

Coca and Ayahuasca: same destiny?

Dr. Jacques Mabit¹, Takiwasi Center²

Summary³

While Peru built the magnificent Inca civilization aided by the wisdom provided by the coca leaf, it later became the first producer of toxic derivatives of this profaned plant. Nowadays, once again, the coca leaf allows treating cocaine addiction, as demonstrated by the experience of the Takiwasi Center. Similarly, the healing use of Ayahuasca was discovered a few decades ago and in a short time, its use exploded all over the world. Will the accelerated desacralization of this medicine reach the same extremes as the misuse of coca? What can the path followed with coca teach us in relation to the use of Ayahuasca? What did the use of coca in the West respond to and what does the use of Ayahuasca respond to today?

Key words: ayahuasca, coca, New Age, modified states of consciousness, ritual, dependency.

Introduction

Beyond their irreducible differences, all the ancient traditions bear such a fundamental preoccupation: to preserve, as far as possible, man - and at the same time society - from the threat of Evil. One could say: "the threats of the Evils" provided we don't forget that, for these traditions, man is one, and that body, mind and spirit are always connected. In other words, the ancient wisdoms and in particular their medicinal traditions based on experience, suppose and are part of a process of purification, removal of Evil and restoration of a certain harmony: both the therapist and the patient engage in this process where no one is left alone. Hence the importance of community rituals, with their sacred aspects, related to the spiritual dimension of the human experience. This applies particularly to the use of medicinal plants, abundant in Peru, of which the most universally known today are Tobacco, Coca and Ayahuasca⁴. We will not discuss here about Tobacco, which is smoked throughout the world mixed with hundreds of chemical substances (often toxic) and whose consumption has nothing to do with the traditional

¹ Medical Doctor, founder and executive president of the Takiwasi Center, Tarapoto, Peru. takiwasi@takiwasi.com

² Center for the Rehabilitation of Drug Addicts and For Research on Traditional Medicines, Tarapoto, Peru, www.takiwasi.com

³ Article published in French: Mabit, J. (2018). *Coca et Ayahuasca, une même destinée?* Revista Cultura y Droga, 23 (25), 15-32. DOI: 10.17151/culdr.2018.23.25.2. Lecture delivered at the "World Ayahuasca Conference", Rio Branco, Brazil, October 2016. Translated from Spanish to English by Mandeep Boro.

⁴ A psychoactive brew of ancestral origins used by the indigenous tribes of the Amazon and composed of the ayahuasca vine (*Banisteriopsis caapi*) and a complement plant (most often *Psychotria viridis*). This plays a central role in traditional medicines of indigenous peoples.

Amazonian uses. We will focus our attention on the two other plants whose use, if separated from its traditional ritual-medicinal framework, leads to disasters - including for example the addiction to cocaine, so common today.

On the contrary, the experience of the Takiwasi Center in Peru shows the benefits that can come from the traditional use of these plants, that is to say, in accordance with a hundreds-years-old experience, within a certain community framework and along a purification path which demands commitment and time (unlike the individualistic consumption that wants to enjoy everything, immediately and without self-commitment). Among these benefits, we can even notice that the coca leaf used properly can treat cocaine addiction! But the tragedy is that the same Peru which, nourished by the wisdom transmitted by the coca leaf, built the magnificent Inca civilization, has today become the first producer of toxic derivatives of this desecrated plant.

A similar problem arises with Ayahuasca, whose uncontrolled consumption is rapidly spreading around the world (Labate and Cavnar, 2014), and whose therapeutic use has been rediscovered since a few decades (Mabit, 2007). Within tribal societies where the use of Ayahuasca was born, the rules are strict, the use of Ayahuasca is under the control of the community, and the spiritual struggle is permanent. The Westerners, profoundly marked by rationalism and atheism at least practical, are in a process of rejection of similar elements belonging to their own traditional roots: facing indigenous traditions, while appropriating some of their components, they will tend to create a “light” context, evacuating some of these traditional rules and adapting them. Thus, the risk is to appropriate Ayahuasca without being submitted to the ritual context that structures the intake, or by selecting at convenience the pieces of this ritualization that are suitable because they do not contradict expectations.

Westerners pride themselves on a return to the thousand-years-old knowledge and expertise of the indigenous people, while in reality they manipulate them, to the point of betraying these traditions and their own. Moreover, they expose themselves to all the dangers that these traditions have been able to detect universally, and against which they have developed defense systems over the centuries.

