOR**

1. *The information contained is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, accurate. I accept responsibility for the conduct of the proposed research and agree to abide by the University's Ethical Principals and Guidelines for Research involving Human Participants and/or applicable professional code(s) of ethics (such as BPS Code of Ethics) and any other provision as determined by the Ethics Sub Committee.*
2. *I undertake to ensure that data are collected and maintained in accord with University's requirements.*
3. *I, together with my co-investigators and any support staff, have the appropriate qualifications, experience and access to facilities to conduct the research as described in the attached documentation, and will be able to deal with any emergencies and/or contingencies that may arise during or as a result of the conduct of the proposed research.*

**Signature:**

**Date:**



## 1. PROJECT DETAILS

### 1.1 Project Title (50 words max.)

A Contemporary study of Amazonian Shamanic Practices in Great Britain

Proposed duration of the Project: from 01/10/2011 to 01/10/2018

### 1.2. Peer review

If the project has already been peer-reviewed, or will be reviewed eg by a funding body or by NHS Ethics Committee, please provide details, and if relevant, any results

### 1.3 Briefly describe the research purpose including your research questions, techniques and procedures involved or the conduct of the proposed research (300 words max.).

The aim of this research is to gain an understanding of the current Amazonian shamanic practices, specifically the use of both ayahuasca and kambo in Britain. It will highlight how widespread usage is, by using a multi-method approach that may include any emergent methods that may add value to the project. The primary methods that will be used are:

- Interviews with participants, practitioners and relevant professionals.
- Group discussions with participants.
- Overt and participant observation.

It is hoped that some field work will be carried out in the Netherlands. This acts as the best example of a European country, with arguably quite similar culture, where these substances have been accepted and are used openly. This field work, it is hoped, will provide us with enough information to establish any societal benefits or dangers associated with the spread of these practices and provide comparative notes on motives and methods surrounding the rituals. However, as our main focus is on practices in Britain this element will provide supplementary data.

This research may also involve some background research in Latin America in order to contextualise the rituals. This will allow for a comparison to see how Britain, and its societal norms may have altered the practices in ways which may not be understood through literary review.

In both of the above cases a new ethics proposal will be submitted beforehand since each country may have different understandings and guidelines pertaining to research ethics.

The research, in its entirety will establish reasons for usage, how it is used, what is gained from the rituals and may, positive and negative effects associated with these particular substances, the effect that British culture may have on them and the effect that they may have on British culture. As a caveat, the research may also highlight some attitudes towards traditional European treatments and therapies.

Ayahuasca is a psychedelic brew made from the combination of the Banisteriopsis caapi vine and various admixtures, usually from the ***Psychotria viridis*** genus of bush. It is traditionally used in ceremonious settings for both healing and spiritual gain.

Kambo is the secretion produced by agitated Giant Tree Frogs, Phyllomedusa bicolor. It is administered by small burn holes in the skin and creates an immediate high fever. This is used to strengthen the immune system, help overcome stress and eradicate 'panamea' or bad luck.

The active component of ayahuasca is DMT which is considered internationally to be a class A controlled substance. A more detailed consideration of legality is offered later in section 4.1.

A minimum of ten interviews will be conducted with participants. It is also hoped that there will be at least three interviews with practitioners, as well as any suitable interviews with other related professionals. These will include some standardized questions aimed at forming an understanding of the type of individual turning to this practice. However, the primary body of the interview

will be performed in a naturalistic format, allowing the individual to discuss in detail their experiences, motivations, and opinions. Between three and five group discussions will take place also. These will be minimally guided so as to touch on topics that will be of value to the project and may involve some visual ethnographic techniques such as using picture making or use of modelling clay to communicate experience, motivations, and feelings of about the practices. It is hoped that at least five case studies will take place too. These will follow individuals from their first introduction, or as close to it as possible, to the practices through a course of at least 12 months, providing they have pre-existing intent to have regular involvement with a shamanic practitioner.

Both overt and participant observations will be conducted throughout the study.

It is intended to seek written permissions from representatives of both the Santo Daime and União do Vegetal churches, which both use Ayahuasca regularly as a holy sacrament. Both religions originate in Brasil, the former established in the 1930's and the latter around the 1970's. Both fuse traditional shamanic ideas with Christian teachings and some afro-shamanic influence too. The two religions are different in their formality, with UDV appearing a much more structured organisation with a formal process of affiliation. The Santo Daime is much more relaxed in their structuring, it seems to primarily shy away from excessive ranking systems and has no formal membership process for its participants. There are also differences in the ceremonial process as well as the interpretation of what the brew does. The UDV claiming only that it is a means of inducing deep concentration, and the Santo Daime claiming its ability to allow access to the spirit realm and have fantastic healing powers. The participation of one or both of these organisations will be vital information for this study.

While the individual practices are central to this study, the research is not focused on only this. There is a whole contextual framework to understand and

navigate through. This study is about the practice as a whole, in particular the beliefs that the participants hold about the practices. The study will establish to what extent the authenticity of the rituals is maintained or adapted, if the practices partitioned in the participants thinking. The research will demonstrate how the individuals explain their beliefs and how all this fits in with our culture in Britain.

**NOTE:** *Where an agency (eg, government department, statutory authority, recognised cultural collective) is the source of either participants or confidential information, attach a statement(s) from an authorised officer confirming the agency's support for the proposed research, or indicating to obtain one.*

#### **14.1 1.4 How will stakeholders obtain details of outcomes from the proposed research?** *(Stakeholders may include participants, project sponsors and/or other interested parties)*

Stakeholders will be invited to make contact at any time with the researcher to obtain updates on the progress of the research. This will be done through the ETH09/04 form, known as the Participation Information Sheet. Contact details of the main researcher will also be given, with additional invite to request the resulting thesis following peer review.

## **2. PROPOSED PARTICIPANTS**

### **2.1 Who are the proposed participants and how will they be selected or recruited?**

A) Administrators of Ayahuasca and Kambo who may also be referred to as shamanic practitioners. These may be representatives of the Santo Daime or União do Vegetal churches, or Holistic Therapists (in the Netherlands).

B) Users or participants. These may be current or future initiates of the Santo Daime or União do Vegetal churches, casual or one time users of the present or past, or regular, none religious users. As both substances are used for therapeutic purposes it is likely that these individuals may suffer, or have suffered the following:

Ayahuasca: depression, stress, anxiety, low self-esteem or confidence and other related mental health conditions, substance addition.

Kambo: Stress, physical illness such as arthritis, immune deficiencies and related illness, swelling or bloating.

C) Other relevant professionals such as; Mental health professionals (phycologists and psychiatrists), specialists in substance addiction including therapists and psychologists, specialist in religion, including shamanism, specialists in entheogens, specialists in holistic and/or complementary therapies, and professionals associated with relevant charities. Where these individuals are employed by the NHS it is recognised that they will request their own ethical clearance. In the event that this impedes research likewise professionals may be found in the private sector. This category of participants is secondary to the research.

## **2.2 What mechanisms will be adopted to follow the University Safeguarding Policy by protecting the rights of those who lack the capacity to provide informed consent?**

No participants will be used if they lack the capacity to offer informed consent. Where notes and information is gained from group events every effort will be made to inform the group of the y, and its aims.

## **14.1 2.3 What mechanisms will be used to obtain informed consent and include the participant's right to withdraw from the study? (NB Attach example information sheet and consent form)**

Participants will be asked if they require anonymity. Those who decline will be asked to sign a consent form that highlights their right to withdraw, without obligation to offer reason or justification. They will also be offered their own copy of the Participant Information Sheet which also highlights their right to withdraw at any time.

Where participants request anonymity they will be offered the same Participant Information Sheet for their own records. Their consent will be obtained verbally at the start of recorded interviews and group discussions.

### **3. CONFIDENTIALITY/ANONYMITY**

#### **3.1 Where this project involves the use of detailed personal information, how is it proposed to meet provisions of the Data Protection Act?**

All participants are reminded via the Participant Information Sheet that;

“You are not expected to provide any personal information that you are not comfortable with sharing. You are not required to disclose any incriminating information.”

All notes and recordings prior to publication of the thesis will remain secure and stored in the researcher’s home. They will be labelled by first name only, and where anonymity has been requested with agreed alternative identifiers.

Telephone numbers will be stored in the researcher’s private mobile phone only. They will be undetectable from regular family and friends and also labelled as agreed with the participant.

In some cases personal information may be disclosed in email communication including real names, telephone numbers, addresses, and email addresses. These will remain private and under password protection.

Any address details recorded in the arrangement of interviews will not be stored and disposed of accordingly by shredding.

**14.1 3.2 How is it proposed to maintain confidentiality and/or anonymity in respect of collected data/information? Particular attention to detail is necessary in the case of research involving any of the following:**

- *structured questionnaires*
- *participant observation*
- *audio or video-taping of participants and/or events*
- *access to personal information (inc. student, patient or client details)*

Please see above. Interviewees will be informed, using the Participant Information Sheet that they only need to share and discuss what they are happy to disclose. Medical and patient details will not be accessed by the research conductor.

#### **4. RISK MANAGEMENT**

**4.1 Identify, as far as possible, any negative events which might arise during or as a consequence of the proposed research. Such risk assessment should take account of potential risks both for the participants and for the researcher(s). Particular attention to detail is necessary where the proposed research involves or may involve any of the following:**

- *administration of any stimuli, tasks, investigations or procedures which participants might experience as physically or mentally painful, stressful or unpleasant;*
- *performance of any acts which might diminish the self esteem of participants or cause them to experience depression, embarrassment or regret;*
- *deception of participants;*
- *collection of body tissues or fluid samples.*

**Detail proposed support for participants who may experience negative outcomes.**

It is recognised that some individuals interviewed may be in a state of vulnerability. They may have problems with depression, self-esteem issues or suffer with substance reliance. It is important from the outset to ensure that I, the researcher have a non-therapeutic role and cannot provide therapeutic help. Where appropriate relevant sign-posting will be offered.

Some interviews may be conducted with individuals acting outside of the law. This proposes a number of ethical dilemmas.

A) Protection of the field of research: Where anonymity is offered it must be maintained in order to prevent risk to the conduct of future research.

C) Disclosure of serious crime or intent: It may be disclosed that the interviewee has committed, or intends to commit particularly serious crime. In this research the only instance of this is where I may be informed of a new, large scale shipment of ayahuasca. This is a highly unlikely scenario, yet recognised as a potential event.

There are a number of UK laws that are aimed at assisting authorities to ensure disclosure from journalists and researchers, and very little protection for the researcher, specifically where research notes and recordings may be used as evidence in criminal court proceedings. There are a number of defences that may be used by the researcher, such as the utilitarian greater good, yet these have not been testing in the UK at this time. Through using appropriate labelling all notes should remain anonymous and as such unusable for any potential criminal investigation.

In addition I have highlighted in the Participant Information Sheet that absolute anonymity may not be possible. Firstly because it is impossible to determine whether information offered by participants will lead them to be identified by others within their family or social groupings. Secondly, in the rare case that a subpoena is issued it may lead to the researcher's imprisonment if notes and recordings are not submitted to the court. Confidentiality will not at all be



possible since transcripts of discussions and interviews will be used in the final thesis. This is too highlighted in the Participant's Information Sheet.

Where there may be any pressure to disclose information gathered in the course of this research, I would argue for a utilitarian greater good, as it could be argued that the results of this research would offer more to society than the results of any arrests. Perhaps I am biased or self-important?

Britain has experienced only one conviction for ayahuasca distribution, Peter Aziz 2011, which led to an 18 month sentence. Whilst this does appear to suggest the legal status of ayahuasca in the UK, Mr Aziz did not claim the defence of 'religious freedom' under the Human Rights Act 1998. It is this very defence that has seen toleration of ayahuasca in Brazil, The US, and the Netherlands. France tolerates ayahuasca simply because no effort has been made to extract the illegal component DMT from its natural plant based sources. Spain also accepts it's use, yet underlying reasons for this are yet to be ascertained.

In fact US Government funded research by the Federal Narcotics Council (CONFEN), August 1987 sated that;

"members of religious movements in which ayahuasca is consumed are actually more likely to exhibit patters of physical and moral well-being beyond those of the nation as a whole (MacRae, 1992:79-83)" and recommended it's removal form the list of proscribed substances.

Based upon this I would also argue that it cannot be stated with certainty that I will be witnessing any illegal activity at all, since this work will focus on use in ceremonial circumstances. It is felt that Britain simply has not been exposed to these practices enough to understand them at this point, and thus the case of Peter Aziz does not necessarily determine the future of these practices here. This is an issue that perhaps this research may inadvertently address. From

previous observation I can state that participants do not handle the substance until the point of drinking, and then in a specific ritualistic settings. No monies exchange hands until the following morning where a contribution is offered by the participant, which contributes to costs including lodgings for the night, use of facilities and breakfast.

There is no legal guidance, or restriction on the use of Kambo.

If ordered under subpoena to disclose notes I would seek legal advice and discuss the matter first with my research supervisors before responding. It is claimed that the defence of 'Freedom of Expression' under Article 10 of the European Convention of Human Rights is weakening in Britain, but may be attempted. The area of disclosure/confidentiality is a mine field of ethical dilemmas for researchers of criminology, as priority protection, from the researcher, will be always need to be offered to subjects so as to maintain the reputation and integrity of the research field.

This work will represent the practices of two religious groups; Santo Daime and União Du Vegetal. It is vital that this representation is fair and accurate. All attempts will be made to prevent misrepresentation and misunderstanding of the reports made. This will be discussed with the Research Supervisors throughout the course of thesis development. It is recognised that the eradication of misunderstanding cannot be guaranteed.

The Research Conductor is dedicated to offering fair and truthful representation to all faiths and individuals involved in shamanic practices. Unless invited she will not share her own personal experiences of the two substances in an attempt to prevent any influence over Research Subjects. Where invited to

share her experience she will explain her position as a researcher and state that her comments are for informative purpose only.

The Research Conductor is dedicated to offering and representing any objective opinion related to the use of Ayahuasca and Kambo.

All research subjects are provided with instruction on how to lodge a complaint, if they feel necessary, on the Participant's Information Sheet.

