Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree in

Women's and Gender Studies

Decolonial-Feminist Account of Yagé

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Abstract

This research aims to explore, expose and problematize the Western scholarly discourse produced about yagé, an indigenous medicine used in the Amazon region of Colombia. Drawing upon what has been said in scholarly literature about this indigenous medicine, under the label "Ayahuasca", I show how the construct of it by Western scholars focus only in the chemical and therefore, medical aspects of it. Analyzing the Western hegemonic discourse allows me to expose the epistemic location of such knowledge production. A knowledge production that denies the spiritual side involved in a yagé experience, as well as the indigenous knowledge required for it to be fully effective. I argue then, that Ayahuasca, as a commodified version of yage, is yet another colonial project. Which opens up the possibility of cultural (mis-)appropriation with psychological consequences for those who use the brew out of its indigenous context, as I demonstrate through the lived experience of 3 women living in the Netherlands. Working with decolonial and feminist theory, I also provide a counter-narrative by documenting the knowledge coming from within the indigenous context. For this purpose, I use 10 Colombian women's lived experience, in addition to the knowledge and experience coming from a male Colombian-indigenous-curandero. This is weaved together by engaging with my own lived experience with yagé. The analysis of the Western hegemonic discourse aims then to contribute to the current efforts of decolonial thinkers whose intention is to demonstrate how Western knowledge production machinery is not innocent, nor apolitical. While, by locating participant's narratives at the center of the counter-narrative, this research elucidates as well how the decolonial option, as opposed to the colonial way of producing knowledge, can be put to work in the making of counter-discourses, whilst affirming the rights of the racialized-gendered Other in producing/maintaining their own knowledge.

Resumen

Esta investigación tiene como objetivo explorar, exponer y problematizar el discurso académico Occidental producido sobre el yagé, una medicina indígena utilizada en la Amazonía Colombiana. Basándome en lo que se ha dicho en la literatura académica sobre esta medicina indígena, bajo la etiqueta "Ayahuasca", muestro cómo la construcción de la misma por parte de académicos occidentales se centra únicamente en los aspectos químicos y, por lo tanto, médicos de la misma. Analizar el discurso hegemónico occidental me permite exponer la ubicación epistémica de dicha producción de conocimiento. Una producción de conocimiento que niega el lado espiritual involucrado en una experiencia con yagé, así como el conocimiento indígena requerido para que éste sea completamente efectivo. Yo sostengo, entonces, que la ayahuasca, como una versión comodificada del yage, es otro proyecto colonial. Lo que abre la posibilidad de una (mala-) apropiación cultural con consecuencias psicológicas para quienes utilizan la bebida fuera de su contexto indígena, como lo demuestro a través de la experiencia vivida de 3 mujeres que viven en los Países Bajos. Trabajando con la teoría decolonial y feminista, también proporciono una contra-narrativa al documentar el conocimiento proveniente del contexto indígena. Para este propósito, utilizo la experiencia vivida de 10 mujeres colombianas, además del conocimiento y la experiencia provenientes de un hombre colombiano indígena curandero. Esto se entrelaza al relacionarme con mis propias experiencias vividas con yagé. El análisis del discurso Occidental hegemónico pretende entonces contribuir a los esfuerzos actuales de los pensadores decoloniales, cuya intención es demostrar cómo la maquinaria de producción de conocimiento occidental no es inocente ni apolítica. Mientras que, al ubicar las narraciones de los participantes en el centro de la contra-narrativa, esta investigación dilucida también cómo la opción decolonial, en oposición a la forma colonial de producir conocimiento, puede ponerse a trabajar en la elaboración de contra-discursos, al tiempo que afirma los derechos del Otro género-racializados a producir/mantener su propio conocimiento.

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Introduction

It was back in 2010, we were sitting around the bonfire, inside Yovany's *maloca* (hut) waiting for him to start the yagé ceremony. Yovany is an indigenous man from Putumayo, Colombia. I remember at the time being in a state between anxiety and fear, because I had no idea of what was about to happen. Although I had a vague idea, it turned out to be a misleading one. The first thing I did with my sister, after deciding to go to a yagé ceremony with my mother, was look up on the internet what yagé was. I did not find any information coming from the indigenous communities. I found instead scientific information, very likely from U.S.A./Europe based scholars, explaining how yagé was another name given to an indigenous brew named Ayahuasca. Hence, I went to Yovany's *maloca* waiting for him not only to give me Ayahuasca, but to explain to me what that was exactly and how it worked in the body and mind.

After the ceremony, I approached Yovany with a lot of questions, but I will never forget the first one I asked him: "Taita" [1], I said, "can you explain to me what Ayahuasca is?" He was seated on his altar – the place they sit during the ceremony – his gaze was fixed somewhere in front of him and, without turning towards me, he replied: "Ayahuasca?" I said: "yes, Ayahuasca, Taita, isn't that another name for yagé?" And he said: "No". I was confused. How is it that he did not know yagé is another name given to Ayahuasca? Or was yagé not the same as Ayahuasca? I spent the following days trying to come to terms with my confusion and, after reading things online, my conclusion, sadly, was not that the internet was simply wrong, but that Yovany did not have internet access and thus, did not know about the scientific research that has proved yagé to be the same as Ayahuasca. In short, my conclusion was: Yovany does not know, the scientists are the ones who know. I was disappointed in him.

[1] Taita is the name given to an old indigenous person who works healing people with the use of indigenous medicine. In the course of development of this thesis I found out that they actually prefer to be called Cuaraca, or Indigenous Yagecero Doctor, as it is more specific. Still, Taita is how I refered to him.

Out of disappointment and lack of trust, I did not visit Yovany for almost two years after that first experience. But I needed some serious healing after the whole trauma that my illegal abortion left me. Consequently, I decided to give yagé and Yovany a second chance, since I was running out of options. I went there for a second time, once again with my mother and my sister. This time my mother asked me to trust him and to trust his knowledge. "He knows what he is doing", she said so more than once. She really believed yagé and Yovany would help me, as she had been a faithful user of yagé and indigenous medicine for a long time.

There I was again, seated in the *maloca* around the bonfire, waiting for him to ask me to approach him at the altar to pray together to the yagé and to drink the medicine. Once he called me, I approached and repeated his words: "yagé, heal me, heal me with your holy will. I forgive myself before god, before the father. May the light of god descend through my body, my mind, and my spirit. Pardon, permission and thanks, father creator"[2]. This journey was intense for me. I saw and experienced things I won't even attempt to express with words, not only because they are ineffable, but also because I want for them to stay ineffable.