Presentation

The Takiwasi Center in Tarapoto, Peru, has been working for 25 years for the treatment of people confronting problems of drug addiction and as refuge for those people on a quest for personal evolution. In the treatment protocol that we have elaborated, Ayahuasca plays a fundamental role, associated with the ritual use of many other plants and inspired by the ancestral practices of the Peruvian Amazon such

as purges, diets, plant baths, suction, exhalations, etc. These resources are inserted in a dynamic that includes a psycho-therapeutic accompaniment and living together within a community of residents. This innovative approach is generating growing interest in scientific community (Brierley and Davidson, 2012).

I propose here an initial reflection on a complex subject. I am aware there is no simple answer to a complex problem (Morin, 2005) and I request the readers to pardon the synthetic formulations that may seem decisive and I ask them to take them as an invitation to delve into this subject.

The lessons of coca

Peru is one of the largest producers of coca leaf and its addictive derivatives that supply drug trafficking at global level. Together with cannabis and alcohol, cocaine and cocaine paste are the substances most frequently consumed amongst our patients.

Paradoxically, coca leaf represented the source of the ancestral wisdom of the Andean world, the epicenter of the Inca culture which flourished for many centuries throughout the Andean region⁵ and beyond and was able to create marvelous constructions like Machu Picchu. The inhabitants of the Andes consume it even today without suffering neither dependence nor addiction. On the contrary, it is for them a source of health, strength, and spiritual awakening.

How could such a source of wisdom become one of the most addictive substances in the world? We owe this degeneration to the illegitimate appropriation of this plant by Westerners, that abandoned its religious, sacred and ritual uses, to replace them by a strictly utilitarian use, essentially controlled by greed (Gumucio, 2008). This path of abuse started for the coca when it became to be used for the smooth running of mining production in general and of gold in particular, before becoming, in our days, a product designed to keep pace with the frantic rhythm of modern society, governed in its totality by the demands of an omnipresent market, and destined at the same time to counter the effects of the stress that arises from these same demands.

Thus, the western lifestyle with its hegemonic tendency at the planetary level has induced frantic

⁵ The Inca empire (Tahuantinsuyo, in Quechua, means "four in one" or "the sum of four parts") began during the 12th century with Manco Capac, first of a dynasty of twelve or thirteen emperors, and ended with Atahualpa, defeated in 1532 by the Spanish conquistador Francisco Pizarro. This empire was, from the 15th to the 16th century, the biggest of pre-Columbian America.

consumption of cocaine and other drugs that give the illusion of "holding up". That's how the ancient medicine of the Incas used in view of the highest ends has become the trap venom of modern life. The consequences of this desacralization have a very high price. This is a spiritual law⁶.

At the Takiwasi Center we try to clinically demonstrate that, by regaining the correct ritualized use of the coca leaf, its medicinal power allows to cure people who are addicted to the same toxic derivatives of coca (Giove, 2002). The problem does not stem from the plant but from its misuse.

Parallel with Ayahuasca

Ayahuasca (*Banisteriopsis caapi*), is likewise an American plant but it grows within the Amazonian region, where it constitutes, even today, an essential tool of the local medicine and ritual practices. Its explosive spread over the last 30 years is essentially due to its appropriation by Westerners. However, this time it is not used to meet the productive goals of western consumerism but to give an answer to the existential crisis that arises from the exhaustion of the same society. Just as coca, Ayahuasca is summoned to give a solution to the stress produced by the violence of modern society, but in a distinct way and for very different reasons. Coca, reduced to its active ingredients, enabled the endurance of stress by permitting to maintain the accelerated rhythm demanded by a system of generalized greed, without ever questioning it. On the contrary, Ayahuasca, to a certain point, interrogates this same system and represents a possible form of escape from that lethal dynamic, thus promoting the generation of alternatives to the latter. Through its visionary effects it responds also to the modern craving for images and screens. On the other hand, it does not generate any addiction even when it is reduced to its active ingredients (Frecka, Bokor and Winkelman, 2016).

These two differences, the non-addiction and the useful questioning to the system, lead many people who defend the use of Ayahuasca to think that it doesn't have negative consequences for the westerner who consumes it.