### **ACADEMIC FREEDOM**

The University is fully committed to the principle of freedom of academic inquiry, judgement, opinion and publication, subject to UK law, to the requirements of the University's Ethical Principles and Guidelines for Research involving Human Participants, and to any specific contractual obligations of commercial confidentiality.

#### ***Office Use Only***

*Date Received*

*Registration No.*

☐ ***Clearance Granted***

☐ ***Clearance Not***

***Granted: revisions suggested as per accompanying letter by: (date)***

*Period of Approval*

***Signature (Chair Ethics Sub-Committee)***

***Date***

*Date Certification/ Advice Issued*

# Appendix 2



## A Study of Amazonian Shamanic Practices in Great Britain.

### Participant Information Sheet

#### **About the study**

This is a PhD study which seeks to gain an understanding Amazonian Shamanism associated with the use of ayahuasca and kambo in Great Britain. Focusing on the underlying religious and therapeutic reasons for the use of these substances, and the related values, beliefs, perceived benefits of shamanic rituals and practices. The study will look at the cultural interplay and how activities and beliefs are accommodated in everyday life.

#### **Some questions you may have about the research project:**

##### **Why have you asked me to take part?**

There are three main types of individual that will be involved in the course of this research. You may be a professional who can offer enlightenment or opinion on the subject, you may be a shamanic practitioner offering treatments, rituals and guidance on such, or you may be a participant in shamanic rituals and religion. Your views will allow us to develop a clearer picture and greater understanding of these the practices.

##### **What will I be required to do?**

The study makes use of three main techniques, In depth Interviews, group discussions and observation of shamanic rituals.

Participants will be invited to contribute by taking part in one or more of these study methods. Interviews will be arranged in accordance to your schedule and availability. Interviews may include some standard questions but will consist mainly of relaxed and natural discussion about your views and experiences. You are **not** expected to provide personal information that you are not comfortable with sharing. You may ask questions about the nature and focus of the study at any time.

You may also be asked to take part in a group discussion at a convenient time, location and date. Group discussions are likely to last two to three hours. You can expect some fun interactive activities during group discussions that are intended to help you to communicate your experiences and views.

You may be asked to be subject of an in depth case-study. If you agree to this the researcher will shadow you during interactions and involvement with your shamanic practitioner. You may be asked to engage in frequent, short interviews and discussions.

Observations may also be made during the course of your activities. It is hoped that you will feel comfortable and free to act as you would usually. You may ask to exclude specific information, or to be alone with your shamanic practitioner if you wish to discuss something personal.

### **Where will this take place?**

Interviews will take place in private at a mutually convenient time and place.

Group discussions will take place in an agreed communal space.

Observations will take place ad-hoc wherever relevant activities take place.

### **How often will I have to take part and for how long?**

The average interview will take 1- 2 hours. If you feel you haven't shared all that you would like to in the interview, you are welcome to arrange another interview at your convenience.

Group discussions may last 2- 3 hours with mutual agreement.

If you are willing to participate in the in-depth Case Study you can expect to be involved in a up to ten shorter interviews over a longer period of time as well as the initial one 1-2 hour interview. These will be arranged at your convenience. Case studies will last for a period of 6 months.

**When will I have the opportunity to discuss my participation?**

You are welcome to email or call at any time before the arranged meeting times to raise any questions. You may also ask questions before and during interviews and group discussions.

You are welcome to withdraw from the study at any time, even while interviews or discussions are taking place. You do not have to offer any reason for choosing to leave the study.

**Who will be responsible for all the information when the study is over?**

The researcher, Kerry Rowberry is responsible for the security of the data collected during the study. You may request a copy of your contribution to field notes and recordings at any time before the completion of the study.

**Who will have access to it?**

Throughout the study information will be held and stored by Kerry Rowberry. Anonymised information may also be made available to Research Supervisors Professor Vincent O'Brien, Dr Ian Convery and Dr Tamara Kudaibergenova.

Once the thesis is complete it will face a panel of University Professionals for peer review. Following this anonymised information will be publicly available.

**How long will data be kept and where?**

Data may be kept in a secure location for the whole period of the study by Kerry Rowberry. Essential Personal information will be kept in accordance with the Data Protection Act, stored at the home of Kerry Rowberry in a room only accessible by her. All electronic data and emails will be held under password protection. You may ask for a copy of the personal data and any other data collected during the study. If you wish to withdraw from the study all personal data will be destroyed.

**What will happen to the information when this study is over?**

The information you have provided will be used to inform the thesis. A copy of the completed thesis will be kept by the Library at the University of Cumbria. Materials gathered during the study may also be used to produce academic articles, teaching materials and books related to the study. In all cases the anonymity of the participants will be maintained except where they have given consent to be identified in a publication. Eg. Photographs used to illustrate text publications.

**How will you use what you find out?**

Information you provide will be used to produce a PhD thesis. All information and opinions provided will be treated respectfully and as a basic principle of ethical research practice, the analysis and interpretation of data will seek to ensure that there is no deliberate distortion or misrepresentation of your comments.

Anonymised direct quotes will be used unless quotes are taken from materials already in the public domain.

**Will anyone be able to connect me with what is recorded and reported?**

Your views and the information you provide will not be shared with other participants in the study and all data collected will be anonymised. A fictional name and coding system will be used to link personal details with interview notes and recordings.

**How long is the whole study likely to last?**

At present the study is part time and could take up to seven years.

**How can I find out about the results of the study?**

You are welcome to call or email at any time for an update on progress with the study and any related publications. A copy of the completed thesis can be provided to you upon request.

**What if I do not wish to take part?**

Participation in the study is entirely voluntary.

**What if I change my mind during the study?**

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without having to provide a reason for doing so. In addition you will have certain editing rights during the interview(s) and group discussions, for example if you wish to retract something you have just said, it will be excluded from the final report. You may withdraw at any stage without prejudice.

**Will I need to sign any documentation?**

You may provide consent in written form by signing the attached consent form or verbally during group sessions and recorded interviews.

**Whom should I contact if I have any further questions?**

Please contact the researcher directly (details below).

**Complaints**

All complaints from the participants are in the first instance to be directed to the Director of Studies;

Dr Tom Grimwood

Senior Lecturer in Ethics and Cultural Theory

Programme Lead for MA Social Work

Faculty of Health and Well-being

Fusehill Street

Carlisle CA1 2HH

[tom.grimwood@cumbria.ac.uk](mailto:tom.grimwood@cumbria.ac.uk)

Following this you may report to the Secretary to the Dean for Research,

Research Office

University of Cumbria

Bowerham Road

Lancaster

LA1 3JD



***Researcher Contact Information:***

Kerry Rowberry Ba/Hons

Post Graduate Researcher

*University of Cumbria*

*Bowerham Road*

*Lancaster, LA1 3JD*

*Mobile:[edited for thesis publication]*

*Email: [kerry.rowberry@uni.cumbria.ac.uk](mailto:kerry.rowberry@uni.cumbria.ac.uk) or*

*kerryrowberry@yahoo.co.uk*

# Appendix 3

## **Rhizomatic diagram**

To access this document please follow this URL:

<https://gbshamanismphd.wordpress.com/2023/10/31/rhizomatic-diagram/>

# Appendix 4

## Activities forum front page – Visual Ethnography

Amazonian Shamanism in Britain Ethnographic Research

HomeHelpSearchCalendarMembersAdminProfileMessages

Welcome Kerry Rowberry, [Logout](#)

Amazonian Shamanism in Britain Ethnographic Research > Home > 

Participated

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News

Welcome to our new forum!

General

	Board	Threads	Posts	Last Post
	<b>Welcome</b> Please read this first. <small>Moderator: Kerry Rowberry</small>	2	4	Please read first! by Kerry Rowberry 22 Sep 2014 at 8:58pm
	<b>Activity 1</b> Everything you need to know about the first activity.	1	1	Instructions on Activity One by Kerry Rowberry 9 Jul 2014 at 8:50pm
	<b>Activity 2</b> Everything you need to know about the second activity.	1	1	Instructions on Activity Two by Kerry Rowberry 31 Jul 2014 at 7:43pm
	<b>Activity 3</b> Everything you need to know about the third activity.	1	2	Instructions on Activity Three by
	<b>Activity 4</b> Everything you need to know about the fourth activity.	1	1	Instructions on Activity Four by Kerry Rowberry 31 Jul 2014 at 8:29pm
	<b>Activity 5</b> Everything you need to know about the final activity.	1	1	Instructions on Activity Five by Kerry Rowberry 4 Aug 2014 at 6:50pm

Legend

New Posts No New Posts

Forum Information & Statistics

**Threads and Posts**  
Total Threads: 7    Total Posts: 10  
Last Updated: [Instructions on Activity Three](#) by robj (8 Mar 2015 at 4:20pm)  
[Recent Threads](#) - [Recent Posts](#) - [Mark All Boards Read](#)

**Members**  
Total Members: 8  
Newest Member: [robj](#)  
Most Users Online: 18 (9 Jul 2014 at 7:08pm)  
[View today's birthdays](#)

**Users Online**  
1 Staff, 0 Members, 0 Guests.  
[Kerry Rowberry](#)

**Users Online in the Last 24 Hours**  
1 Staff, 0 Members, 0 Guests.

235

# Appendix 5

## Preliminary guidance – visual ethnography

Please read first!


« Prev 1 Next »

Actions Search...

Quote Edit

Reply

Kerry Rowberry  
Administrator  
★★★★★



Posts: 10  
Member is Online

9 Jul 2014 at 6:10pm

Welcome to the forum.

**Thank you for agreeing to take part in this stage of the research. I hope you find it a fun and useful experience.**

The aim of these activities is to explore some of the themes that have emerged from interviews, observation and personal experience of Amazonian shamanistic practices.

It is my hope that they may help you reflect on your experiences and explore your thoughts and feelings about the themes.

**There are a few 'ground rules' I would like to establish please:**

- 1) Please read the instructions for each activity in full before attempting each activity.
- 2) If you have any questions about an activity please feel free to ask in the relevant thread. I will respond to these as soon as possible (usually within a day or two).
- 3) Only start an activity when you are confident you understand the instructions.
- 4) You are welcome to use the forum to start your own discussions. These can be about anything you see fit to discuss. It obviously helps me if your discussions are around the subject of Amazonian shamanism in Britain. **PLEASE DO NOT POST ANYTHING INCRIMINATING.** Use false names for any persons you refer to in discussions.
- 5) Please do not discuss how you feel you should respond to any of the activities. I am looking for your own natural, spontaneous, subconscious, reactions. Equally don't put too much thought into your reactions. You may - only if you want to, spend more time expressing any artistic skills you may have (this will certainly go down well in presentations) but you are under no obligation to do so.
- 6) Try and complete each activity in one sitting - but you don't need to do them all in the same sitting. The point is to explore your natural responses not well thought out and contrived responses.
- 7) I am not judging your artistic or creative skills and there is no one 'answer' I am looking for.
- 8) You don't have to worry about having an avatar for this forum. I certainly don't want you to create one that might cause you to be identifiable to other participant.
- 9) Have fun and be kind to each other.

All information, text and files posted on this forum may be used in my final thesis and any subsequent journal articles or presentations that may emerge from this. It will be assumed that your contribution to the forum will be taken as permission for this. However, if you do retrospectively change your mind about my use of anything you have posted on this forum please email me: [kerryrowberry@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:kerryrowberry@yahoo.co.uk) and let me know what you want me to remove. You do not have to give any reasons or justification. I will be happy to respect your wishes. You will have until April 30th 2016 to make any retractions.

**Please feel free to be as expressive as you like.**

I will send you a private invitation to link to your own drop box folder. Please submit all of your files there. No one else, other than me will have access to this folder.

Yours sincerely,  
Kerry

P.S.  
If you need any assistance with the forum, the forum staff are available to assist you seven days a week. Please visit our Support Forum at [support.proboards.com](http://support.proboards.com).  
(please note that I am not associated with the forum staff at the end of that link - Kerry)

Last Edit: 31 Jul 2014 at 9:02pm by Kerry Rowberry

Ever appreciative of your participation.

# Appendix 6

## Activity one instructions

Instructions on Activity One

« Prev 1 Next »


Actions Search...

Quote Edit Share Settings

Kerry Rowberry

Administrator

★★★★★



Posts: 10

Member is Online

9 Jul 2014 at 8:50pm

For this activity you will need a way of timing yourself and access to MS Word and PowerPoint.

Overall the activity should take between 25-60 mins

The amount of effort you put into Stage 6 is up to you. The more effort - the more is communicated.

Below under the spoiler tags is a list of themes only reveal them when you are ready to go. No peeking. One at a time please. **DON'T LOOK AT THE THEMES YET!!! - don't forget to read all of the instructions before you start.** 😊

1) Open a new blank document in MS Word.

2) Set your timer to sound an alarm after one minute. When you are ready reveal your first theme (or the next theme) and start the timer.

3) As soon as your timer starts counting start typing as many words or small phrases as you can in relation to that theme. Think about what that theme means to you and any feelings you might have about it. (your feelings about the theme itself - not my choice in using that theme - you can post our feelings about my decisions in this process on the board for this activity). Don't worry about spelling at this stage. It's up to you if you hit return or include a comma between each thought. Get as many ideas and thoughts down as you can in the 60 seconds. Don't think about it - just do it. Don't worry if you type something more than once and if you do don't delete it.

It's up to you how you go from here. You can repeat step 1-3 for all the themes before moving on to the next stages (but don't forget to put a title at the top so you know what theme relates to what list of words and phrases) or you can complete all the steps for each theme before moving onto the next.

4) Open MS PowerPoint and start a new slide show. It's up to you if you want to add a background. Please do not use animation or transitions.

5) In the center of a slide write the theme. Make this fairly big and bold. It needs to be easily identified as the theme for that slide.

6) Cut and paste each word or phrase from the related Word document and arrange them on the PowerPoint slide around the theme title. Think about where you are positioning each word or phrase in relation to each other and the central theme. Group ideas or thoughts that you think are similar or related near to each other. You can experiment with text colour if you like (to identify groups maybe) and size (to show how important you think a word or phrase is). If you type one word or phrase multiple times at stage three, please copy all instances over to the PowerPoint.