However, I can tell you how powerful it was for me what Yovany did that day. Then I realized how everything he does during the ceremony is just part of the healing process. Every song, every word in his native language, every drumbeat, every melody coming out from the harmonica was meant to do something. To move something from the inside to the outside, as well as from the outside to the inside, or just through the entire body. I saw the darkness inside of myself, but I ended the ceremony with the greatest peace I had ever experienced in my life. Yet, I could not shake off the desire of having him explain to me, with words, the things I saw during my journey. I wanted to engage him in a conversation. But it felt forced. I had the impression he did not want to talk with me.

[2] Yagé: curame, saname con tu santa voluntad. Yo me perdono ante dios, ante el padre. Que la luz de dios descienda por mi cuerpo, por mi mente y por mi espíritu. Perdón, permiso y gracias, padre creador

The years passed by, and I kept on visiting every year. After four years I decided to engage even more with the yagé, so I started visiting every two to three months, depending on how strong the medicine's calling was[3]. Today, eight years after my first encounter with yagé and of getting to know Yovany, I have come to understand a couple of things. First of all, that the medicine has great potential for healing. It helped me overcome my traumatic experience, right after I thought there was no solution for me. It helped me when psychology and psychiatry did not work. Second of all, I learnt I was wrong. Yovany does know what he is doing with yagé. Moreover, his knowledge does not come through words. It comes through harmonious sounds, from his mouth, his drum, his harmonica, his entire spirit. And from every drop of essence, made of other medicinal plants, he spits on you during the ceremony to help you deal with *la chuma* (the journey).

Over the last couple of years, through the development of my Master program in Women's and Gender Studies, I also came to understand something else: Yovany's political location of knowledge-production, as well as the one of his community and so many other communities in Colombia and elsewhere, is an oppressed one. Oppressed by the epistemic privilege of the dominant Western-Europe and North-Anglo-America. A theo-ego-politically founded epistemological position, as defined by Walter Mignolo (2009), that is to say: a political location of knowledge-production base not only on Christian values, but also founded on the idea of a secular subject dependent on the Cartesian Reason. Western epistemology then, presents itself as the one and only, capable of explaining the world, from what decolonial scholar Santiago Castro-Gómez called the 'Hubris of the zero point', namely: a neutral, objective position. Or from the illusion of the 'God Trick', as elaborated by feminist scholar Donna Haraway (1988) on the feminist critique to Wester dominant epistemology. From that epistemic position of the zero point or that of God, who can see it all and explain it all, Western scholars dismiss other ways of knowing usually by referring to them as tradition, myth, folklore or the

[3] Yes, the medicine calls. Which means that one feels an urge, not like a physical or psychological one, but a spiritual urge to participate in a yagé ceremony in order to release something, or to understand something. The call, in my particular case, comes through the sudden remembering of its strong smell and taste. Such remembrance feels so real, as if I was experiencing it in the moment it is happening.

like. It is through such distinction –that of knowledge as opposed either to tradition, myth or folklore– that knowledge-production from Western-Europe and North-Anglo-America oppresses the knowledge-production of the Other. In this particular case, the one coming from indigenous communities in Colombia.

Therefore, if one were to look for yagé in Google scholar the first available idea online would lead one to think that yagé is just another name given to an indigenous medicine known as Ayahuasca[4]. Ayahuasca, as I further elaborate in Chapter II, is presented by Wester scholarship as an indigenous psychoactive brew made out of the combination of two plants. Which means that, following the information presented by the scholarship, yagé is a brew used by many other indigenous communities throughout "Latin-America"[5], and produced by combining two plants. Therefore, if one were to look for yagé online, the information available would provide no more than the Western hegemonic discourse about it. Hegemonic to the extent that, as contended by Gramsci (1971), is the discourse produce by powerful groups with access to discursive means of production and dissemination.

As I show in Chapter II, this hegemonic discourse does not engage with indigenous epistemologies, nor their knowledge about this medicine. Which not only demonstrates Walter Mignolo's point about Wester epistemological position as a dominant-colonial one, but also calls for a critical review and the construction of a counter-discourse about yagé, departing from indigenous knowledge. Hence, with this research I aim to explore, expose and problematize the assumptions and presumptions that Western scholarly discourse has produced about yagé. Moreover, given that another fact has come to light through my critical review of scholarship about this medicine –women's healing stories have been left

[4] I use Ayahuasca with capital as a way of recognizing the fixation and commodification that has resulted from the Western scholarly discourse.

[5] The quotation marks are my way of problematizing the very existence of a self-evident "Latin-America" as a united region, because, as Mignolo's decolonial critical genealogy shows, those "decolonial thinkers", who reclaimed the "Latin" for the Americas of the south, were no more than the "White Creole and Mestizo/a elites, in South America and the Spanish Caribbean islands" (2007, p. 59), who were not aiming to build a decolonial identity, but a post-colonial one. For it is of great importance to remember that, again following Mignolo, a decolonial identity of that southern land will never start from a particular American identification, an identification that is foreign to it and, under no circumstances, ontological.

out, I want to account for Yovany's knowledge as well as the one coming from the experience of all the other women who have come along with me looking for remedy through yagé.

To this end, I offer in Chapter I a theoretical framework which provides the basis for my overall argument. Using decolonial and feminist theory I explain what coloniality and modernity are, and how these two realities –because they are realities– have produced an unequal epistemic relationship in which the Western epistemology holds a dominant position. Decolonial thinkers have shown, with the elaboration of concepts such as the coloniality of power, the colonial matrix of power, the coloniality of knowledge and the coloniality of the self, how Western knowledge production is not innocent, nor free of political implications. The awareness of the implication of what has defined as the 'Hubris of the zero point', or the illusion of the 'God trick', is what has prompted both decolonial and feminist thinkers to work and to elaborate from different epistemic locations, that of women or indigenous communities. Thus, in Chapter I, you can find the definition of the concepts already mentioned, as well as a brief explanation of what the decolonial option is, and how I find it important in order to elaborate on what follows in Chapter II and III. I then use decolonial and feminist theory to situate myself in three interconnected sites: the yagé community, the women's healing group who use yagé as a tool, and with feminist and decolonial thinkers. I close by explaining how such sites impact/configurate my argument and the methodology use to build it.