We believe that, although it is true that the physical toxicity of Ayahuasca cannot be compared with that of the by-products derived from the coca leaf (dos Santos, 2013), its potential mental and spiritual toxicity is greater on a large scale. That relative physical innocuousness that appears to exculpate the

⁶ The universal Tradition recognizes, beyond physical laws, the existence of psychic and spiritual laws as well, emanating from a transcendental and immutable order. Modernity accepts the existence of the first (studied by exact sciences), admits the possibility of the second (studied by social sciences and philosophy), but rejects or denies the third (studied by theology).

use of Ayahuasca hides subtle dangers that are, precisely because of this subtlety, widely ignored. They are more difficult to detect at first sight and, as a result, considered almost non-existent. While the effects of physical toxicity are immediate and difficult to refute, those of the psychological toxicity can manifest in a slow and progressive manner, and this apparent harmlessness is even more pronounced at the spiritual level. The greater the subtlety and difficulty to acknowledge, the greater the danger. The links to be established between the incorrect consumption of Ayahuasca and its deleterious effects on the short and medium term are difficult to highlight. Thus, inappropriate use of Ayahuasca can be very toxic at spiritual level, relatively toxic at psychological and mental level and non-toxic at physical level.

Denatured by a world that separates medicine and spirituality

Just as Westerners thought they could exonerate themselves from the ancestral knowledge regulating the use of coca, (not to mention tobacco and opium poppy, among others), they show now a tendency to appropriate Ayahuasca, leaving aside the basic rules which were established for centuries or millennia by the Amazonian societies. The ritual dimensions are either excluded for being considered folklore or of mere cultural significance, or considered in a purely formal way, and thus emptied of their true essence and content⁷. They claim a tradition to better adulterate it and, leaving aside the spiritual and religious dimension, forcing the thousand-years-old Amazonian wisdom to pass under the yoke of a reductionist conception of mental health.

Even more, the self-denoted “Ayahuasca community”⁸, while considering itself to be revolutionary, unconsciously adheres to the categories and concepts of the *New Age*, typical postmodern product that, despite its ambitions to reach a paradigm change, it rather serves to reinforce the system without actually questioning its foundations. This way, the “religious” use of Ayahuasca is tolerated whereas its therapeutic use is forbidden or, if eventually authorized, it’s within the desecrated context of western medicine without any rituality or spiritual dimension. In the worst-case scenario, irrationally, it is banned in all its forms, including in the context of research that this way contradicts its own epistemology by creating scientific taboos. Thus, the traditional use of Ayahuasca is submitted either to

⁷ The ritual dimension would require specific development in the light of contemporary ignorance on this subject within a secular and desecralized society at a global level, topic that we have already treated elsewhere (Mabit, 1999).

⁸ In our opinion this “Ayahuasca community” lacks real consistency and we believe it is an imaginary construction. What do all those who give or take Ayahuasca have in common? Not even the Ayahuasca concoction have anything in common, as it can be prepared in different manners with different “energetic” variations not recognized by botanic experts (cf. distinctions in the indigenous world between tiger-Ayahuasca, sky-Ayahuasca, etc.), with different additives (chacruna or *Psychotria viridis*, yagé or *Diplopterys cabrerana*, etc.) and, occasionally, even without the same ayahuasca vine (*Banisteriopsis caapi*) replaced by similar plants or chemical preparations (not to mention the infinite variety of contexts and objectives in its use).

a technical and utilitarian medicine, or to a disembodied spirituality, and thereby helps to dissociate body, soul, and spirit – in accordance to what truly constitutes the heart of post-Christian ideology⁹. In the end and in both cases, Ayahuasca is subject to the Western spirit, reinforcing and reassuring what it was supposed to question. We must now say a few words on the *New Age*.

Ayahuasca community and *New Age*

Most of Westerners who drink Ayahuasca, or subjects more or less westernized, spontaneously associate Ayahuasca intake with *New Age* philosophy (Toolan, 1987). The *New Age* undoubtedly responds to the legitimate need to give a sense to existence in the face of the accelerated desacralization of today's society. But it seems to us that this movement promise much more than what it can really offer, since it maintains, in its foundations and under different appearances, the axioms of the society that it claims to reject or criticize: it re-takes into account some important conceptual and philosophical errors, the inanity of which the history of Western society has already shown to us (Verlinde, 2014) - while claiming to be inserted into traditions such as the practice of shamanism or the great spiritual currents of Humanity, whether Eastern¹⁰ or Western.