**PLEASE DO NOT ADD ANY NEW WORDS OR PHRASES AFTER THE TIME RUNS OUT.** 😊

7) Repeat this process for each theme. Use a new slide for each theme all inside the same PowerPoint file.

Your themes are:

SPOILER: [Click to show](#)

SPOILER: [Click to show](#)

SPOILER: [Click to show](#)

SPOILER: [Click to show](#)

SPOILER: [Click to show](#)

The point of this activity is to see what ideas come from you spontaneously so it is important that you stick to the time limit specified.

You will not be judged on how many words you produce but please try and write as many as you can.

**Try not to spend more than an hour on the activity overall (unless you want to put extra effort into stage 6).**

Make quick decisions and stick to them.

Last Edit: 13 Sep 2014 at 1:07pm by Kerry Rowberry

# Appendix 7

## Activity two instructions

Instructions on Activity Two

Reply

« Prev 1 Next »


Actions

Search...

Quote Edit

31 Jul 2014 at 7:43pm

Kerry Rowberry  
Administrator  
★★★★★



Posts: 10  
Member is Online

I don't want you to spend too much time thinking about this one. 20 minutes should be more than enough. It's not an art competition.

You can express your idea in any media you want - so long as it can be sent to me as a flat image. Please ensure that any photographs are well lit and 4MP minimum.

**Please draw or paint an image that expresses your experience of ayahuasca. Capture any element of it that you feel is important to portray.**

The following list is to provide inspiration - you might have another technique in mind you are welcome to use.

- paint
- crayons, pens, pencils
- collage
- etching
- MS Paint
- Photoshop
- photograph
- mixed media

It's up to you how long you spend on this. Ideally minimum 20-30 mins but if you would like to spend an evening or two that would be fantastic too. Don't spend more than two evenings. 😊

The size it up to you. Please don't make it any smaller than roughly A4. It is important to remember that I would like to use the images you produce in future conference presentations so they will be projected.

**Have fun and be creative!!!**

Last Edit: 13 Sep 2014 at 1:05pm by Kerry Rowberry

Ever appreciative of your participation.

# Appendix 8

## Activity three instructions


Instructions on Activity Three

Reply

« Prev 1 Next »

Actions Search...

Kerry Rowberry  
Administrator  
★★★★★



Posts: 10  
Member is Online

31 Jul 2014 at 8:25pm

OK this one might feel a little complicated. Never fear - I am a message away.  
Read everything through. Twice if you have to.  
1) Open up your favorite bit of drawing/art type software. If you are good with photoshop, illustrator, coral etc. Brilliant. If not MS Publisher, or PowerPoint is fine. Make the background black.  
2) In the bottom center of the page draw a little stick person that is you (a lolly pop shape is fine!) Make this light grey in colour.  
3) Now assign the words below shapes and colours (don't use black!). You may like to use the same shape twice, but please don't use the same shape for every word. **The shape and colour you choose should convey meaning** about how you feel towards what the word represents. The shapes can be anything you want although regular recognisable shapes are recommended. Simple so far? You might want to sketch out your shapes on paper first to create a reference list.  
4) Please create a key to show me which shape belongs to which word. It is up to you if you would like to provide a key to explain your choice in colour, or leave it up to me to interpret. I would only strongly recommend a colour key if you feel that I might not accurately understand the meaning you have attached to a colour. For instance I would commonly associate red with anger and blue with calm. You may not.  
5) Here's where it gets a bit more taxing. Think about the **space on your page as a way of illustrating connection**. So now position your shapes, using space to show me how connected you think each shape (the thing they represent) is to both you and each other. You do not have to make them touch to show absolute connection - just close positioning is fine. If you do not feel at all connected to something please still include it on your page - just position it far from yourself.  
6) **Re-size the shapes to illustrate the influence** you think each thing they represent has on you.  
7) Save and send it to me.  
This activity should take you about an hour to complete.  
The words I want you to use are:  
God  
Religion  
Spirituality  
Community  
Education  
Pharmaceutical Medicine  
Shamanism  
Central Government (Parliament)  
Family  
Friends  
Health  
Local Government (Council)  
National Health Services  
Just a note to let you know I have asked for a black background just because I think the final product will look better this way. Colours tend to look more vibrant on black.  

Last Edit: 13 Sep 2014 at 1:10pm by Kerry Rowberry

Ever appreciative of your participation.

239

# Appendix 9

## Activity four instructions

Instructions on Activity Four

« Prev 1 Next »


Actions Search...

Reply

Kerry Rowberry

Administrator

★★★★★



Posts: 10

Member is Online

♀

31 Jul 2014 at 8:29pm

For this activity you can take some time to think about it.

Have a day or a week to mull over some ideas in your head.

You can express your idea in any media you want - so long as it can be sent to me as a flat image. I was going to say visual, but I don't want video footage. Please scan or photograph your final piece if it is not electronic.

Ready?

Can you think of a metaphor that answers the following question:  
What does Amazonian shamanism mean to you?

The following list is to provide inspiration - you might have another technique in mind you are welcome to use.

paint  
Plasticine  
clay  
crayons, pens, pencils  
collage  
etching  
MS Paint  
Photoshop  
photograph  
mixed media  
cross stitch

- If you do choose a 3D medium please provide well lit, good quality photographs (4MP min) of all angles (including top and bottom).

It's up to you how long you spend on this. Ideally about an hour but if you would like to spend an evening or two that would be fantastic too. Don't spend more than two evenings. 😊


Have fun and be creative!!!


Ever appreciative of your participation.

Last Edit: 13 Sep 2014 at 1:12pm by Kerry Rowberry

Quote

Edit





▼



# Appendix 10

## Activity five instructions

Instructions on Activity Five

Reply

« Prev 1 Next »


Actions

Search...

Quote Edit

4 Aug 2014 at 6:50pm

Kerry Rowberry  
Administrator



Posts: 10  
Member is Online

Please spend as much time as you see fit on this exercise. I will ask for a minimum of 20 minutes but no more than an evening.

Can you please **sum up, in one word, what your involvement in Amazonian shamanism has given to you.** Once you have your word I would like you to have some fun with typography.

Using any software that you feel comfortable using please type this word in nice big lettering (Min 100pt). Pick a font and a colour that you think adds greater expression to this word. If you want to hand draw the word this is fine too. You might want to swap some of the letters for images - a basic example would be to change the 'oo' in look to eyes. You might want to have the letters in different colours or sizes. My wish is that every decision you make in presenting the word strengthens it's meaning and what you wish to communicate.

Here are some useful links that might help you with this activity.

[47 top typography tools](#)

[1001 free fonts](#)

**Inspiration** - These are pieces by top typographic professionals. Please be inspired but rest assured that I don't expect anything of this caliber. Some of these examples would have taken weeks to create.

**If you need any help please don't hesitate to ask.**

It is important that you save this as a PDF, or high resolution JPEG before depositing it in drop box. If I do not have the font you use programs such as Word and Publisher will default to a font I do have. This will loose the meaning you express through your typeface choice.

Last Edit: 13 Sep 2014 at 1:14pm by Kerry Rowberry

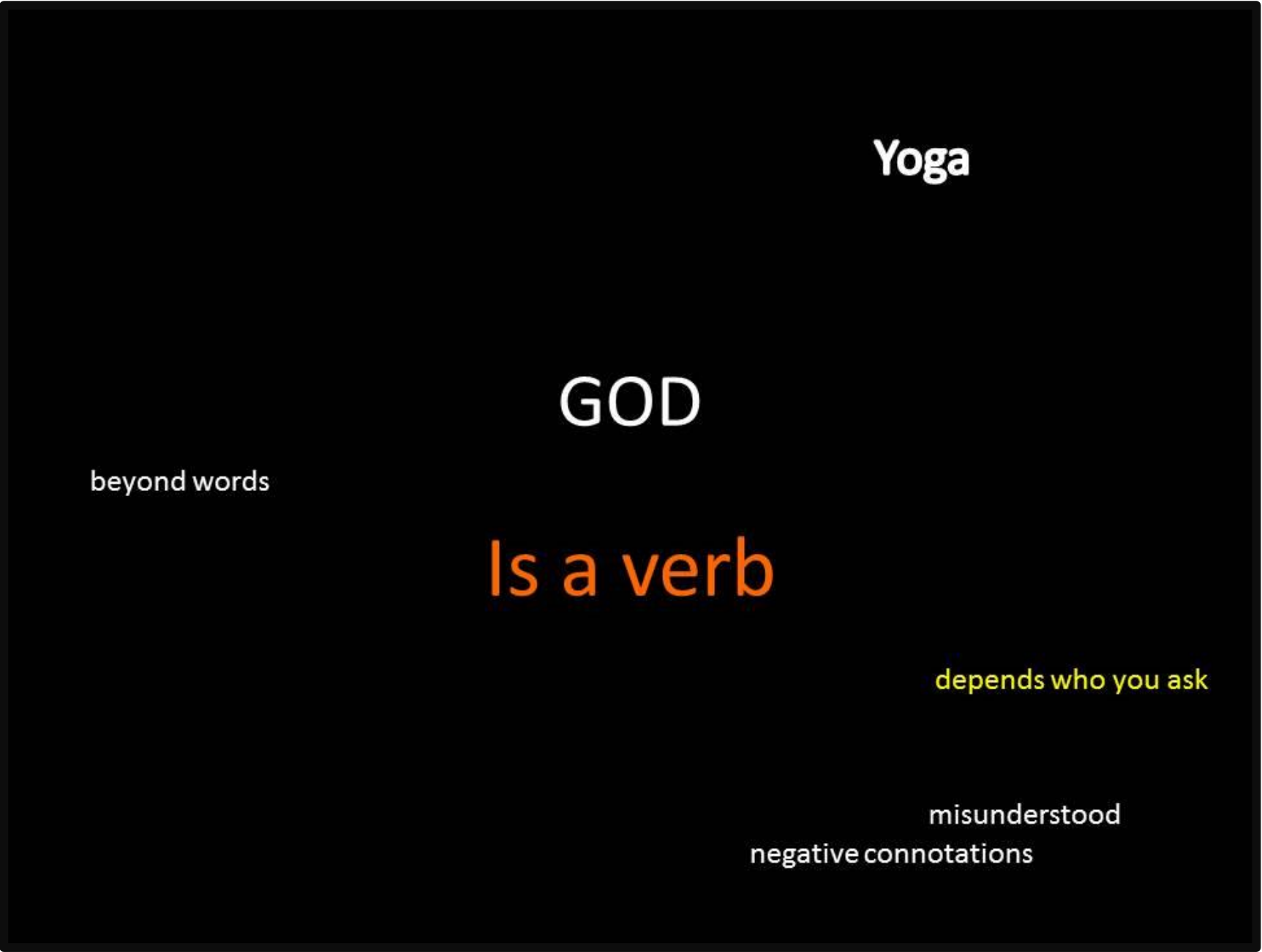
Ever appreciative of your participation.