Subsequently, I present a review of the scholarly work developed about Ayahuasca, the label under which most yagé scientific research has been published. For this purpose, I have collected a total of 61 papers that one can find in Google Scholar when looking up the word "Ayahuasca". From those 61 papers, I have randomly selected and read 20, upon which I situate my analysis. Thus, chapter II gives an overview of what has been said and how it has been said. Although, I believe that it was never the intention of the scholars I reviewed, to produce harm of any kind to the indigenous communities they worked with. Relying on, Edward Said's (1978) ideas as to how "true" knowledge has political implications, as well as on theories of cultural appropriation (for instance: Coombe (1998); Roth-Arriaza (1997); Ziff & Rao (1997)) and how indigenous practices are commodified by the imperial-

neoliberal society (see Córdova (2014); (Gilbert & Gleghorn (2014); Zittlau (2014)), I argue that this knowledge-production has opened up a possibility for cultural appropriation. As well as it proves decolonial thinkers' ideas about coloniality of knowledge. A coloniality that works by reproducing certain kinds of knowledges while denying others. Worse even, by transforming subjects into objects of knowledge with whom Western scholars never engage in constructive conversations.

A series of interviews I have chosen to conduct in order to help me understand the scope of such discourses, facilitate my conclusion. This is what follows in the last chapter: the stories of 9 Colombian women who have participated in yagé ceremonies performed by Yovany. Their stories, along with mine and Yovany's knowledge are the sources I use to explain what a yagé ceremony is and why is it important, along with the presence of a trained/experienced master of the plant's element. With this description I sought to have a comparable basis for what is known in The Netherlands as Ayahuasca ceremonies, which I constructed through the testimony of three other women who have participated in such ceremonies. Their stories serve as evidence of my conclusion in chapter II, which shows that Ayahuasca ceremony is no more than cultural appropriation, or better yet: a colonial project. It aims to conquer and commodify a cultural practice, while separating it from the knowledge that accompanies its production through the thousands of years it has been used by indigenous communities. In other words, it has been separated from the knowledge of the Other.

All in all, this master thesis aims to make a contribution to the current decolonial attempt to unveil the Western knowledge-production machineries that are not innocent, nor a-political. By locating participant's narratives at the center of my argument, this research elucidates how the decolonial option can be put to work in the making of counter-discourses. While affirming the rights of the racially devaluated to produce/maintain their own knowledge.

Chapter I:

Theoretical Framework

In this first chapter I aim to provide the theoretical foundations and motivations of my thesis. Moreover, I am situating myself within my thesis, as well as my thesis within a broader theoretical framework. This way, I begin with a personal experience that leads me to elaborate on decolonial theory or, more specifically, a definition of what modernity/coloniality is. Through my own lived experience, I show how coloniality was not over, as many decolonial thinkers have sustained, with the creation of national states. Thus, I present concepts such as coloniality of power, coloniality of knowledge, coloniality of the self and the colonial matrix of power, to sketch the current forms through which Western-Europe and North-America maintain their powerful positions within the imperial world.

Once the definition of modernity/coloniality is established, I continue by exploring the decolonial option defined by Walter Mignolo (2009) as an alternative to the Western theo-ego-politically located epistemology. With an understanding of what coloniality is, I am able to explain what Mignolo means when he talks about the theo-ego-politically located epistemic position from where Western scholars produce knowledge. I do so with the intention of explaining my choices of authors and epistemic positions, which take place in the following chapters. My thesis not only aims to critically analyze the Western knowledge production of yagé, under the label of Ayahuasca, but also, to 'de-link' as Madina Tlostanova and Walter Mignolo (2009) propose from that very same discourse and epistemic location. In the second section of this chapter I elaborate on the strategy followed to achieve such an enterprise.

Finally, the decolonial option allows me to expose the motivations of my thesis and briefly expose the scheme that follows in the next chapters. I end this part by situating myself within this thesis and exposing the methodology use in what comes next. To this end, I use decolonial theory, as well as feminist theory, to position my motivations and intentions. More specifically, it is with the help of

Aimee Carillo Rowe (2005), and Madina Tlostanova and Walter Mignolo (2009), that I present the three sites from which I am speaking from. My places of belonging and becoming. These three sites are what constitute my perspective and my motivations. It is from my very particular body-political location that I find the problem I elaborate in the course of this thesis. Moreover, they constitute the reason for my epistemic choices: i.e. the places from which I elaborate my arguments and how I elaborate on them.

1.1. A Story of Modernity/Coloniality

It is a very warm and unusually, sunny Tuesday in July in The Netherlands. I am seated in the backyard of the house where I –a Colombian woman– live with a white-Dutch family. I am the "Workawayer", the "Au pair", the "babysitter". I am the Colombian, woman of color who; out of lack of financial means and due to visa restrictions, which do not allow me to have a legal-well-paid job; lives with them and serves them as an extra hand for everything. I am the extra-cheap-labor-hand. In exchange, they provide me with everything I need, except humanity. Do not get me wrong, they are an amazing family who, as many other white people, do not see what is behind the social organization of labor. For them, as for many others, the fact that mostly women of color perform caring jobs is no more than that: a fact; and not one of the consequences of a systematic problem.

I am seated in this backyard trying to decide where to begin writing about modernity, coloniality and the implications of knowledge-making, when I realized that my bodily experience is the result of what modernity/coloniality is. It was my colonial belief in progress what brought me to Europe. It was my idea of dwelling in underdeveloped land, that moved my desire to study and live in Europe. I wanted to experience development along with its quality of life. Worse even, I wanted to learn from the developed world, so I could contribute to my own country's development. It was modernity and its "ideals of humanity and promises of economic growth and financial prosperity" (Mignolo, 2009) that brought me here in the first place. Following Paola Arboleda-Ríos (2014), the theorists who created the collective *Modernidad/Colonialidad* –Modernity/Coloniality– "(Enrique Dussel, Walter

Mignolo, Santiago Castro-Gómez, Aníbal Quijano, Arturo Escobar, María Lugones, Ramón Grosfoguel and Nelson Maldonado-Torres to name a few) have opposed the idea that with the end of the colonial administrations and the formation of the national states, we finally live in a decolonial world" (203). In fact, Walter Mignolo and Madina Tlostanova sustain that "coloniality is constitutive of modernity, and that there is no modernity without coloniality". What is coloniality then? To answer this question, I find Aníbal Quijano's publication about *Colonialidad y Modernidad/Racionalidad* – Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality– very useful. In this article, published in 1992, Quijano asserts that coloniality is the domination coming from Western Europeans, and its decedents North-Americans of mainly Africans and Latin Americans. Such domination was initially political, social and cultural. With the creation of the national states, however, the (factual) political domination came to an end, whereas the social and cultural domination are still at stake[6].