Now these traditions, that exist also among the Eastern or Western Christian monks, always insist on the need to: be part of a structured filiation; follow, in the long term, rigorously codified teachings and exercises; submit to the authority of the masters who mediate in the relation between this world (profane) and a world “other” or spiritual; meticulously observe a set of rules and principles; not mix at will substances or practices that oppose or contradict one another (whether rituals, plants, concepts, etc.); benefit from an appropriate and strict protocol of containment and guidance; accept a certain quantity of suffering during the learning process that involves sacrifice, abnegation and dedication; renounce to the search for richness, and get rid of the useless or superfluous; be disposed to “work on oneself”; inscribe all relation with the spiritual world within a non-improvised context, because it rests entirely on the precise and codified transmission of teachings; be prepared for a dimension of both inward and outward spiritual combat that leads the initiate to a confrontation with malevolent spiritual

⁹ “Post-Christian” in a sense that does not refer only to the sociological phenomenon of secularization that has affected Western societies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but to deeper phenomena appeared much earlier and characterized by radical denaturation of Christian thoughts and practices; these have marked our societies as much as Christianity itself, as analysed by Chesterton who speaks of "Christian truths gone mad".

¹⁰ We talk here about oriental traditions as practiced in the origins and not after their appropriation by Western society that transforms and adapts them with the same ease as it does with the traditional use of Ayahuasca. Thus, most of the Hindu and Buddhist philosophies came to the Western world after having been reinterpreted by the Anglo-Saxon thought of English colonialism of the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries

entities¹¹.

Thus, a journey is laid out that requires time and availability, caution and slowness – elements without which one cannot overcome the numerous obstacles and detect the many traps - and which, above all, demands necessary humbleness to be able to embrace and benefit from the experience and knowledge of the elders or predecessors.

Unfortunately it is the opposite attitude that appears most often: where the tradition points out the need of a long process of learning, they try to learn quickly in a few months or weeks¹²; where it shows the need of filiation (Sotillos, 2013), they happily cut off their own Judeo-Christian, Greek and Latin roots; (*faith is excluded in the name of freedom and reason is forbidden to avoid excessive mentalization*); where it recommends to refer to a structured tradition, self-reference is preferred (*"the inner master", verbal tic of the New Age*)¹³; where it warns from a hasty approach to the world-other, and especially with its intermediate level inhabited also by evil entities, they choose the idealization of a spiritual world free from enemies¹⁴; where it indicates the importance of mediation by elders or masters, they try to substitute it with individual autonomy, and interact directly with the Divinity on their own¹⁵; where it indicates the existence of immutable and implacable physical, psychological and spiritual laws, they replace it with the egotic assertion that the only valid laws are those that one gives himself¹⁶; where it

¹¹ Creation cannot be reduced to a visible and sensible world (Nature, Universe); an invisible world exists, located between the visible creation and the divine world, hence its name of "intermediate world". All pre-Christian traditions have some knowledge of it due to experience, so they talk of spiritual creatures separated between good and bad (angels or demons, spirits that are radically good or bad, unlike human beings who remain ambivalent), on which the Bible and the Christian experience shed a light on. Only Westerners - and only during the last few centuries - are marked by an ignorant obscurantism on those "entities" or spiritual beings that can communicate and affect human beings (respectively for the good of or for evil). The *New Age* tends to confuse this intermediate world created with the Divinity itself. The intermediate world is dual, Divinity is one.

¹² Humberto Piaguaje, taita (master) of the Colombian ethnic group Ziona, considers that it takes about twenty years to become "taita" (the one who conducts ayahuasca sessions alone) and that some will remain apprentices or assistants for life (personal communication). In general, indigenous ayahuasqueros estimate that it takes at least 6 months of "dieta" (strict condition of isolation in the jungle with dietary rules, daily intake of plants and sexual abstinence) before claiming to be a healer. But a "dieta" of 2-3 weeks is already extremely demanding and requires a post-dieta period (with dietary, sexual and behavioural rules, among others) that lasts at least twice the time of the "dieta" itself. In other words, very few Western ayahuasqueros fulfil these conditions.

¹³ What some will call "spiritual narcissism" or a form of pseudo-mysticism, as David Spangler (1984), one of the most eminent *New Age* representatives, points out. He then took distance and claimed that "individuals and groups engage in their dreams of adventure and power, usually under occult or millenarist form [...] They stand out by their attachment to an inner world centered on self-realization, which is translated (although in an insidious way) into withdrawal from the world. At this level, the *New Age* is populated by strange and exotic beings, masters, followers, aliens. It is a place of psychic powers and occult mysteries, conspiracies and hidden teachings" (p. 78).

¹⁴ Again, they deny or ignore witch practices, spells, enchantments, magical practices, that literally abound in the various forms of shamanism or traditional "medicines".

¹⁵ Some replace the physical presence of an experienced elder by the virtual resort to their "inner master", "ascended masters", "guides", "angels", etc.