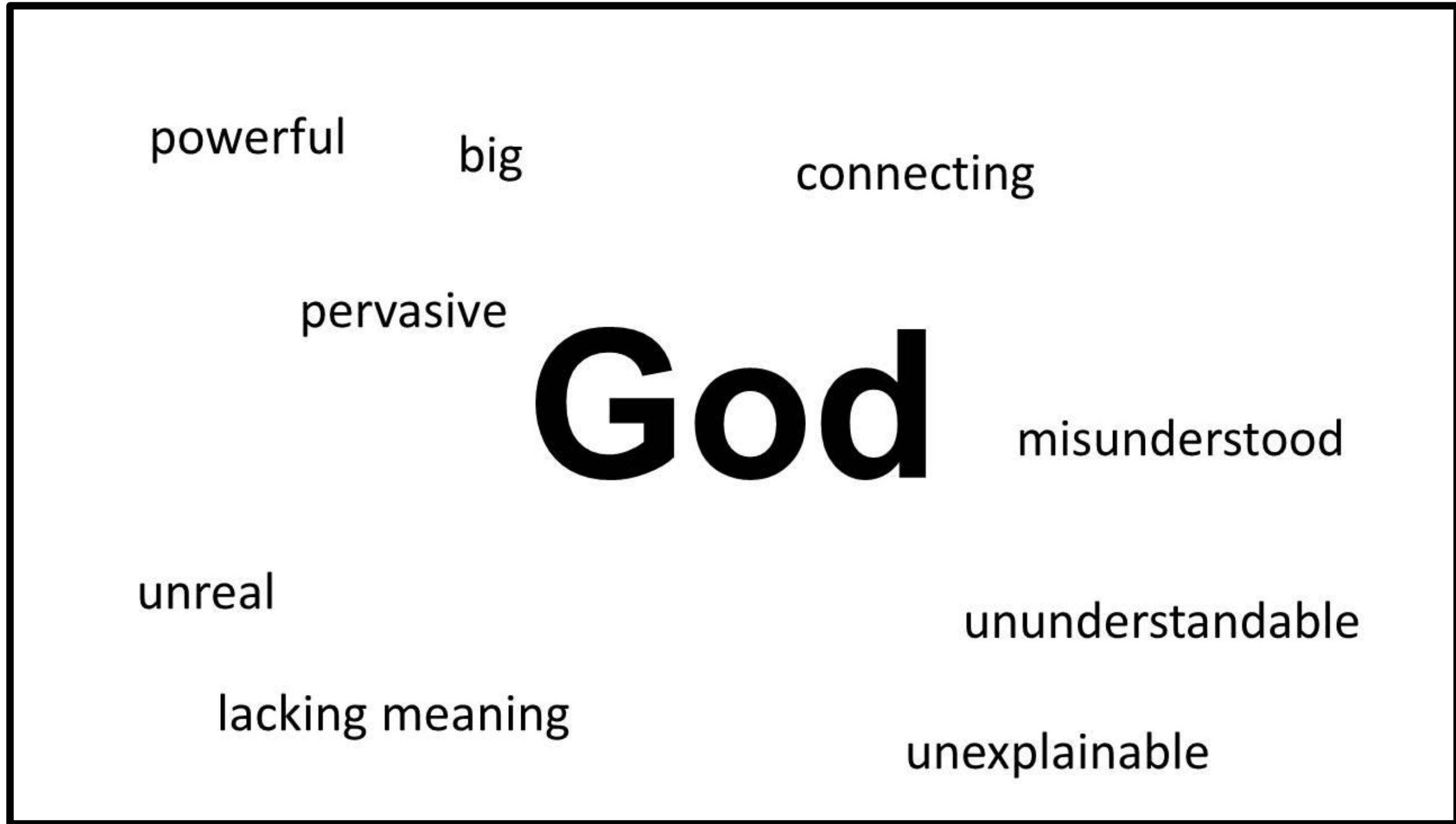
Appendix 11

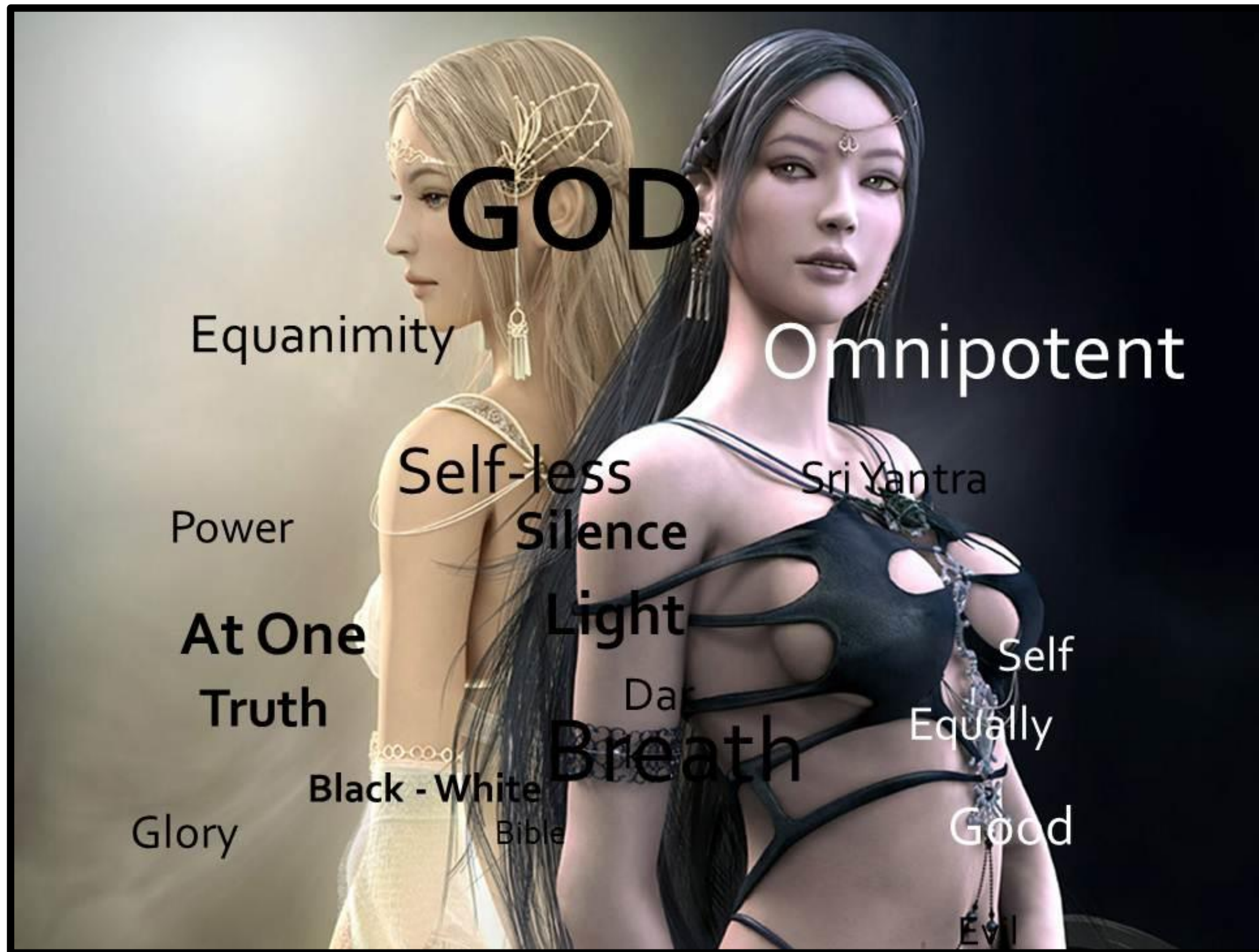
Responses to activity one

Theme: God

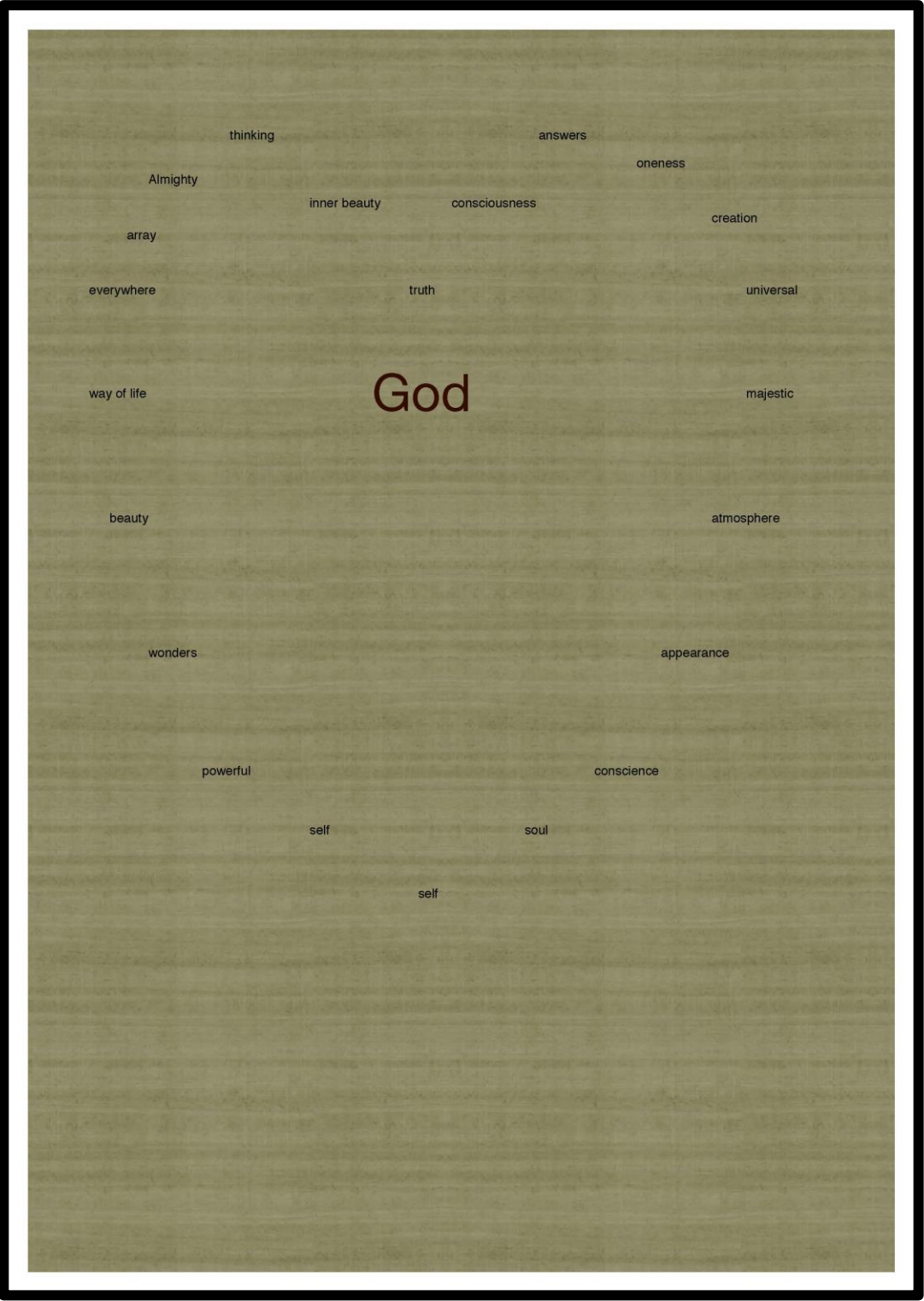
Participant 4







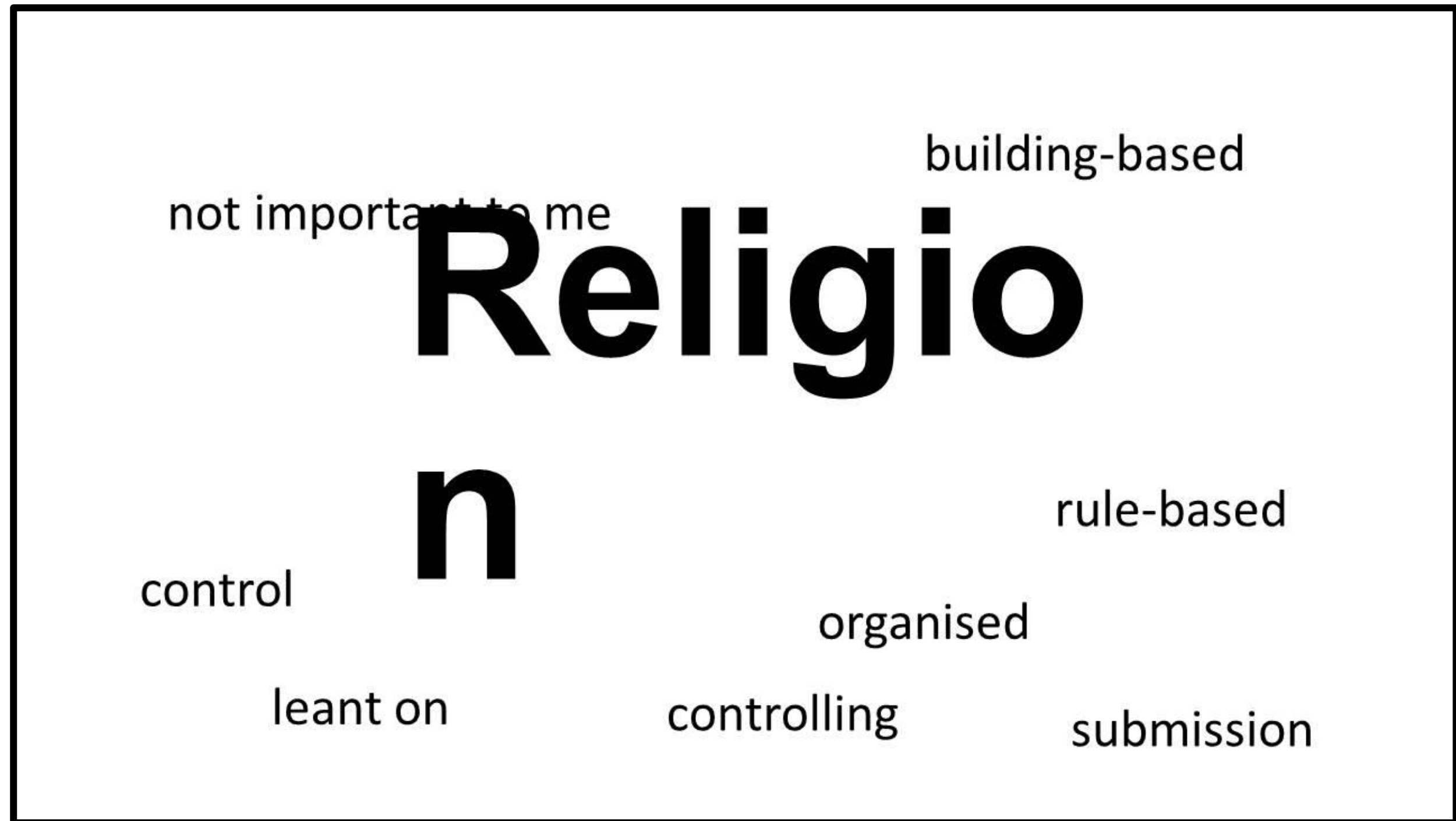
Participant 10



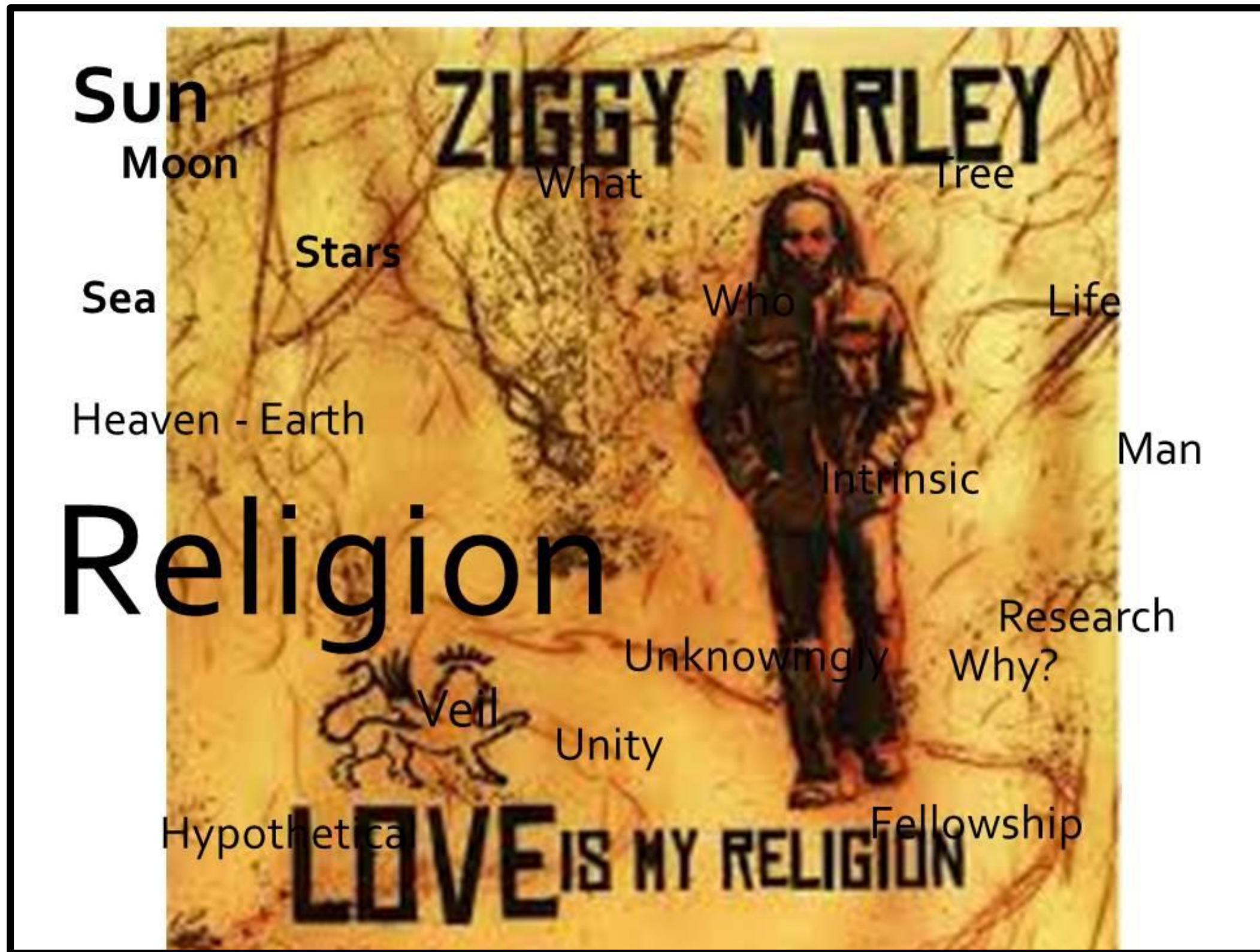
**Theme: Religion**

Participant 4

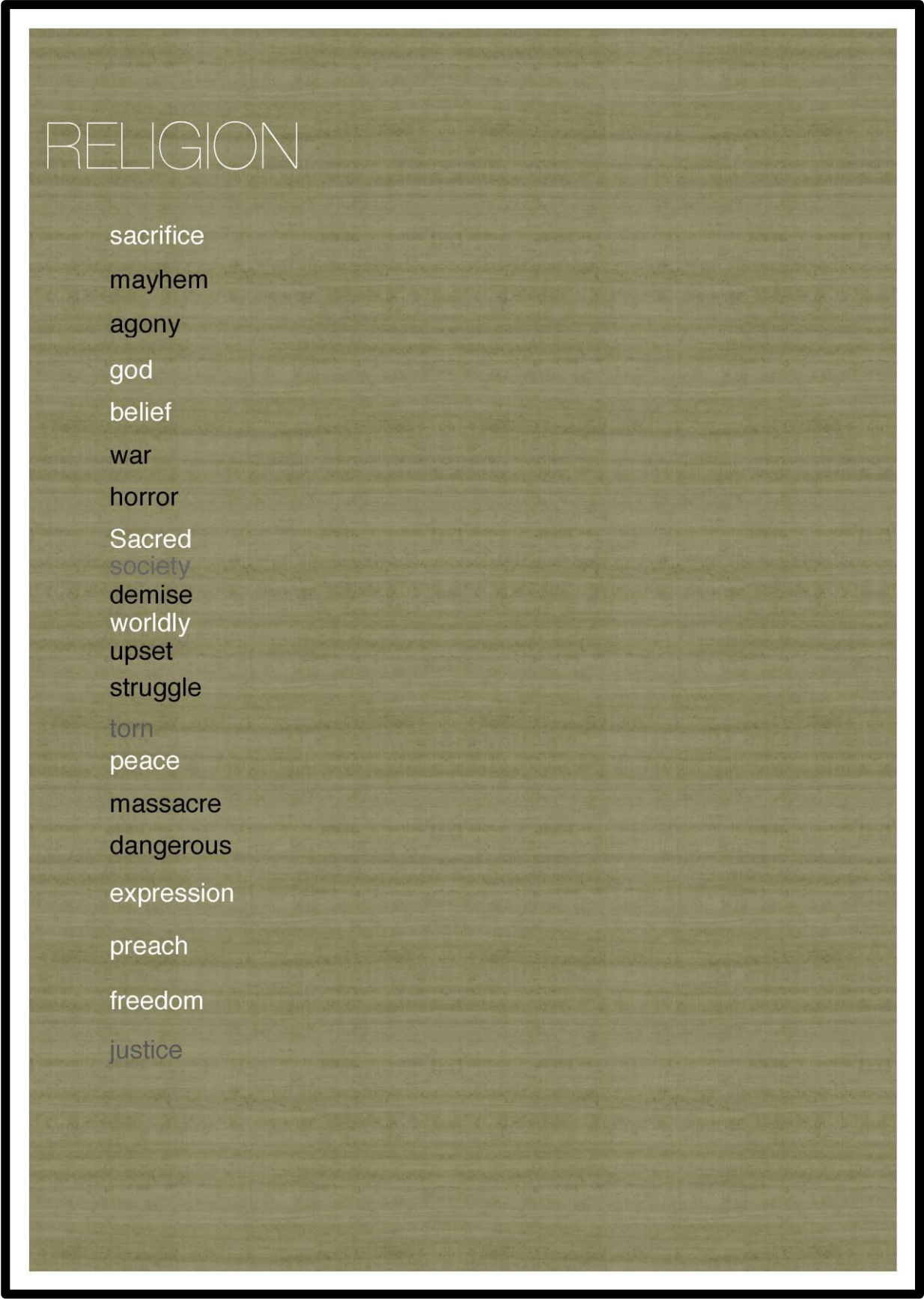