According to Quijano (1992), coloniality is the colonization, submission and repression of other cultures from within, by the Western dominant one. The repression "[…] falls, above all, on the ways of knowing, of producing knowledge, perspectives, images and systems of images, symbols, modes of meaning; on the resources, patterns and instruments of formalized and objectified, intellectual or visual expression" (Ibid., 12, translation is mine). Quijano sustains that it is through this colonization of cultures from within, that the Western (dominant) one maintains its control and power position, while preventing the reproduction or rather, eradicating, through its modernizing's missions "'tradition', 'barbarism', 'fanatic religious belief', and the like" (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2009, 132). Thus, as well stated by Tlostanova and Mignolo, "[…] coloniality is, like the unconscious, the hidden weapon of both the civilizing and developmental mission of modernity" (Ibid, 133).

Consequently, many scholars from non-Western-European/non-North-American countries have worked with concepts such as the coloniality of power, the coloniality of knowledge, the coloniality of the self or the colonial matrix of power. The coloniality of power to begin with, is defined as "the

[6] I believe it is important to recognize that cultural and social domination are other ways of, indirectly performing political domination.

interrelation between modern forms of exploitation and domination"(Maldonado, 2003, 130). In other words, economic exploitation and hierarchical (racial) relations within the global economic system. Whereas, the coloniality of knowledge refers to the production and reproduction of colonial thought regimes. The coloniality of knowledge has to do with epistemology and the production of certain kinds of knowledge, i.e. Western scientific knowledge as the one and only. Thus, if coloniality of power is exploitation and domination at an economical level, and coloniality of knowledge is the control of knowledge-production, then coloniality of the self is the one related with bodily experience, one that goes beyond the coloniality of the mind. The coloniality of the self; as elaborated by Nelson Maldonado (Ibid.) using Franz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Mask* (1970) is the experience of the racialized body. A body whose subjectivity, as in the case of Franz Fanon, begins not with the anarchic moment of meeting the Other, but on the traumatic one in which the racialized body meets the imperial Other: "Look! A Negro!" (Fanon, 1970, 93).

The colonial matrix for its part is a concept that aims to gather not only the different colonial strategies, but also their history. This concept, coined by Felix Patzi-Paco (2004, in Tlostanova & Mignolo (2009)), makes visible the four different struggles through which coloniality currently works. The struggles are those of: economic control, control of authority, control over the public sphere and control over knowledge and subjectivity. In this way, by gathering the different struggles, the colonial matrix of power makes possible the tracing of the historical moments that have made coloniality itself, possible. To trace such moments, Tlostanova and Mignolo (Ibid.) explain that it is necessary to trace the "successive and cumulative periods, in which the rhetoric changed according to the needs and the leading forces shaping the spheres of economy, authority, public realm (gender and sexuality) and education (knowledge and subjectivity)" (135). The first moment, following Tlostanova and Mignolo (Ibid.), is then a theological one. The mission during this first moment was one of conversion to Christianity and took place during the 16th and 17th century. It followed a period in which; because of the profitable economics of plantations that were taking place in England; the secular and economic rhetoric took over. Secularization was then the first step towards the civilizing mission led by England

and France. With World War II, nonetheless, the U.S. took over England and France and transformed their civilizing mission into a developmental and modernizing one. In this way, the colonial matrix allows us to understand what the promises behind coloniality were and currently are. It began by promising heaven and paradise after death, to promise happiness as a direct result of development.

Coming back to my sunny Tuesday, which is now a sunny Friday afternoon, I can answer: how is it that modernity/coloniality brought me to The Netherlands exactly? As a woman born in Colombia, I grew up as a racialized subject, who recognized her race as inferior to that of white western-Europeans and north-Americans. I grew up with a serious belief in the existence of developing countries as opposed to those underdeveloped, such as Colombia. I grew up with the expectation of finding happiness along with development. I grew up thinking that to 'progress' in life I had to study, not the knowledge produced in Colombia, but the one produce by 'real' universities and published in well-ranked journals, which of course were not the Colombian ones. I was asked to learn English, I was asked to read articles and knowledge produced in English. I was asked to write in English. And so, I did. I moved to The Netherlands then, in the attempt to 'progress', but I forgot to account for my racialized body; the one that keeps on meeting the imperial ones. Luckily, I found feminist decolonial scholars such as Gloria Anzaldúa and I realized that I, as Anzaldúa and many other Chicana women, have been forced to speak the monster's words, as in Cherrie Moraga's terms (Anzaldúa, 2009). I became aware of the effects coloniality has, and so I learnt about authors such as Walter Mignolo, María Lugones, Aníbal Quijano and Madina Tlostanova. Through them, I found an alternative to coloniality and its colonial matrix of power, which Tlostanova and Mignolo (2009) call the decolonial option.

1.2. The Theo- and Ego-politics of Knowledge and the Decolonial Option

I have already discussed what coloniality is and how it even constitutes lived experience. Let us linger on what Walter Mignolo defines as the theo- and geo-politics of knowledge, so we can understand what the decolonial option propose is. In his article published in 2009, Mignolo explains that one of

the main consequences of coloniality has been the distinction between knowledge, culture, wisdom and science. Knowledge pertains to those people from the first world, culture is what comes from the third world, wisdom from Native Americans and science form Anglo Americans. Or so we have been made to believe through colonial academic discourse. Yet, knowledge and science are not static, nor are they produced only in the first world and Anglo America. On the contrary, they are the master tools of coloniality and thus, of modernity. Which is why, Mignolo prompted us to question

> Who and when, why and where is knowledge generated (rather than produced, like cars or cell phones)? Asking these questions means to shift the attention from the enunciated to the enunciation. And by so doing, turning Descartes's dictum inside out: rather than assuming that thinking comes before being, one assumes instead that it is a racially marked body in a geo-historical marked space that feels the urge or get the call to speak, to articulate, in whatever semiotic system, the urge that makes of living organisms 'human' beings. (2009, 160)

Mignolo, as many other decolonial and feminist scholars (see for instance Koobak & Thapar-Björkert (2014); Eagleton (2000)), question the politics of location involved in knowledge production. He explains that, while producing knowledge about the world from the body-geo-political location of Western-Europe or North-America, scholars forget to mention that their results, along with their ideas of modernity and humanity, and their promises of economic growth and financial prosperity, make sense and are applicable from/to their very particular location. One example offered by Mignolo to prove his point relates to Kant's ideas of freedom and maturity which, he contends, apply only to the first world. He sustains, using the landmark article of the Indian political theorist Partha Chatterjee (1998), that:

> Missing in Kant's celebration of freedom and maturity […] was the fact that Kant's concept of Man and humanity was based on the European concept of Man from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment and not on the 'lesser humans' that populated the world beyond the heart of Europe. So, 'enlightenment' was not for everybody. Thus, if you do not embody Kant's and Foucault's local history, memory, language and 'embodied' experience, what shall you do? Buy a pair of Kant's […] shoes?. (Ibid., 169)