¹⁶ For example, the isolation during "dietas" is no longer so strict, the dietary rules are not rigorous and new foods

talks about an intangible and universal Truth, they affirm that everybody has inalienable right to his own truth; where it indicates a necessary suffering, they desire enjoyment and easy learning¹⁷; where it insists on a purified intention, they assume that good intention and desire “to help” are enough; where it teaches strictness in use of symbolism and rituals, they prefer improvisation, personal inspiration and aesthetic¹⁸; where it demonstrates that kindness without knowledge is the “road to hell”, they are convinced that good intentions are enough and protect them; finally, where, on the contrary, it warns on the danger of “knowledge for itself”, not nurtured by kindness, they believe that the accumulation of concepts, ideas, readings and studies prevails¹⁹.

This way of seeing, thinking and acting predominates in the current “Ayahuasca community” and place it within the *New Age* nebula - itself located in the vast field of Gnosis²⁰ - where the search for freedom for itself encloses into a self-referential system without limits, structure and authority. The alleged "expansion of the consciousness" tends to resemble a disproportionate inflation of the ego (Spangler, 1984). This mode of operation responds as a mirror, as we have seen, the scientific approach that is only interested in the effects of Ayahuasca expurgated of its spiritual dimension – and reductionist psychology (psychologism) that considers Ayahuasca only as a facilitator in psychotherapy. *New Age* spiritualistic approaches on the one hand, and reductionist (atheist) approaches on the other hand, each desecrate the use of Ayahuasca in their own way.

Several authors have tried to overcome this contradiction by wishing to unite modern psychology to spirituality, put the West and the East in harmony, whereas together they would really represent the eternal and universal psychology/philosophy inherent to all human beings. Ken Wilber tried it with great intelligence and brilliance and the same can be said for Professor Jorge Ferrer of the Californian Institute of Integral Studies, in what can be considered an almost post *New Age* momentum. However, we find the same difficulty that already Jung had faced with the question of the Evil, having to assume the concept of *privatio boni*, and which allowed for it to be later recovered by the *New Age* and different

are introduced, ritual acts can be performed remotely (or even by telephone!), the length of the post-diet process is reduced, the prohibition to be in contact with a woman in the menstrual period is ignored to be considered "chauvinist", etc.

¹⁷ The supposed "peace and love" is opposite to the dolorism or Saint-Sulpicianism of Christian knick-knacks.

¹⁸ For example, the ikaro or ritual song traditionally transmitted by a master is replaced by a personal poetic creation, a popular song or a music for aesthetic purposes.

¹⁹ Typical process of Gnostic and esoteric approaches in search for secrets or hidden keys. It must be noted that some of the criteria listed match the questionings of the Protestant Reformation (freedom of analysis, criticism of clerical mediation) which predominates in the Anglo-Saxon countries where the *New Age* has become strong.

²⁰ By 'gnosis' we mean the enlightened knowledge of the divine mysteries reserved for an initiated elite, in opposition to the revelation brought by Jesus and of which he will say: “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children.” (Lucas, 10:21).

types of gnosis like we have shown elsewhere (Mabit, 2016). If the archetype of the Self represents the Good and therefore God, then the Evil is symbolized by its shadow and the evil spirits do not exist. Thus, Jung tried to desacralize the archetypes in order to not recognize the autonomous existence of the spirits of the intermediate world. The psychic shadow is again confused with the spiritual shadow in the renewed and endless attempt of the human spirit not to "kneel before God", the *summum bonum*, and ultimately accept, in its finitude, that the path passes through Revelation²¹. Paradoxically, just as Jung will be inspired by two spirits (malignant?), Philemon and Basilides, who claim themselves as such, the *New Age* is not reluctant to supply on "inspirers" as Roberto Assiagoli (promoter of the Psychosynthesis) with a spirit called the Tibetan and Alice Bayley (promoter of Theosophy) with a spirit of the same name which also identifies itself as Master of Wisdom and then under the initials D.K. later translated as Djwal Khu; or again the "Jesus" who supposedly dictated Helen Cohn Schucman the books "A course in miracles" or the "Letters of Christ" received by an anonymous author. *New Age* thus has many esoteric roots, neither the reality nor the nature of these "source entities" are ever clearly addressed or defined.

Authorizing the most unlikely mixtures, the *New Age* eclecticism creates new chimeras: experiences, plants, philosophies, concepts are all collected in great confusion, without building anything consistent. It is remarkable to see the verbosity about experiences with ayahuasca and the extreme scarcity of reflection on it, both at a psychological, philosophical and theological level. Western society is criticized in the name of an individualism disguised of freedom and typical of this end of cycle decadence.