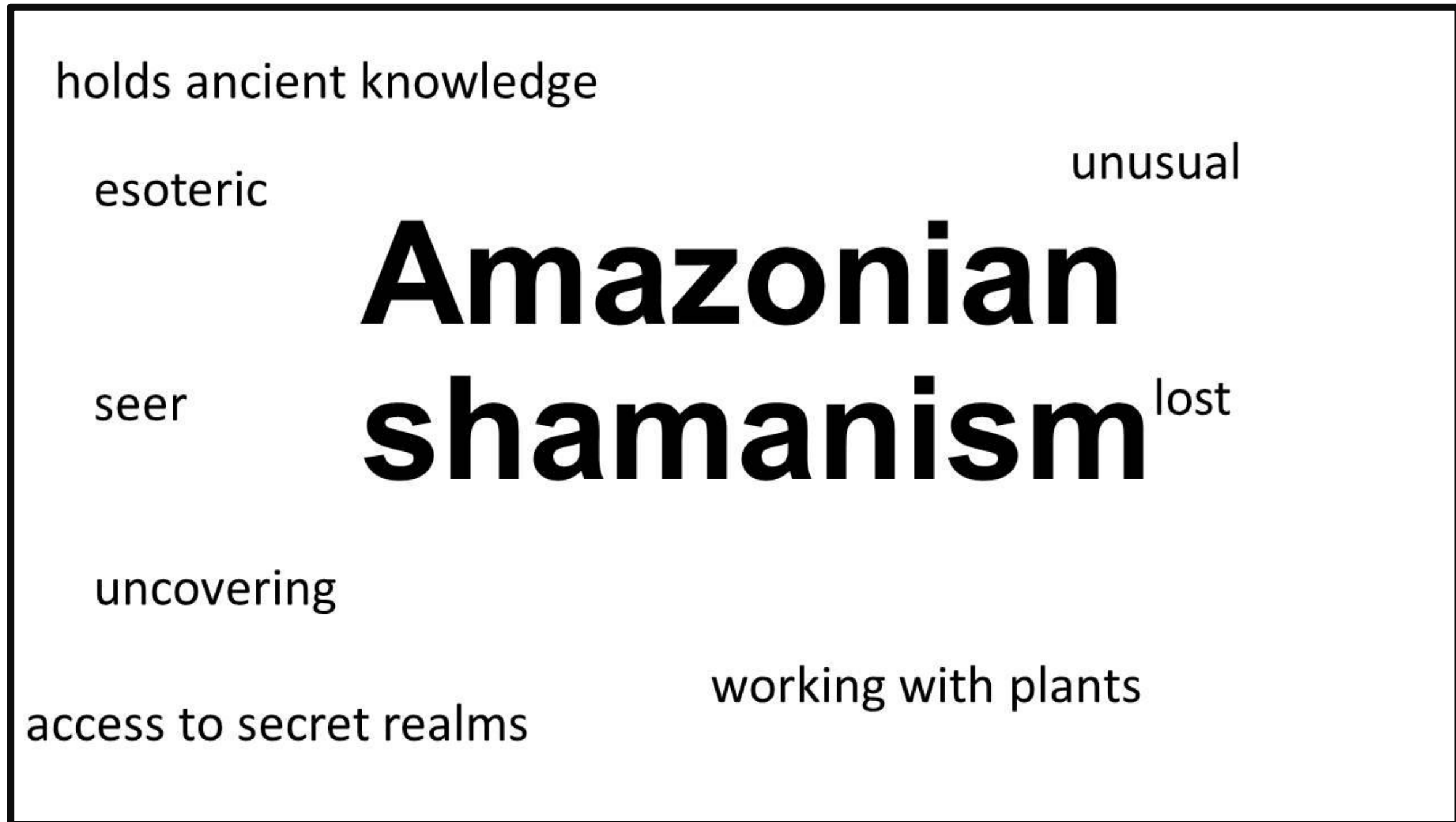




*Theme: Amazonian Shamanism*

Participant 4





# Amazonian Shamanism

**Spiritual**  
Freedom

Omnipresent

**Visionary**

Grace

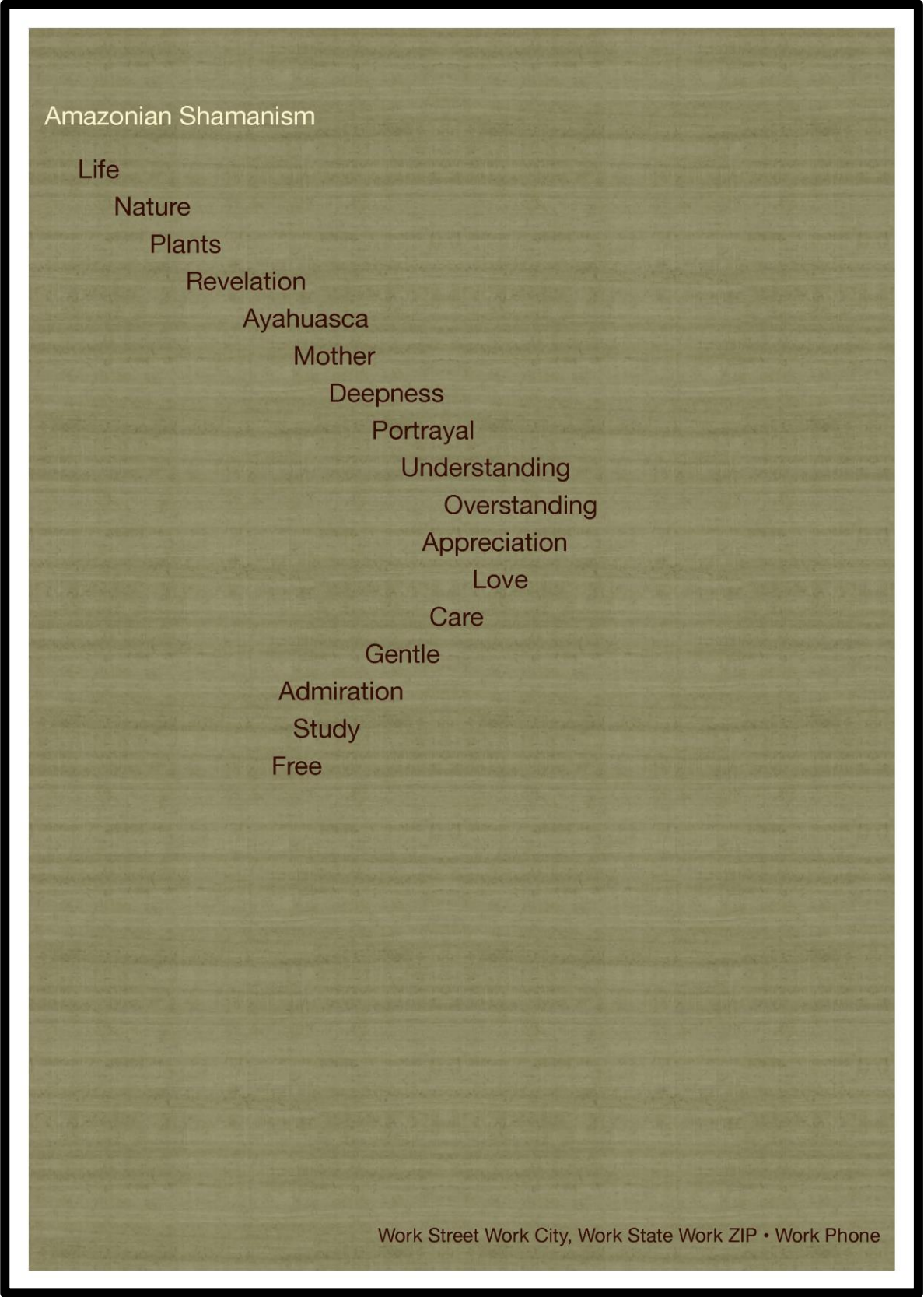
Cleansing

Evaluation

Philosophy



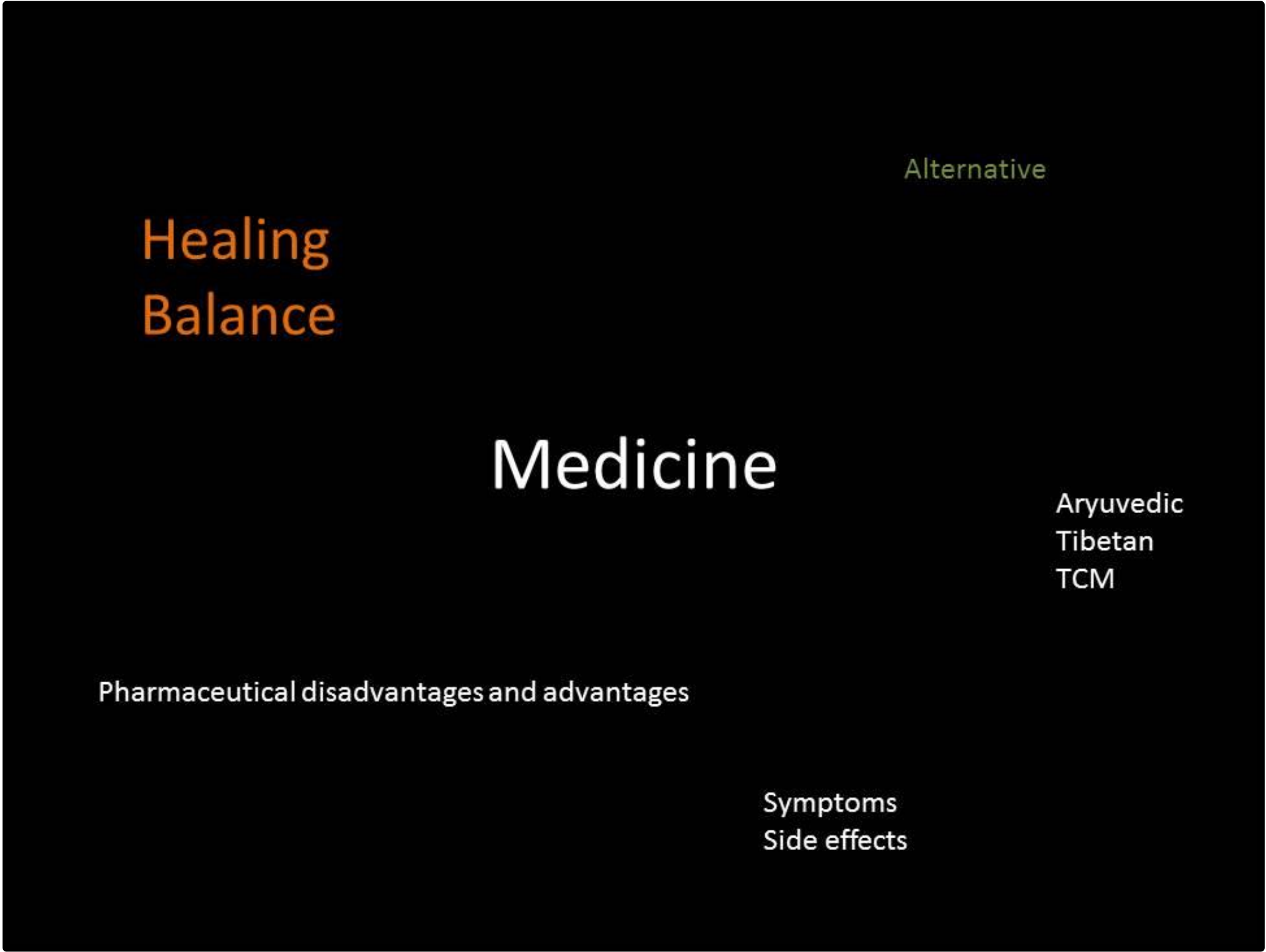
Participant 10

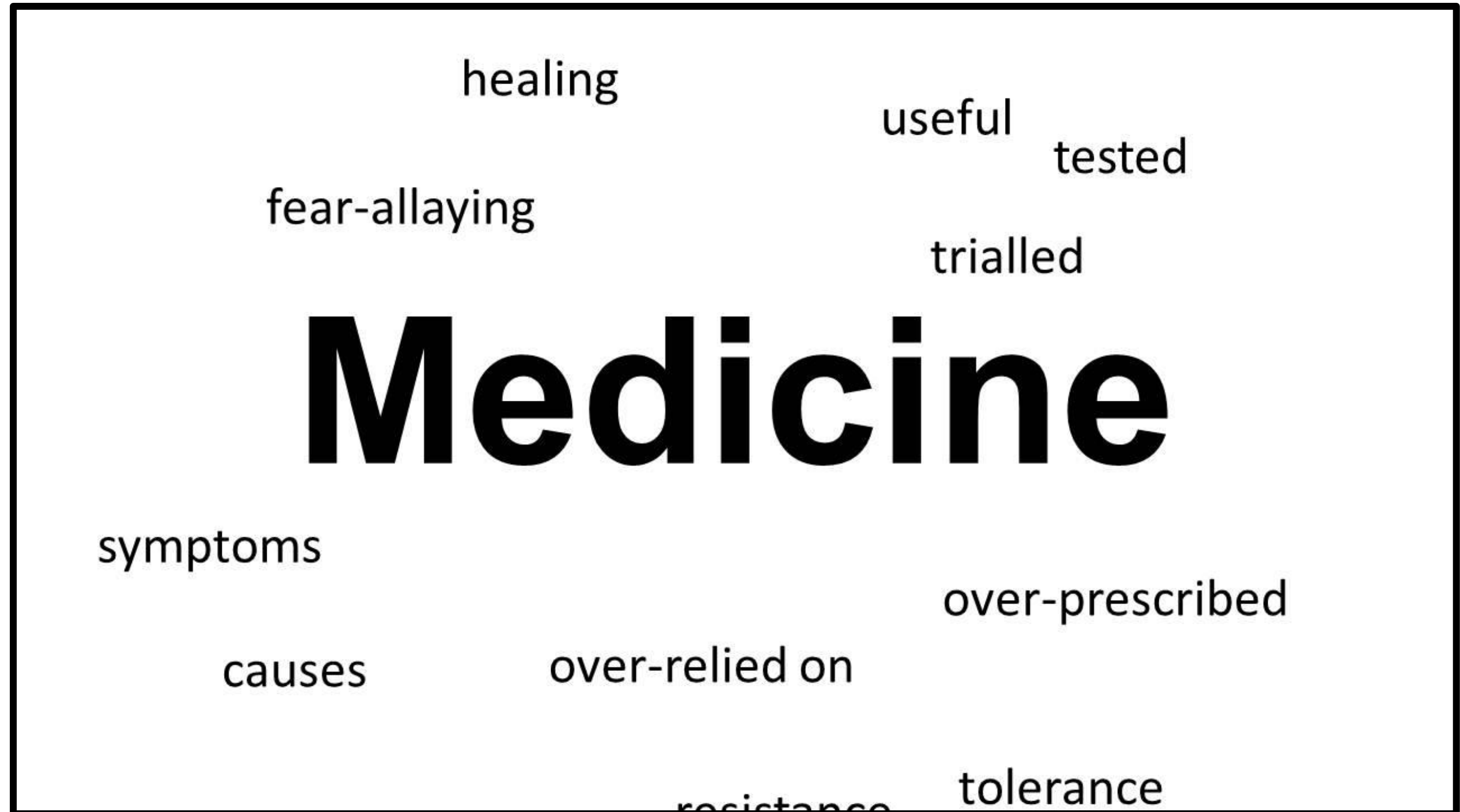




Theme: Medicine

Participant 4