Consequently, if freedom, maturity and 'enlightenment' are not for everyone, it follows that not everyone can be recognized as the subject of knowledge production, not at least within the Western knowledge production framework. In this way, "we built up an intricately differentiated structure of authorities which specifies who has the right to say what on which subjects" (Chatterjee, 1998, 273-274, in Mignolo, 2009, 170). In other words, Western Europeans, along with North-Americans, have

built a knowledge production structure from which specific subjects, using a specific kind of epistemology, can produce knowledge about the rest of the world. Such production of knowledge departs then, not from particular body-geo-political locations, but from what has been defined as the *hubris of the zero point* by decolonial theorist Santiago Castro-Gómez (Mignolo, 2009) or the *God-trick* illusion by feminist scholar Donna Haraway (1988). Both concepts aim to make visible how Western scholars created the illusion of producing knowledge from a detached position, from which, a Western scholar will embody the "[…] neutral seeker of truth and objectivity who at the same time controls the disciplinary rules and puts himself or herself in a privileged position to evaluate and dictate" (Mignolo, 2009, 162). Thus, Mignolo states that there is a bio-politics of knowledge that Europe forgot about when theorizing about bio-politics, i.e. body-politics. Body-politics is, following Mignolo

> […] the darker side and the missing half of biopolitics: body-politics describes decolonial technologies enacted by bodies who realized that they were considered less human at the moment they realized that the very act of describing them as less human was a radical un-human consideration […] Body-politics is a fundamental component of decolonial thinking, decolonial doing and the decolonial option. (2009, 174)

Body-politics in decolonial theory is what situated knowledges is for feminist theory (Haraway, 1988), namely: an awareness that the production of knowledge is always ever attached to the body-political-historical location of the subject of such production.

An even more interesting point is made by Mignolo (2009) in his article *Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom*, when explaining that the hubris of the zero point, the detached position, served Western scholars well in producing anthropological knowledge, that is to say: knowledge about peoples. Such knowledge production makes of people not subjects, but rather objects of study. He explains how producing knowledge from a third world body-location becomes puzzling then, to the extent that one might end up using the same logic of the zero-point location, even more when producing anthropological knowledge. Based on the anthropological work of Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), however, Mignolo proves that it is possible to twist the logic and to produce different types of knowledges. These new knowledges come from what he, as many other decolonial

scholars, calls the 'decolonial option'. Contending that the Western European knowledge-making machineries are "entrenched with imperial/colonial purposes" (Ibid., 176) and grounded in specific languages, institutions and geo-historical locations, which according to him:

> […] bracketed their geo-historical foundation and, instead, made of theology and philosophy/science a frame of knowledge beyond geo-historical and body location. The subject of theological knowledge depended on the dictates of God while the subject of secular philosophy/science depended on Reason, on the Cartesian ego/mind and Kant's transcendental reason. Thus, Western imperial knowledge was cast in Western imperial languages and was theo-politically and ego-politically founded. Such a foundation legitimizes the assumptions and claims that knowledge was beyond bodies and places and that Christian theology and secular philosophy and science were the limits of knowledge-making beyond and besides which all knowledge was lacking: folklore, myth, traditional knowledge, were invented to legitimize imperial epistemology. (Ibid. 176)

Mignolo proposes the decolonial option as a way of breaking with theo-ego-political Western knowledge production. This decolonial option aims to disrupt with the brackets imposed by the imperial West and North. To do so, the first step is to reject dictums, coming from the epistemic privileges of the zero point, stating what 'we' are, and start producing knowledge about/from, our very own positionalities as decolonial thinkers. Mignolo clarifies, that this is not to say that decolonial thinkers must claim originality, as the legitime reason to produce decolonial knowledge, but to work towards the "unveiling of epistemic silences of Western epistemology and affirming the epistemic rights of the racially devalued, and decolonial options to allow the silences to build arguments to confront those who take 'originality' as the ultimate criterion for the final judgment" (2009, 162). Thus, the decolonial option will strive not to advance Western knowledge, but that of oppressed peoples. Which entails engaging "in shifting the geography of reason – in unveiling and enacting geopolitics and body-politics of knowledge" (Ibid., 172). This shift of geography implies producing knowledge from the very position of the subjects-object of study, which will make of them subjects of study, instead of objects. In doing so, the decolonial option affords the possibility to oppressed peoples to decide what is good and bad for them, instead of giving the power of such decisions to the Western scholar, who will decide, departing from the hubris of the zero-point epistemological position. The decolonial option aims then, to de-link from the Western epistemological stance through acts of epistemic disobedience. Such acts endeavor the task to produce knowledge for the well-being

of people, not for managing them through the interest of the imperial system. This knowledge, according to Mignolo:

> […] shall come from local experiences and needs, rather than from local imperial experiences and needs projected to the globe, invokes also the body-politics of knowledge. Why? Because not only regions and locales in which imperial languages were not ancestrally spoken and that were alien to the history of Greek and Latin were disqualified and the disqualification […] Racism, as we sense it today, was the result of two conceptual inventions of imperial knowledge: that certain bodies were inferior to others, and that inferior bodies carried inferior intelligence. The emergence of a body-politics of knowledge is a second strand of decolonial thinking and the decolonial option. (Mignolo, 2009, 177-178)

1.3. A Case Study for Coloniality

I want to present now a case of study for coloniality at work. By coloniality at work I mean the work of knowledge production from the Western epistemic position of the zero-point, which endows non-Western objects of study with meanings that are foreigner to them, with the intention of commodifying them. The case of study to be presented throughout this thesis is the one of an indigenous medicine named yagé. Yagé, as I further elaborate in Chapters II and III, is a medicine used by indigenous communities from Colombia. This indigenous medicine is also produced, by similar means, in other indigenous communities in other countries of the so-called "Latin-America". In this way, yagé, along with its analogues, have been largely studied by Western scholars during the last decades. Thus, producing a whole scholarship on working to understand, explain and draw conclusions about what they have defined as Ayahuasca.

Beyond the homogenization that comes along with the use of only one of the names given to this medicine, Ayahuasca has been taken from the indigenous communities by Western scholars in order to study it within the brackets of the theo-ego-historically located knowledge production framework. This bracketing means the laboratory testing of the brew, in order to understand its composition and bodily effects. Thus, the tests suggest information through a language that is intelligible for those familiar with Western knowledge production. It does not, however, resonate with indigenous knowledge. Moreover, in the construction of such explanations there is not a single engagement with indigenous epistemologies, nor the discourses that have been produced from the epistemological position of the indigenous. Clearly, the scholarship developed by Western scholars about this

indigenous brew is no more than another example of coloniality at work. A coloniality that prompted me to explore and expose the colonial discourse that was developed it from the critical eye of a decolonial thinker.