Innovation is not excluded from tradition even if Tradition does not evolve at all. Traditional medical systems are able to incorporate elements from other cultures and proceed non-exclusively. But this integration of innovative elements is previously passed through the filter of its coherence with the operating structures of the traditional system. Either it is suggested during the same work with Ayahuasca and then appears as an additional teaching of the spirit that presides over the effects of the plant, or it comes from outside and will be subjected to experimentation in a traditional setting before possibly being integrated. Dynamism and enrichment capabilities of traditional Amazonian medicines do not imply abandonment of the "energetic" fundamentals that are the basis of its operativity. The ayahuasqueros will then explore the qualities of a medicinal plant foreign to their regular baggage of knowledge by observing it during the trance state so to define its potentiality and possibly include it in their therapeutic resources. In the same way, the indigenous groups of the Colombian Amazon have

²¹ The *summum bonum* or supreme good, as well as the *privatio boni*, the evil defined as lack of the good, are Christian theological concepts that should introduce a substantial theological debate on the question of the evil, which unfortunately is almost absent from the *New Age* sphere as if it were a taboo of modern times.

incorporated into their practice the use of the harmonica, but maintaining a rhythm and a melody coherent with the “energy” of Ayahuasca. Indigenous traditions in Latin America have also fed on their proximity to Christianity by including prayers, the invocation of saints, some hymns, the use of holy water, etc., in the extent to which these contributions did not create a conflict with their cosmivision and on the contrary, potentiated their spiritual fight²². The notions of *cutipada* and *cruzadera* (energy interferences), previously reserved for certain plants, smells or animals, has been extended to the objects of modernity (bottled fragrances, smells of gasoline or detergent, vehicles or technology products) without fundamentally modifying the diagnostic and therapeutic model.

Western innovation in the use of Ayahuasca would benefit from taking inspiration from this empirical approach, starting from the procedures traditionally implemented to introduce innovative elements into practice. This supposes to give to the indigenous empiricism a genuine probationary value and get rid of the arrogance that wants to correct, without verifying it, the supposed deficiencies or lacks of the indigenous peoples’ thought described as magico-religious.

Western progressive thinking²³ suggests to our contemporaries sons of the modernity that these primitive conceptions would have been obsolete in Western world and they are exonerated from being submitted to the “filter” of this ancestral empiricism. *New Age* frequently commits this abuse of power, while believing itself to be more open, tolerant, advanced and evolved by definition.

All those who take Ayahuasca without exception claim a “spiritual” dimension in its use, without ever defining what they mean by it. The reflection on this field presents an abysmal gap or, in other words, can be considered as almost nonexistent. It looks like a taboo subject. When the use of Ayahuasca is addressed from scientific, social and therapeutic approaches, it rightly demands the rigorousness of logical reasoning and demonstration of the hypothesis: bald affirmations are not permitted. However, when it comes to “Ayahuasca spirituality”, anybody can say anything without being demanded the same rigorousness and there is no space for questioning. Thus, we see that religious use of Ayahuasca is allowed in many countries and we have “Ayahuasca churches” which could make hear their experience,

²² This partial Christianization of ancestral therapeutic practices often bother the Westerners who, in their fantasies, would like to find in these medicines the "purity of origins" and thus consider them "contaminated" by a religious coloring (his own tradition) that they reject. This inconvenience does not belong to the indigenous people who do not understand it.

²³ Progressive thinking is part of a linear vision of time, in which what is new is necessarily better than the old. This cultural disposition is so inscribed in the “genes” of modernity that it is almost unconscious and imposes itself as obvious. However, it is in direct opposition to the vision of the indigenous peoples who place the source of knowledge and wisdom in the mythical origins. This underlies the cult of the ancestors and the respect of the ancients situated chronologically closer to the source. Hence, among them, the need to preserve and stay closer to tradition. The *New Age*, while criticizing the Western system, remains permeated with this axiom, which generates a constant misunderstanding with the indigenous world.

but the cacophony of personal opinions dominates, based solely on individualistic inspiration, without any critical mind or debates, without conceptual bases or doctrinal coherence, and without written or historical references.

In my opinion, studies, researches or reflections on the theological and philosophical level would be greatly needed, to be at the service of practices in everyday use of Ayahuasca - which need to be founded. I attribute this deficiency essentially to the emergence of drifts with their serious consequences on the physical, psycho-emotional and spiritual levels, the frequency of which is largely underestimated. The spiritual harms in particular (infestations, possession, witchcraft, spells, etc.) are almost completely ignored, kept in worrying silence and therefore untreated.