**Theme: Culture**

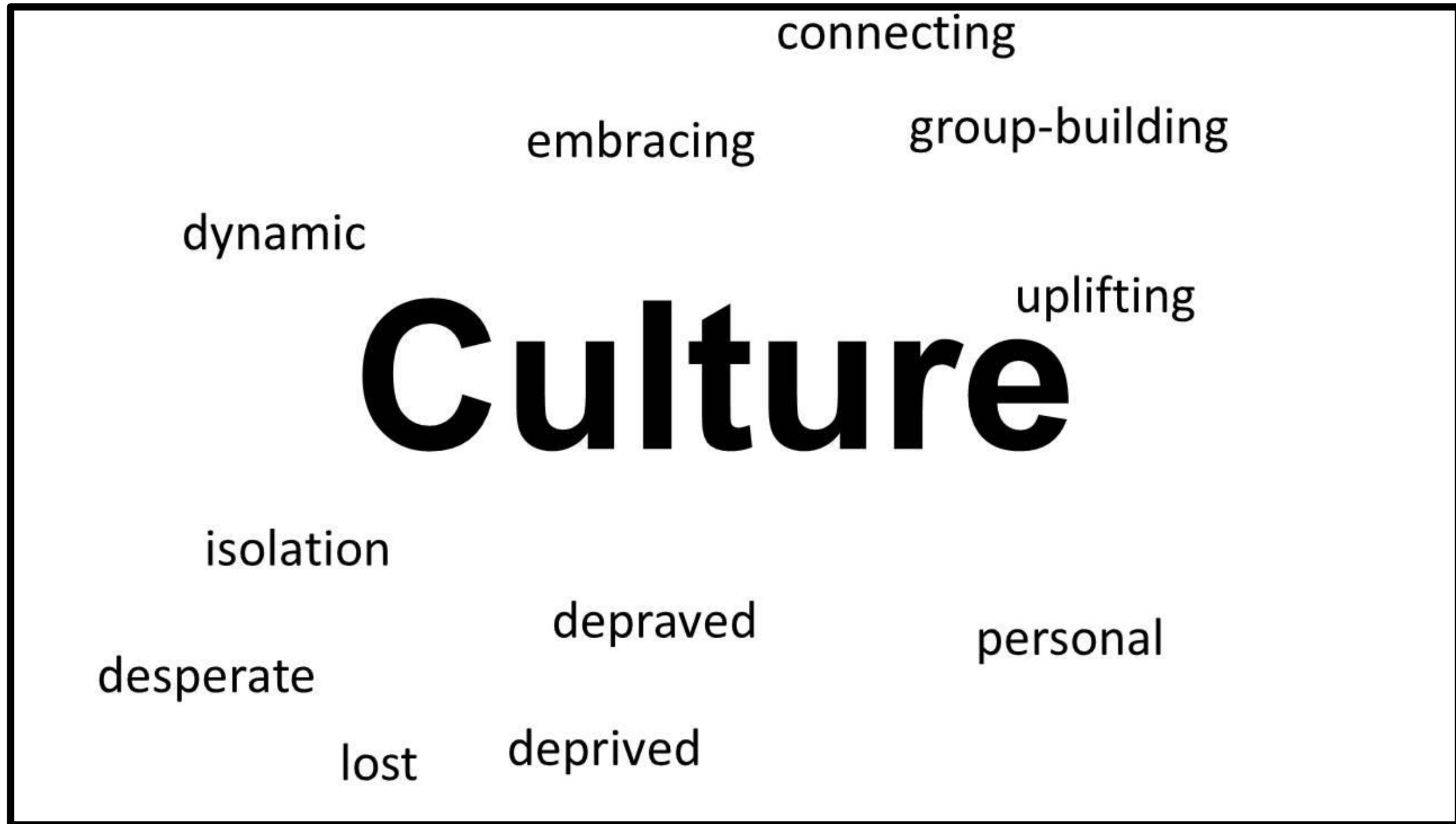
Participant 4



Culture

“is your operating system”

means different things to different people



# Culture

Who



Allowing



# *CULTURE*

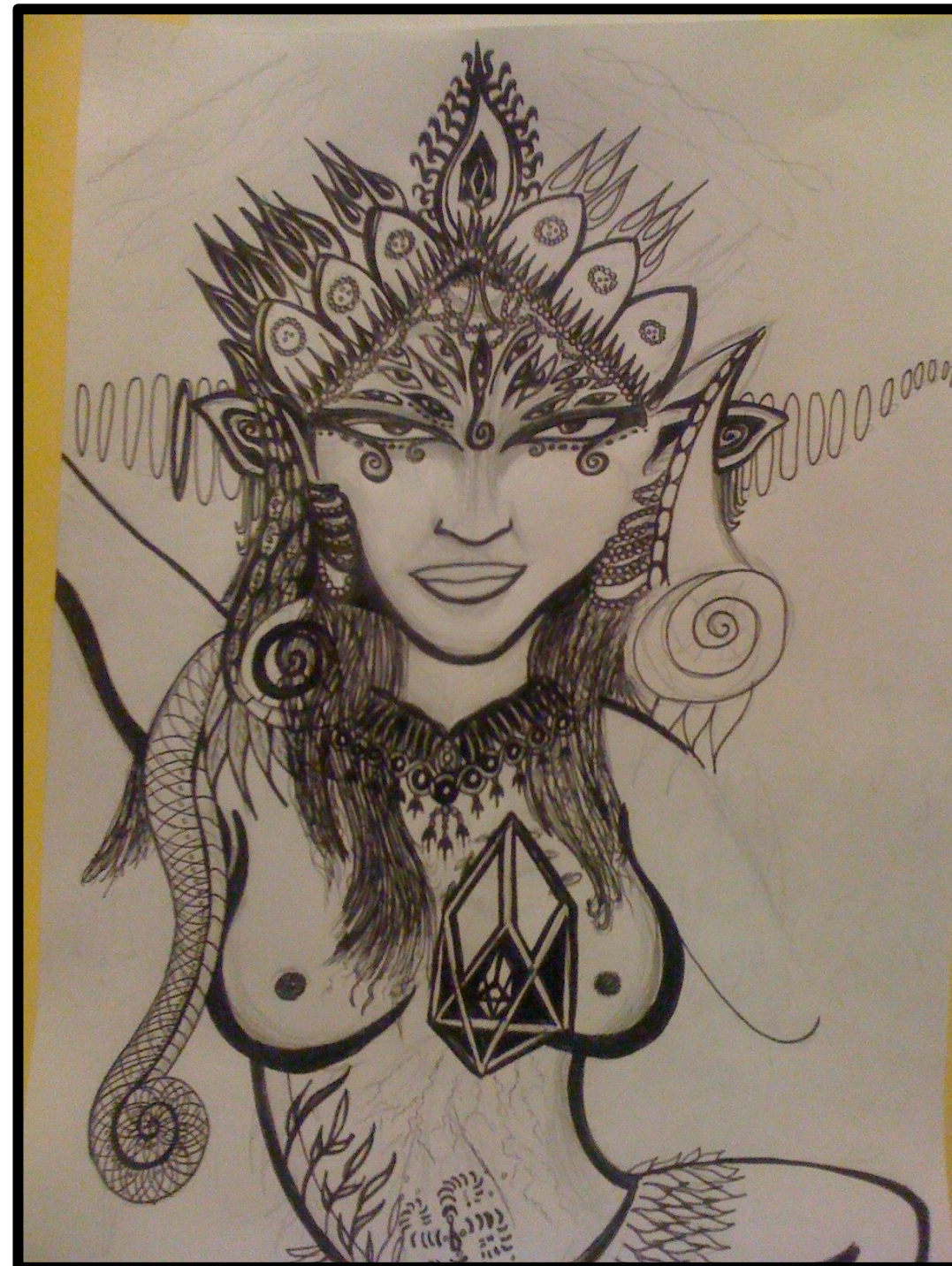
Film-society-age-  
progression-movement-  
subjects-change-sway-  
consciousness-  
collectiveness-  
challenges-eras-music-  
clothing-industry