In the following chapter, I attempt to explore and present the scholarship published under the label "Ayahuasca" with a capital A, as a statement of the fixation and commodification[7] that has resulted from such scholarship. Thereafter I explore the implications of this colonial discourse that resulted in cultural appropriation, which was only possible due to the Western discourses. For this purpose, I use the epistemological position of the oppressed: woman (mainly of color) and that of the indigenous man with whom I got to know yagé: Yovany. As well as my own lived experience as a decolonial-feminist thinker who has used yagé for more than seven years. Through their knowledges and experiences, and my own, I challenge the foreign use and discourse about Ayahuasca that has been extensively published, and on yagé as well. Throughout my thesis, "I attempt to pull the strings together and weave my argument with the […] cases explored, hoping that what I say will not be taken as the report of a detached observer but as the intervention of a decolonial thinker" as Mignolo said (2009, 163).

1.4. A Decolonial-Feminist Option

Some feminist scholars invite us to place ourselves as subjects of knowledge production located in particular geo-historical-political positions within the gendered-racialized world. This I find problematic and prefer Aimee Carillo Rowe's proposal as a less colonial one, in the sense that it enlightens the implications of the colonial work. According to Carillo Rowe (2005), the feminist invitation of the individual position is another consequence of colonial modernity, since "the assumption of the individual is foundational to colonial modernity" (16). Instead, she proposes the "politics of relation", as opposed to that fixed location related with the individual. To this end, situating

[7] Throughout this thesis, I elaborate commodification as the process through which this indigenous practice has been 'understood' and 'explained' by Western scholars, in a way that makes it available for reproduction and profit out of the context in which it has been produced for centuries.

the political location from which one speaks and produces knowledge is an endeavor that involves the recognition of belonging, because, in her own words:

> The sites of our belonging constitute how we see the world, what we value, who we are (becoming). The meaning of self is never individual, but a shifting set of relations that we move in and out of, often without reflection. My work aims to render transparent the political conditions and effects of our belonging. It gestures toward deep reflection about the selves we are creating as a function of where we place our bodies, and with whom we build our affective ties. I call this placing a "politics of relation." It moves theories of locating the subject to a relational notion of the subject. It moves a politics of location from the individual to a coalitional notion of the subject. (Ibid.)

The sites of belonging precede then the being, which in its own precedes knowledge production, as already explained above using Mignolo's ideas. Thus, in order to situate myself within this thesis – production of knowledge– I begin by identifying my sites of belonging, which places myself into the world of yagé, feminist healing and decolonial thinking. From such a position I am able to put the problem to be studied in the following chapters, at the center of my analyses, instead of focusing on objects (subjects) itself. The change of focus, from objects to problems is what, according to Tlostanova and Mignolo (2009), "allows for a specific epistemic, political and ethical instrument for transforming the world by transforming the way people see it, feel it and act in it […] By doing so, it leads any investigation through the scholar, intellectual or researcher, *into the world*, rather than keeping him or her *within the discipline*" (131, italics original). Thus, through my sites of belonging I aim at transforming the way people think and perceive Ayahuasca, because of what has been said within the Western academia.

My first site of belonging is then, the one of the yagé community. With the yagé community I am referring to the group of both, indigenous and non-indigenous people who partake this medicine following the knowledge and experience of those peoples who discovered it and have been using it for thousands of years in Colombia. This first site of belonging provides me not only with the experience, but a strategic location, which allows me to recognize the problem I am discussing later in the thesis. This is not to say however, that I am an original knower of some sort. Nor that I have more rights than anyone else to write about it. It does instead, state my position within it, as a woman who has experienced yagé herself and who, through her academic formation, is willing to make that

familiar place "strange, of revisiting home to unearth what is at stake in its making" (Carillo Rowe, 2005, 16).

Similarly, my second position, connected with yagé, is one that situates myself as part of a women's group –my mother among them– who have been working together to heal and empower their lives with the use of yagé, and some other tools/strategies. This belonging site is the abstract place where I combine my most current formation in Women's and Gender Studies with decolonial studies. Both theoretical backgrounds provided me the basic tools I am using to weave my argument. It is this second location that makes me value women's experiences with yagé as I have seen how powerful and productive it can be, when used in adequate circumstances, for the building of sisterhood and female empowerment.

The last site from which I am speaking from, that of decolonial thinking, is one that has constantly invited me ever since I first engaged with it, to unveil the Western epistemic dominant position, as well as to create counter-narratives that can navigate in hegemonic theoretical spaces as epistemic contamination. Consequently, it is through these three political locations that I am weaving my argument. They constitute the way I perceive the world, what I value and who I am (becoming), to follow Carillo Rowe.

1.5. Methodology

In order to expose, analyze and criticize the Western hegemonic discourse about yagé, under the label Ayahuasca, I offer in the following chapters both a theoretical review and interviews. I do so with the intention of first, drawing the Western hegemonic discourse about yagé, but also of articulating the "why", "how", as well as the consequences of such a discourse. Thus, I begin by presenting in the next chapter a scholarly review of Ayahuasca. There, I expose and analyze the Western hegemonic discourse. By using 20 papers, randomly chosen out of the representative sample of 61, I draw the Western hegemonic discourse for which Ayahuasca is no more than a combination of plants. Elaborating on this discourse allows me to prove both decolonial and feminist critique to the dominant

position of the Western epistemology. As Chapter II ends by questioning the implications of such a hegemonic discourse, in Chapter III I elaborate on this regard. Therefore, Chapter III presents 13 interviews with 9 Colombian women who have been using yagé for more than 10 years as an empowering tool, 2 Dutch women who have used Ayahuaca in the Netherlands, 1 Colombian woman who has participated in yagé and Ayahuasca ceremonies, and 1 indigenous person with whom I, as well as the Colombian's women group, have partaken yagé for several years. It is through their narratives that I offer a counter-discourse, a critical one that can account for the consequences of the colonial project that Ayahuasca scholarship has become.

Moreover, this thesis is written in the first person as a way of accounting for my places of belonging, as an epistemic act of disobedience through delinking from the illusion of the zero point. Similarly, I engage with the experiences of the interviewed women to whom I let speak through my writings and refrain from (man-)explaining or correcting. Same applies for the indigenous man –Yovany– who I interviewed a couple of times in the process of understanding some of his knowledge and experience to help me contrast and build a counter-narrative. I hope to present their inputs in a way that gives the impression you are actually engaging in a conversation with them, and not with me. As there is one thing I want to avoid and that is to "give voice" to the "voiceless". They do not need to be given voice, they have their own, we just need to be more attentive and open to listening to what they have to express. Lastly, my theoretical engagement aims to avoid Western epistemic domination. This is to say, I carefully select my sources, taking Gloria Anzaldua's argument into account:

> I choose words, images, and body sensations and animate them to impress them on my consciousness, thereby making changes in my belief system and reprogramming my consciousness. This involves looking my inner demons in the face, then deciding which I want in my psyche. Those I don't want, I starve; I feed them no words, no images, no feelings. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 70)

In other words, I do not reproduce knowledges that I believe need to be stop being fed, so they can give room to the demons I do believe deserve more space.