A such obvious lack of coherence allows the return of a large number of errors in thought or old and obsolete ideologies about the human being and the mystery of its existence: relativism, naturalism, quietism, dualism, manichaeism, messianism, spiritualism.

Consequences of the *New Age* drift

The spiritual dangers pointed out by all the traditions currently flourish in the “Ayahuasca community” and put the value of this plant and of the traditions that codify its use in danger of being completely distorted, to finally give reason to the supporters of its prohibition (Molnar, 2013).

It is known that the major obstacles to every spiritual evolution reside in the temptation of power, greed and sexual abuse²⁴. There are many examples of all these abuses and transgressions related to a consumerist use of Ayahuasca. A little tour on the Internet is enough to observe the increasing accidents: sudden deaths, suicides, sexual abuses, economic and commercial exploitation, sectarian retention, mental destabilization, manipulation²⁵. We know that what appears on the Internet is only the tip of iceberg: shame, fear of reprisals and, sometimes, complicity place under silence the largest part of the victims. Obviously, the echo of these morbid news sometimes relayed by the press causes a sharp degradation of the public image of Ayahuasca.

Nevertheless, we think the greatest danger has not surfaced yet to the conscience of the same Ayahuasca

²⁴ We can associate the famous three lusts (excessive desire of our fallen nature) named by St. Augustine: *libido sentiendi* (desires of the body), *libido dominandi* (pride) and *libido sciendi* (knowledge).

²⁵ These events have become so frequent and worrying that in various countries (Spain, United States, Czech Republic) emergency units have been set up to respond to these sometimes dramatic cases.

users, although indigenous traditions gathered extensive data about the evil use of Ayahuasca and witchcraft practices. We want to talk here about the spiritual illusion and the possible contamination, infestation or possession by evil spirits. Both modern science and modern world at large deny this dimension of reality. The same Christian churches, for fear of appearing outdated and retrograde, have come to the point of hiding these issues, and thus forget how to treat them, even though they have the tools and the doctrine to do it²⁶. Now, how to prevent a danger that we do not know? These manifestations take the aspect of mental distresses that psychiatry will be in charge of labeling and putting under a chemical straitjacket, if not a lifetime placement in a psychiatric hospital, without being able to cure them.

The "Ayahuasca community" places itself in the same line of denial of the malignant dimensions of the spiritual world and its manipulations, probably because modern Westerners could not come out of their spiritual obscurantism without being returned to their own shadow. It is much easier to think that is only a matter of cultural and unfounded beliefs. They believe in evacuating the problem by ignoring it. Thus, the users of Ayahuasca become the easy prey of these occult powers (Daniélou, 2008), whereas our clinical experience teaches us on the contrary that the correct use of Ayahuasca – we insist on the adjective “correct” - not only allows to avoid these infestations²⁷, but also reveal them, and thus bring their victims into a process of liberation.

Conclusion

The misuse of coca has warned us on the risks of a desecrate use of the sacred plants of the native peoples. This same danger also points to Ayahuasca but presenting itself in a different, more subtle way, with the absence of significant risks at the physical level concealing a greater danger at the psychic and, especially, spiritual level. The apparent harmlessness of Ayahuasca given by its lack of dependence and its supposed questioning of the Western technocratic consumerist system and Judeo-Christian heritage, found in the *New Age* thinking a soil in which to spread. These conditions have fostered an exponential, naive, desacralized and deritualized expansion of the use of Ayahuasca in the Western world. This naivety is beginning to be challenged by the emergence of more and more frequent cases of abuse, accidents and psychic disturbances related to incorrect use of Ayahuasca. However, the spiritual risks

²⁶ I'm referring in particular to the relatively neglected exorcist tradition, although a renaissance seems to be emerging in this area, as shown by the contemporary demonology theses of Father José María Fortea in Spain and Father Jean-Baptiste Golfier in France, or the recent reactivation of the International Associations of Exorcists, trainings and appointments of specialists in the field.

²⁷ Sources of infestation include spiritualism, magic, occult practices, inappropriate sexuality, transgenerational heritages, drug use, among others.

of infestations are still widely ignored and kept under silence. In fact, they suppose to overcome the “spiritual” or “religious” taboo who presides over western reductionist thought (psychologism, scientism) and return to the roots and teachings of the heritages left by the great spiritual currents of humanity including, especially in what concerns Westerners, the recovery of the original Christian filiation. Ancestral knowledge from which the use of Ayahuasca comes, paradoxically, agrees in its rules and requirements with Western traditions, precisely those that the members of the *New Age* nebula tend to reject.