## Appendix 12

### Responses to activity two

Participant 4



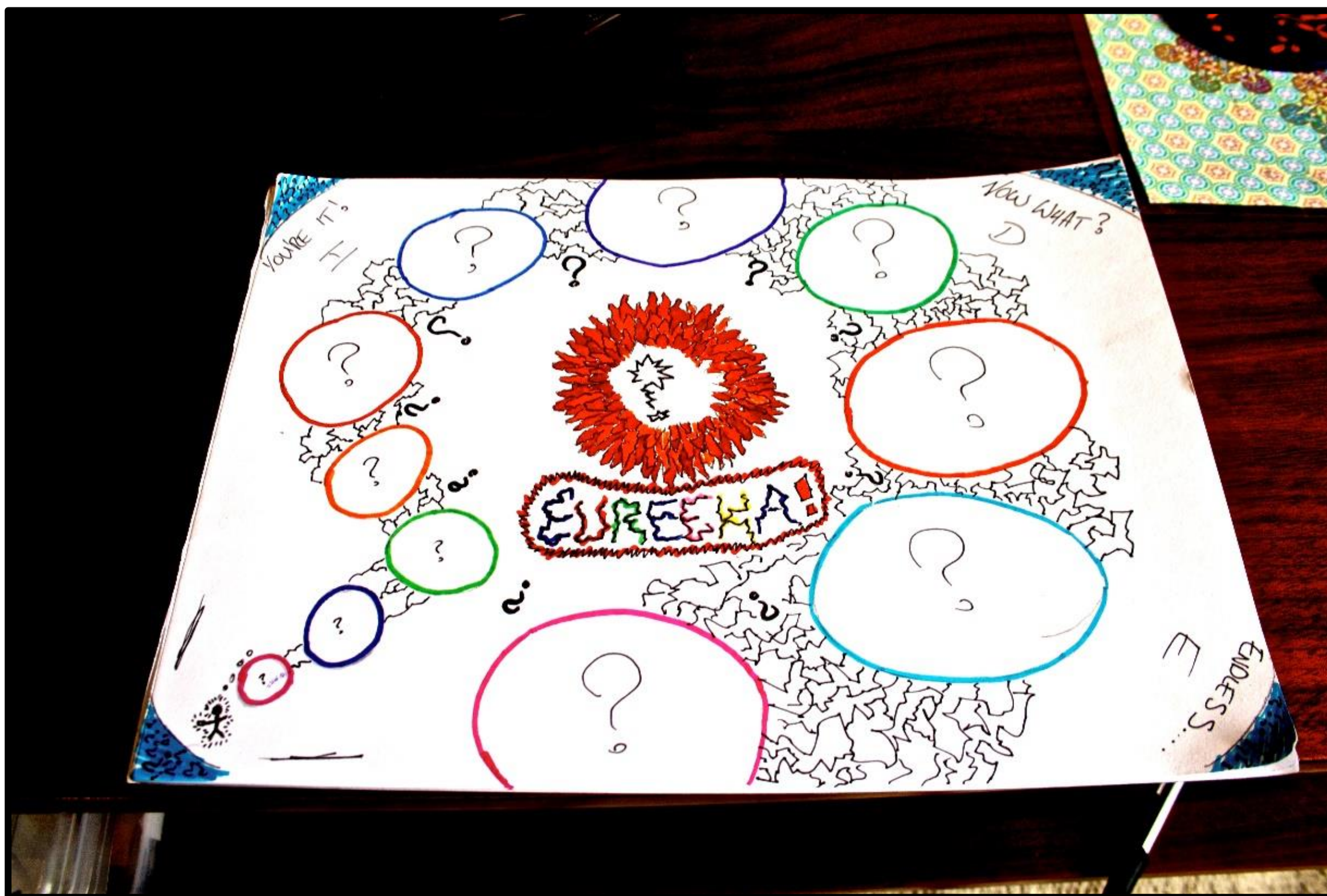












Appendix 13

Responses to activity three

Participant 4

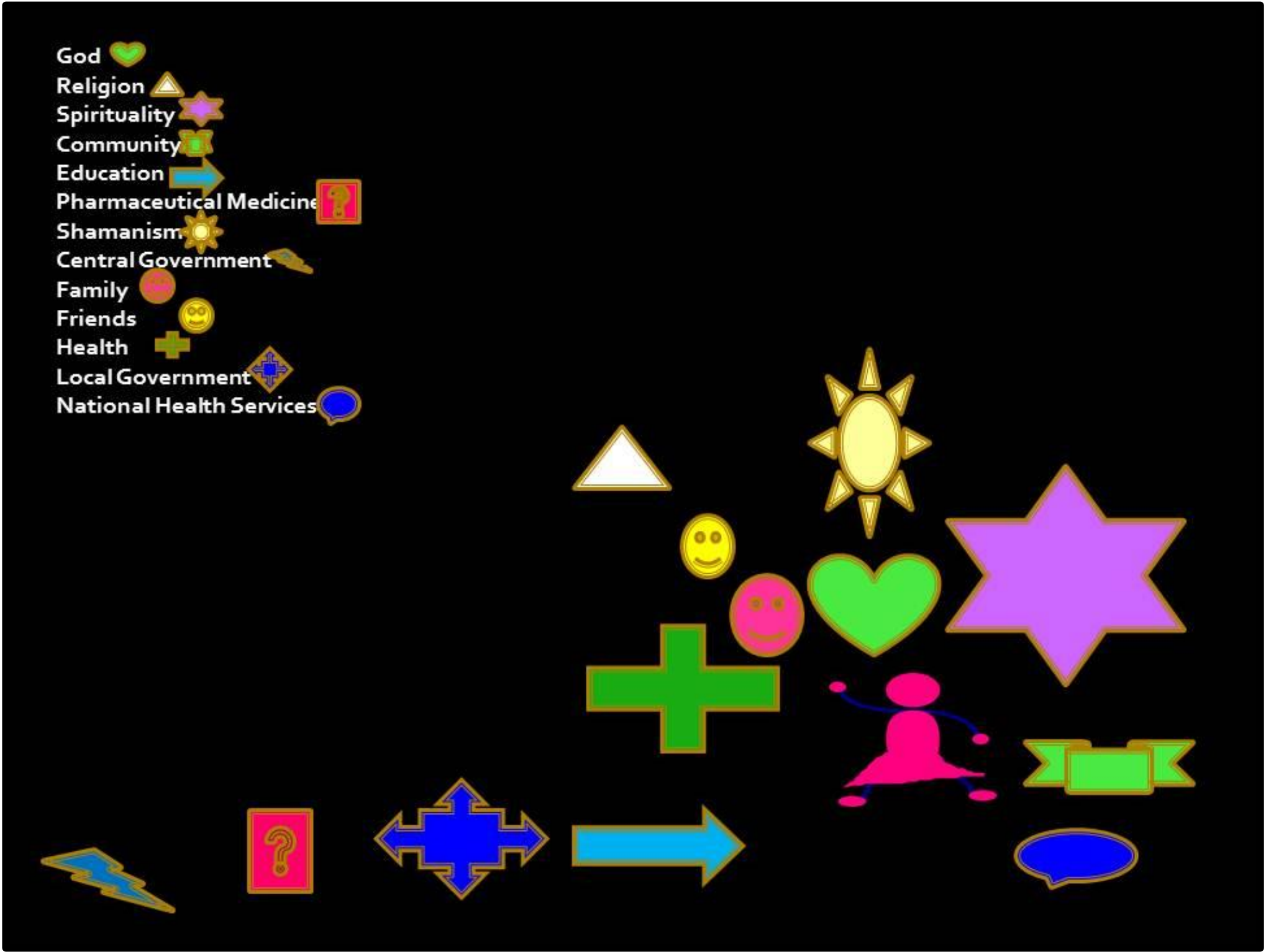


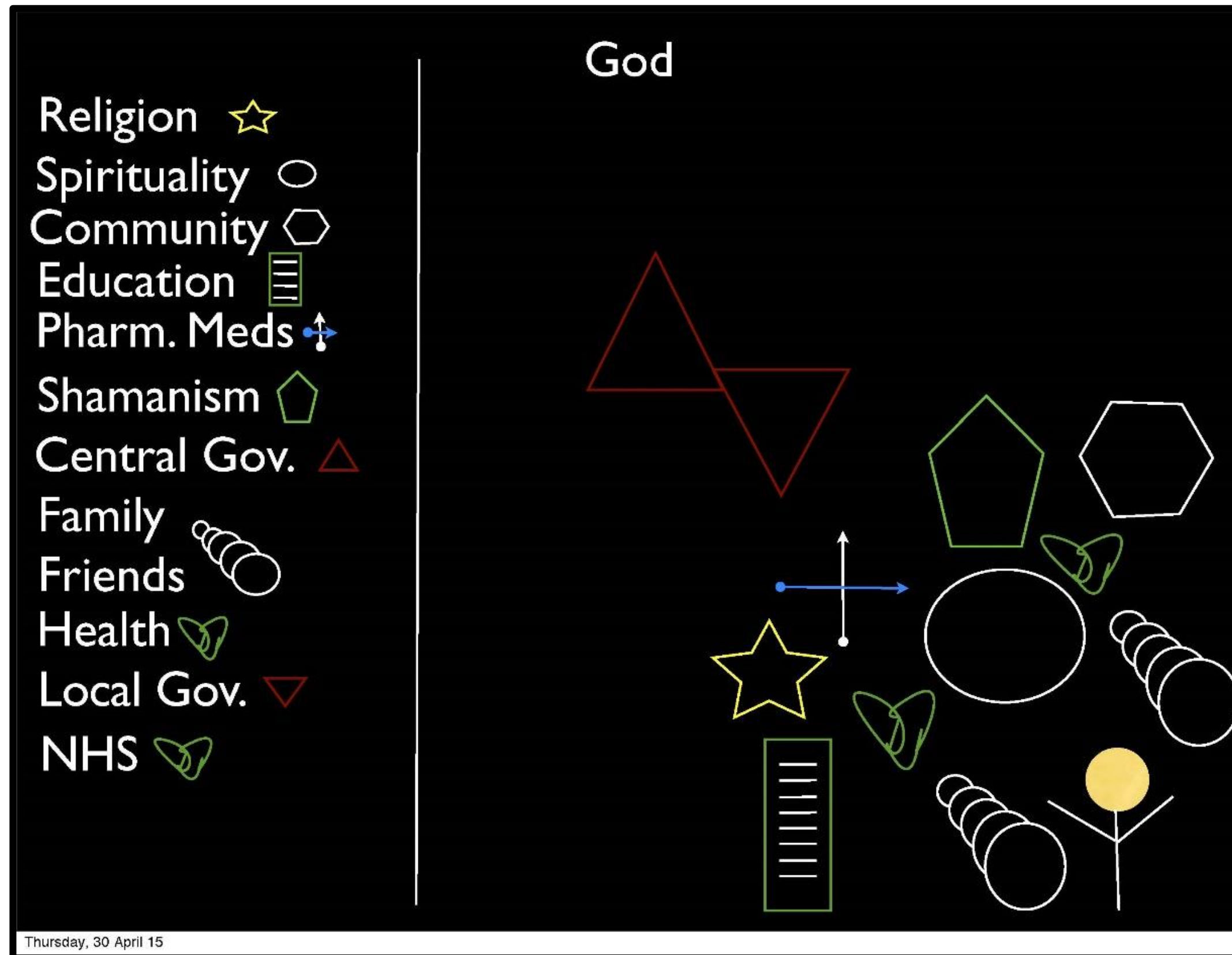


Participant 7

Participant 7 did not feel that they could contribute to this activ'ty.  
They stated; 'I don't feel I have enough to say about the topics you're asking about.'

Participant 9





## Appendix 14

### Responses to activity four

Participant 4





Participant 7

Participant 7 did not feel that they could contribute to this activ'ty.

They stated; 'I don't feel I have enough to say about the topics you're asking about.'