Chapter II:

Revealing a Scientific (-Colonial) Discourse

My main objective in this chapter is to outline the scholarship that has been developed about yagé, or rather Ayahuasca, as most of the academic work that has been published about this indigenous medicine has been labeled under the same name —Ayahuasca. However, prior to explaining why the term Ayahuasca has been used instead of Yagé, it is important to note that I have chosen specific academic work to demonstrate what constitutes the current hegemonic discourse about Yagé, as I discuss in this chapter. Hegemonic discourse, as defined by Antonio Gramsci (1971), and further elaborated by Teun A. Van Dijk (1993; 2001), is one produced by powerful groups; those with access to the discursive means of production and dissemination –and therefore, socially accepted and rarely questioned or challenged.

Chart 1 Number of articles by category
Own elaboration

Category	Number of Articles
Ethnopharmacology	20
Neuropsychological effects	20
Globalization	6
Therapeutic potential	6
Other	6
Experience	5
Risk and Toxicity	3
Several	2

My first step involved exploring Google Scholar with the intention of getting to know what could potentially be discovered for someone looking up the word "yagé". As I had anticipated, there were only a couple of papers dealing with yagé itself, where I found out that yagé, at least for Western academia, is another name given to an indigenous brew called Ayahuasca. Thus, if one uses the word "Ayahuasca", instead of "yagé", the results change dramatically. There exists, at least by the end of March 2018, a total of 16.400 results in Google Scholar that included the word Ayahuasca, of which a representative sample of 61 papers[8] were taken.

[8] To obtain this number, I used the average result from two different calculator samples, according to which, with an error range of 10% and a confidence level of 99%, the representative sample of papers for this study should be somewhere in between 60 to 63 (Asesoria Económica & Marketing, 2009; Raosoft & MRLG, 2005).

Once I collected the 61 papers about research touching upon Ayahuasca, I grouped these papers into the 8 categories illustrated in ***Chart 1***, regarding their content.[9] It became evident that more than half of the papers dealt with Ayahuasca's Ethnopharmacology and Neuropsychological effects. As the likelihood of someone reading about the neuropsychological effects and the ethnopharmacology of Ayahuasca is high, I choose 20, from the total of 40 papers, that fall into either one of those categories.

Whilst exploring the 20 papers, I attempted to find out how Ayahuasca was defined and how it was related to yagé, what information and research was offered by these papers and how they engaged with indigenous epistemologies, if at all. I also wanted to answer the following questions offered by Bradley (2015) regarding the problems with cultural appropriation, i.e.:

- What was the motivation and the intention behind such papers?
- Why did the authors need the influence or use of that particular medicine?
- Who is benefiting from this borrowing?
- What has been the impact of these papers regarding the social cognition, defined by Van Dijk (1993) as "Socially shared representations of societal arrangements, groups and relations, as well as mental operations such as interpretation, thinking and arguing, inferencing and learning, among others" (257)

Furthermore, I aimed to demonstrate "how the general liberal consensus that "true" knowledge is fundamentally non-political […] obscures the highly if obscurely organized political circumstances obtaining when knowledge is produced." (Said, 1978, 10). Thus, in the process of reviewing the scholarship on yagé, I critically approached the way it was presented and how such presentation can be defined as a colonial project, whose objective is to bracket an object of knowledge-making into the discourse of rationalism, proper to the theo-ego-politics of knowledge production. This is because once it is rational, it can be commodified and appropriated.

[9] The total sum of Number of Articles' column is 68, instead of 61, because a couple of papers touched upon more than one category, to which I assigned those that represented the better its content.

2.1. Ayahuasca and/in Western Scholarly Discourse

I shall first outline what I have found in the academic work I have reviewed, which I will henceforth globally refer to as Western scholarly discourse, because of the epistemology and methodology they represent, i.e.: one theo- and ego-politically founded, as stated by Mignolo (2009).

The papers usually open up with a statement such as the one offered by Benny Shanon (2002): "Ayahuasca is a psychoactive brew consumed throughout the entire upper Amazon region" (13) or the statement from research by one of the most widely known author s Dennis J. Mckenna (2004): "Ayahuasca is a hallucinogenic beverage that is prominent in the ethnomedicine and shamanism of indigenous Amazonian tribes" (111). According to Mckenna (2006), Ayahuasca is the agreed –upon name– given to this indigenous brew among the scholars ever since the report of the Ecuadorian geographer Manuel Villavicencio was published in 1858. He writes:

> Although Villavicencio supplied no botanical details about the plant used as the source of the beverage, his account of his own self-intoxication left no doubt *in Spruce's mind* that they were writing about the *same thing* […] it was Spruce's account of his travels in a volume edited by the famed naturalist and co-discoverer of evolution A. R. Wallace in 1908 that may have *rescued the knowledge of ayahuasca from the depths of academic obscurity and brought it to the attention of educated lay people*. (Ibid, 44, italics added)

Later on, in (1939), Ko Kuei Chen and Amy Ling Chen were the ones who, after isolating the main components of yagé and Ayahuasca, concluded that Caapi, yagé and Ayahuasca were all different names for the same brew –as they refer to it– and that their source plant was the *Banisteriopsis caapi*.

The scientific research that was developed *in situ* were carried out in the Brazilian religious communities named *União do Vegetal* and *Santo Daime*. The intention of this was to understand its chemical composition, but also neuropsychological effects: what does such a combination of plants do in the body, what is the brain response; in terms of neurotransmitters; to the plants and how does that relate with the visions and the journeys one experiences under its influence (see, for instance: Callaway, 2006; Callaway & McKenna, 1998; McKenna, 2006; Riba, Anderer, Jané, Saletu, & Barbanoj, 2004). The psycho-social impact it can have was also studied, specifically looking at whether this brew can help people overcome addiction-related issues, anxiety, or even depression (See McKenna, 2004;

Santosa, Landeira-Fernandez, Strassmanc, & Mottaa, 2007; Shanon, 2002; Thomas, Lucas, Capler, Tupper, & Martin, 2013).