At the heart of this contradiction is the question of Evil and its treatment and the enormous issue of the existence and operability of the spiritual "intermediate world" that awakens the allergy of Westerners to a subject they believed, with arrogance and ignorance, to have overcome thanks to the atheistic rationalism that is instilled in all modern world.

Traditions are not static but they can progressively incorporate elements from other traditions. Thus, it is possible for the indigenous traditions, like the Amazonian one, to be enriched by the rational western tradition (Greco-Roman), just as the latter would gain a lot by allowing to be fructified by the wisdom of traditional societies.

One of the ways to move forward in this direction is to rediscover the multicultural aspect of Christianity from its origins, as demonstrated by the various Eastern Churches that Western world has long forgotten and relegated to the sidelines. It can be seen that ancient Greco-Roman traditions, which are spiritually poor, are not the only wisdom that the Christian experience has assumed and transmitted. The ancestral effort of man to ward off Evil and get purified corporally, psychologically and spiritually can enrich today's Westerners, as long as they accept their own roots and filiation - and therefore question dominant rationalism, which comes mainly from old anti-Christianism. Otherwise, they are destined to elaborate a kind of chimera and to get lost in the confusion of a transgressive, incoherent and irresponsible *New Age*. A huge work of epistemological, philosophical, theological and clinical reflection remains to be done, and it is particularly essential in view of the naive vulnerability of Westerners to face the dangers of the intermediate spiritual world, where, with total unconsciousness, they put at risk mental health and spiritual salvation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Brierley, D. and Davidson, C. (2012). Developments in harmine pharmacology implications for ayahuasca use and drug-dependence treatment. *Progress in Neuro-Psychopharmacology & Biological Psychiatry*, 39 (2), 263-272.
- Daniélou, A. (2008). Las divinidades alucinógenas. *Revista Takiwasi*, 1.
- Frecska, E., Bokor, P. and Winkelman, M. (2016). The Therapeutic Potentials of Ayahuasca: Possible Effects against Various Diseases of Civilization. *Frontiers in Pharmacology*, 7, 35.
- Giove, R. (2002). *La liana de los muertos al rescate de la vida, medicina tradicional amazónica en el tratamiento de las toxicomanías*. Tarapoto, Perú, Takiwasi editions.
- Guimarães dos Santos, R. (2013). Safety and Side Effects of Ayahuasca in Humans— An Overview Focusing on Developmental Toxicology. *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, 45 (1), 68-78.
- Gumucio, J. (2008). *La leyenda de la coca. La historia secreta de la hoja de coca y la cocaína*. Caracas, Venezuela: Editorial El Perro y La Rana. 32
- Labate, B. and Cavnar, C. (2014). *Ayahuasca Shamanism in the Amazon and Beyond*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Mabit, J. (1999). Ir y volver: el ritual como puerta entre los mundos, ejemplos en el shamanismo amazónico. *Amazonia Peruana*, XIII (26), 143-155.
- Mabit, J. (2007). Ayahuasca in the treatment of addictions. In Winkelman, M.J. and Roberts, T. (Ed.), *Hallucinogens and Health: New Evidence for Psychedelic Substances as Treatment*. California, USA: Praeger Publishers.
- Mabit, J. (2016). Le sorcier, le fou et la grâce : les archétypes sont-ils des esprits désacralisés ? Réflexion à partir du chamanisme amazonien. *Danger et nécessité de l'individuation*, IXe Colloque de Bruxelles, Esperluète Ed. co-édition avec L'Arbre Soleil, 2016. Belgique.
- Morin, E. (2005). *Introducción al pensamiento complejo*. Barcelona, España: Gedisa.
- Molnar, E. (2013). The responsible use of entheogens in the context of bioregionalism. *European Journal of Ecopsychology*, 4, 78-89.
- Spangler, D. (1984). *The Rebirth of the Sacred*. London, England: Gateway Books.
- Sotillos, S. (2013). *Psychology and the Perennial Philosophy: Studies in Comparative Religion*. Indiana, USA: World Wisdom.
- Toolan, D. (1987). *Facing West from California's Shores: Jesuit's Journey into New Age Consciousness*. New York, USA: Crossroad Pub Co.
- Verlinde, J.-M. (2014). *Les impostures antichrétiennes*. Paris, France: Presses Renaissance.