Participant 9



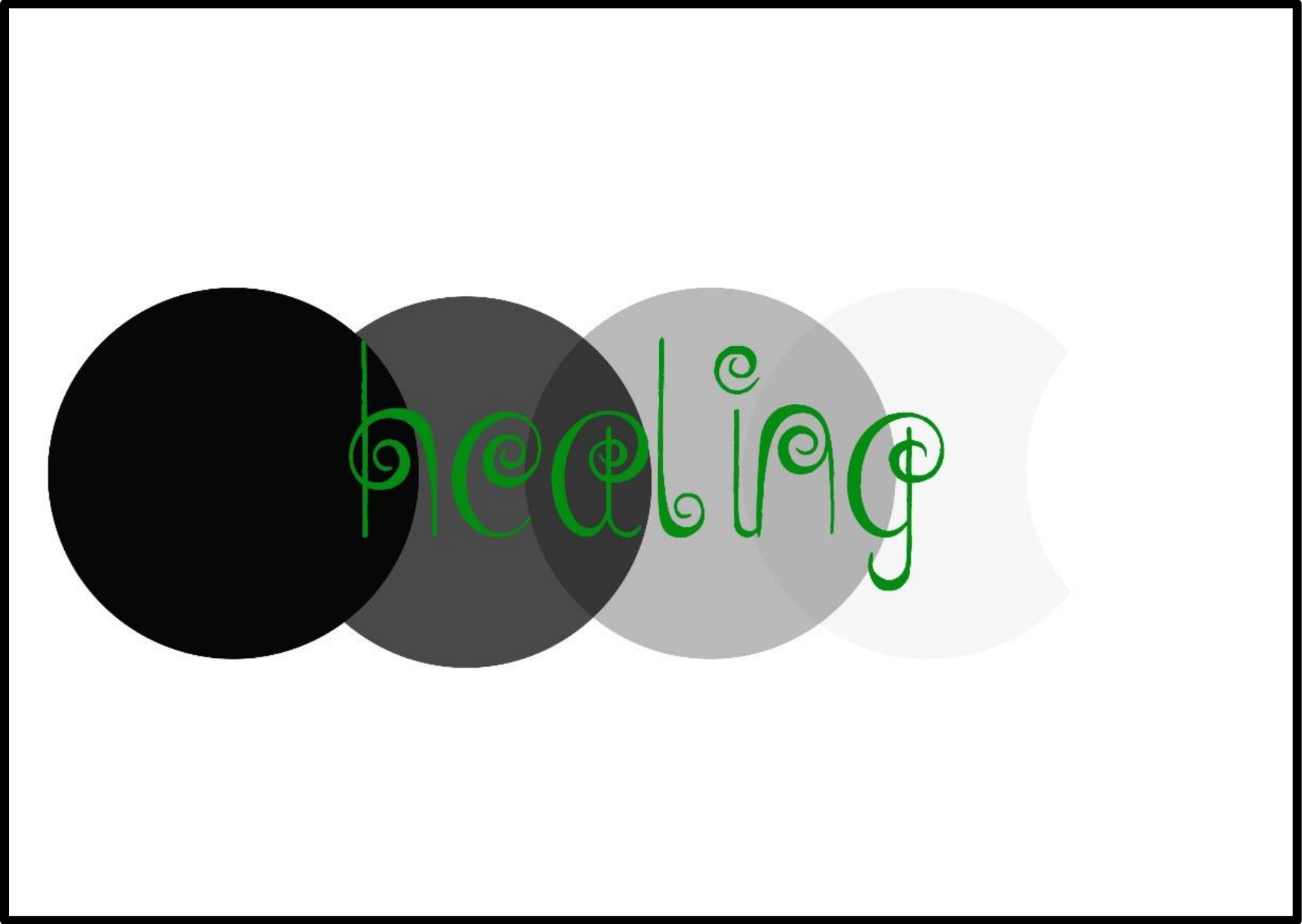
Participant 10

Shamanism is a sign, a journey with unlimited direction.

Appendix 15

Responses to activity five

Participant 4





Participant 7

Participant 7 did not feel that they could contribute to this activ'ty.

They stated; 'I don't feel I have enough to say about the topics you're asking about.'

Participant 9



**REMIN D**

# Appendix 16

## Code list

1. 'Telepathic visual communication' with spirits in the ayahuasca experience.
2. Already used cannabis therapeutically
3. Amazonian shamanism - definitely not a drug culture scene.
4. Amazonian shamanism is about spiritual healing (culturally speaking)
5. Amazonian culturally a spiritual healing based subculture.
6. Amazonian shamanism had no effect on spiritual or religious beliefs
7. Amazonian shamanistic practices have no social effect
8. Anxiety with ayahuasca
9. Attitude of family and friends
10. Attitude shift from interest in drug experience to religious use
11. Ayahuasca 'knowledge' believed to come from the higher self or the spirit
12. Ayahuasca 'shattered' beliefs of participant
13. Ayahuasca and shamanism seen as pure
14. Ayahuasca attributed to increased tolerance
15. Ayahuasca attributed to bringing more structure to participants life
16. Ayahuasca attributed to curing depression
17. Ayahuasca attributed to overcoming addiction
18. Ayahuasca attributed to self-acceptance
19. Ayahuasca believed to re-align participant with their 'life path'
20. Ayahuasca believed to be able to impart wisdom
21. Ayahuasca believed to challenge self-perception
22. Ayahuasca believed to connect to higher-self or the spirit
23. Ayahuasca believed to 'dissolve' 'cultural vices'
24. Ayahuasca believed to have lifted psychological 'blocks'
25. Ayahuasca believed to provide access to subconscious and 'hidden' or 'buried' psychological issues.
26. Ayahuasca brew/drink is unpleasant
27. Ayahuasca expanded understanding of the universe
28. Ayahuasca experience unpleasant
29. Ayahuasca experience wasn't as powerful expected
30. Ayahuasca explained as being like a book - you have to use the knowledge it provides
31. Ayahuasca felt to allow you to un-learn behaviours
32. Ayahuasca felt to provide access to spirits
33. Ayahuasca had a significant impact on participant
34. Ayahuasca had significant impact on belief systems
35. Ayahuasca influenced creativity
36. Ayahuasca influenced philosophies
37. Ayahuasca made participant feel that everything was meaningful
38. Ayahuasca provided answers to participant's questions.
39. Ayahuasca referred to as 'she'
40. Ayahuasca ritual felt right/comfortable
41. Ayahuasca rituals integrated into lifestyle
42. Ayahuasca seen as a medicine
43. Ayahuasca slots into holistic and spiritual worldview
44. Ayahuasca incompatible with prescription drugs
45. Ayahuasca brought about increased confidence
46. Belief ayahuasca takes you to the spirit realm
47. Belief in ayahuasca potential as it connects you to yourself.
48. Belief in ayahuasca potential as it's an active experience - immersion
49. Belief in ghosts and spirits
50. Belief in God
51. Belief in other dimensions brought on after ayahuasca experience
52. Belief in re-birth
53. Belief in reincarnation and past lives

54. Belief that Amazonian shamanism has imparted wisdom
55. Belief that ayahuasca can extract negative entities
56. Belief that ayahuasca can provide answers
57. Belief that ayahuasca can provide messages
58. Belief that ayahuasca cleanses the soul.
59. Belief that drugs can help enhance the inner self
60. Belief that participant was 'operated on' in ayahuasca ritual
61. Belief that shamanism had unlocked knowledge from past lives
62. Belief that the practices start working (healing) immediately
63. Changa and Psilohuasca
64. Change in attitude towards psychoactive drugs from recreational to spiritual.
65. Chewing salvia
66. Clear linkage between substances and belief systems/religion
67. Community
68. Comparing raving and recreational drug use to tribal culture
69. Comparing shamanic practices to western culture.
70. Concern that some people don't understand or are unaccepting
71. Concerns that friends and family will worry.
72. Confidence in ayahuasca due to its extensive use in S. America
73. Confused religious ideas going into Amazonian shamanism
74. Description of ayahuasca experience (external)
75. Difficulty expressing or explaining lifestyle
76. Discomfort with the term 'God'
77. Discomfort with the term religion
78. Discussion' about 'not coming back'
79. Discussion about dying with psychedelics.
80. Distaste for religion
81. Distaste towards western culture
82. Distinctive interest in psycho-active drugs
83. Does not feel connected to a group.
84. Doesn't like vomiting brought on by ayahuasca
85. Doesn't usually share religious beliefs
86. Drawing in scientific understandings
87. Drawn back to ayahuasca out of curiosity
88. Drawn to ayahuasca through an interest in South America
89. Emotional response to ayahuasca ritual
90. Empathic nature
91. Exotic nature of Amazonian shamanism was an appeal
92. Experience of drug addiction
93. Experienced initial fear.
94. Explains efficacy by magic
95. Expresses difficulty in articulating the experience on ayahuasca.
96. Family not aware of involvement
97. Fear of the power of salvia.
98. Fear that he will not be able to relax in the ritual
99. Feels it's important to her personal freedom to be allowed to be involved in Amazonian shamanism
100. First ayahuasca experience
101. First learning about shamanism
102. How they came to know about ayahuasca
103. Improved attitude to healthy living following participation in a ritual
104. Influenced by Buddhism and the occult
105. Inner turmoil
106. Interconnectivity
107. Interest in and reference to conspiracy theories.
108. Interest in exploring different states of consciousness
109. Interest in ayahuasca as a therapeutic tool
110. Interested in the ceremonial aspect of ayahuasca over recreational drug use
111. Interview conducted twice due to technical issues recording the first one

- 112.Introduced to ayahuasca through a shop after investigating iboga
- 113.Introduced to ayahuasca when living in South America
- 114.Introduced to ayahuasca through a friend
- 115.Introduced to new friends through shamanism
- 116.Introduced to ayahuasca through a documentary on the subject
- 117.Involvement seen as positive by some f & f and questioned by others
- 118.Is it a cult?
- 119.Kambo believed to remove blockages
- 120.Kambo
- 121.Kambo believed to help with illness and infection
- 122.Kambo introduced via BBC Bruce Parry
- 123.Kambo unpleasant experience.
- 124.Kambo use for healing
- 125.Kambo used for cleansing
- 126.Kambo used to remove spirit attachment - didn't work
- 127.Kerry as an insider researcher
- 128.Kerry reflection - rambling. Clouded. Finally reached a clear question.
- 129.Kerry reflection - challenged interviewees understanding
- 130.Kerry reflection - educating and potentially leading
- 131.Kerry reflection - leading—here.
- 132.Kerry reflection - speaking as a friend
- 133.Kerry reflection - this might seem rude. Also reflecting in situ. Right to check
- 134.Kerry reflection. Confusing leading mixed up question.
- 135.Kerry reflexion - evident that I was not enjoying the interview.
- 136.Kerry reflexion - using Brahmanism again to try and understand from own frame of reference.  
Pantheism would be more apt.
- 137.Kerry reflection - closed answer.
- 138.Kerry reflection - shock experienced/questioning credulity of the participant
- 139.Kerry self-reflection -interrupted interviewee's flow here
- 140.Lack of fear of things going wrong in psychedelic experiences.
- 141.Level of Amazonian shamanistic experience
- 142.Level of involvement in shamanistic practices
- 143.Liberal Christian religious background
- 144.Lifestyle
- 145.Material v's spiritual or mind v's soul
- 146.Moral/ethical upbringing
- 147.Motivated by wanting to explore what happens when we die
- 148.Motivated by a lack of trust of western medicine
- 149.Motivated by an interest in exploring spirituality
- 150.Motivated by experience
- 151.Motivated by exploring the nature of reality
- 152.Motivated by popular culture
- 153.Motivated by soul cleanse/ eradication of negative energy.
- 154.Motivated by wanting to achieve personal potential
- 155.Motivated by wanting to be more creative
- 156.Motivated my wanting to break into a creative realm
- 157.Motives
- 158.Music seen as important to ayahuasca experience.
- 159.Negative
- 160.No interest in Santo Daime religion
- 161.No great value placed on shamanism
- 162.No interest in spiritual side of shamanism expressed.
- 163.No negative effects or complications—experienced.
- 164.No prayer - participant stated affirmations and intent instead.
- 165.No prior dugs experiences
- 166.No prior spiritual or religious leanings
- 167.No social circle
- 168.Not discussed if felt people 're UN interested or won't understand

169. Not discussed out of family
170. Not explore' but understands salvia's use for divination and healing
171. Only certain friends know
172. Paradoxical nature of everything
173. Participant expected being consciousness with ayahuasca
174. Participant 'knew' ayahuasca would improve their life
175. Participant always interested in other cultures
176. Participant associates diet, mental preparation, research and attitude with ritual
177. Participant concerned about the legal status of ritual
178. Participant considers themselves to be a shaman
179. Participant experienced ayahuasca alone
180. Participant explains it as their religion
181. Participant expressed a wish to go beyond the spirit realm, behind it
182. Participant feels it's important to be able to practice
183. Participant feels information is given from an external source
184. Participant felt drawn to ayahuasca
185. Participant had no reservations going into the practices
186. Participant sees it as part of their long term plans
187. Participant relates to a small group of people who are considered shamanistic.
188. Participant believes ayahuasca took them to the spirit realm
189. Participant experienced significant change in personality
190. Philosophical beliefs
191. Practices have helped participants to feel uplifted.
192. Practices not seen to have had any significant impact on day-to-day life.
193. Pre ayahuasca supernatural experiences
194. Pre-existing interest in the occult (before involvement in shamanism)
195. Predilection towards alternative therapies
196. Predilection for religion
197. Psychedelics give insight to creativity.
198. Purgings
199. Questioning if the experience is all in his head
200. Questions being answered from within and from an external source inside the ayahuasca experience.
201. Reality is an illusion
202. Reasons for a shift in religious perspective
203. Recreational drug use
204. Religion seen as a form of control
205. Religious beliefs
206. Religious exploration
207. Religious tolerance
208. Religious upbringing
209. Rituals had no impact on spiritual or religious beliefs but seen to confirm them
210. Route into shamanism through drug smuggling
211. Safety precautions on behalf of the ayahuasca provider
212. Salvia
213. Salvia and childlike regression
214. Salvia homely feeling
215. Salvia produced an experience of multiple worlds.
216. San Pedro
217. San Pedro - no effect
218. San Pedro used to elicit spiritual experience
219. Santo Daime
220. Says he won't return to it but he always does
221. Self-help and development
222. Shamanism not seen as part of lifestyle
223. Shamanic practices are normal to participant
224. Shamanic retreat for tourists
225. Shamanism believed to provide healing.
226. Shamanism promoted an interest in alternative therapies

- 227. Shamanism seen as pure
- 228. Shamanistic practices are cathartic
- 229. Significant impact on lifestyle
- 230. Significant time spent in South America
- 231. Social connection to other shamanistic people felt unnecessary
- 232. Something missing from pharmaceutical
- 233. Struggled with a belief in God
- 234. Suggests participant views the substances as 'the hard side of it' is the soft side the belief structure and philosophies?
- 235. Supernatural experiences after participation in rituals.
- 236. Supportive family and social network
- 237. Thoughts on religion
- 238. Uncertain of how ayahuasca works
- 239. Understanding of how ayahuasca works
- 240. Understanding of shamanism
- 241. Understanding or explanation of God
- 242. Use of drugs for more than recreational use.
- 243. Valued as important
- 244. Valued due to effect
- 245. Wanting ayahuasca to offer a wakeup call - to make a significant change
- 246. Worries

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