The brew was explained by Western scholarship as the combination of, at least, two plants: the woody liana known as *Banisteriopsis caapi* (henceforth B. caapi) and the leafy plant named *Psychotria viridis* (see for example Callaway, 2006; Callaway & McKenna, 1998; Dennis J McKenna, J C Callaway, & Charles S. Grob, 1998; Metzner, 2006). According to the scholarship, each of these plants have a specific effect that, when combined through the "Ayahuasca technology" (Callaway, 2006), is capable of producing the powerful journeys that are widely documented. Specifically, it is concluded that the *Psychotria viridis* is the plant containing the powerful psychoactive dimethyltryptamine (DMT), which, under normal circumstances, is not orally active due to a stomach enzyme known as Monoamine Oxidase (MAO), that inhibits the circulation of the DMT through the bloodstream. The DMT (*Psychotria viridis)*, however, in combination with the *B. caapi*, a MAO-inhibitor, is allowed to run through the bloodstream all the way straight to the brain (Callaway, 2006; Metzner, 2006b), where "it triggers the visionary access to otherworldly realms and beings" (Metzner, 2006, 2).

In other words, the powerful visions associated with Ayahuasca, according to the Western academic discourse, come from the *Psychotria viridis* which will never be able to produce its effect without the company of the *B. caapi.* This is why some scholars have called the combination of these plants –the one of *Psychotria viridis* with *B. caapi*– "Ayahuasca technology". It is also stated that it was achieved by using "only careful naturalistic observation and experimentation" (Ibid, 25). Naranjo contends that the method of trial and error is not sufficient to explain the process through which the indigenous people came to discover this medicine:

> The experimental process that originally led to the manipulation and combination of these morphologically dissimilar plants, and the discovery of their unique chemical properties, is far more profound than the term 'trial and error' suggests. The patterns that any researcher—and the shaman most certainly has earned that title—observes in nature depend on cognitive constructs, an intellectual synthesis, and reflect in turn culturally patterned thoughts and values. […] It is this unique, cosmological perspective that has enabled the shaman to comprehend implicitly the intricate balance that is the Amazon forest. (Naranjo, 1983 in Shanon, 2002, 16)

One can also commonly find that there is a sense of confusion regarding the nature of the brew and its origins, mainly regarding the plant's composition that contains alkaloids which work in the body as neurotransmitters. For instance, McKenna poses a question: "Why should plants contain alkaloids that are close analogs of our own neurotransmitters, and that enable them to "talk" to us? What "message" are they trying to convey, if any?" (2006, 57). According to McKenna, the logical explanation as to how indigenous people found the plant and its potential is that they tried to digest it as food. McKenna also explains that "'ayahuasqueros themselves will simply tell you that 'the vine calls'" (Ibid., 57). In general, the confusion comes mainly because each indigenous community has its own way of preparing the brew. They use different plants, that, according to the scholars, have more or less the same chemical composition, yet there are no standard plants among the communities to produce it, due to their different geo-political locations.

Similarly, the description of the preparation varies from one scholar to another. While Barbosa et al. (2009) assert that this brew is the result of decocting the root bark, or even steaming the cortex of the liana *B. caapi*, Shanon (2002) argues that the same liana is "cut into twigs and pounded; thereafter the pounded fibers are boiled in water together with the leaves of *Psychotria*" (Ibid.,15). Schultes et al. (2001), however, contend that, depending on the localities, the bark of the liana *B. caapi* can either be boiled for several hours or pulverized and then kneaded in cold water. Regarding the neurochemical-bodily effects that these plants have when partaken[10], Callaway (2006) explains that it has become clear how through the MAO inhibition that is produced by the psychoactive *B. caapi*, along with the powerful psychedelic agent that is the DMT, contained in the *Psychotria viridis*, the body experiences something similar to what is known as serotonin syndrome. But as it is not relevant for my argument to unpack what a serotonin syndrome is, I decided to save us the trouble of trying to understand it. The same applies for the results of research such as the ones elaborated on by Paulo

[10] I use the verb partake as it is the one used in the scholarship to describe the process of drinking the brew during the ceremony, it is commonly drunk.

Cesar Ribeiro Barbosa, Joel Sales Giglio, and Paulo Dalgalarrondo (2005), among many others, because they expand upon the psychological discourse that is not relevant for my argument, not yet anyhow.

2.2. A Colonial Project

Departing from what I have found in Western scholarly discourse developed on Ayahuasca, I believe there are a couple of points that are important to analyze. The scholarship is ***(1) incapable of affirming Ayahuasca, and all its seemingly analogues, as a vernacular and an altogether different form of medical practice from that of the Western tradition***. Apparently, the easiest way to deal with a broad spectrum of indigenous practices, from a scientific perspective –a colonial one, I would argue– is to agglomerate them under one term: Ayahuasca. The term is used to refer to research that has been done not only in Quechua communities, who produce a medicine named Ayahuasca, but also to present research and findings from other indigenous communities who do not use Ayahuasca, but, for instance yagé, as in the case of Colombian communities. Consequently, all the papers I have reviewed begin by explaining that Ayahuasca is a Quechua compound translated to English as either "vine of the (dead) spirits" (Luna, 1986; Shanon, 2002) or "vine of the soul" (Schultes et al., 2001). Similarly, after explaining the term and the composition of brew, most of the papers also explain that the brew is produced and partaken by several indigenous communities living in the Amazon region of "Latin-America", mainly from Perú, Colombia, Ecuador, Brazil and, even Panama[11]. Western scholars contend that each of the Amazon indigenous communities that uses this "admixture plant technology" (McKenna, 2006) confers a different name upon it. Assuming that it is just a matter of naming that makes the difference between those brews, they usually offer various names such as: Caapi,Yage, Natem, Cipo, Mariri, Daime, Hoasca, Vegetal, Dápa, Mihi, Kahf, Pindé[12] (Luna, 1986; Schultes et al., 2001; Shanon, 2002).

Crucially, some scholars have actually recognized this problem. Schultes et al., for instance, explain:

> The natives often have special names for diverse "kinds" of Ayahuasca, although the botanist frequently finds them all representative of the same species. It is usually difficult to understand the aboriginal method

[11] Luna (1986) listed in his doctoral dissertation about 72 ethnic groups belonging to 20 different linguistic families, who use Banisteriopsis based preparations (p. 57).
[12] Luna (Ibid) offered a list of 40 different common names for this medicine in his doctoral dissertation.

> of classification; some may be age forms; others may come from different parts of the liana; still others may be ecological forms growing under varying conditions of soil, shade, moisture, and so on. The natives assert that these "kinds" have a variety of effects, and it is conceivable that they may actually have different chemical compositions. This possibility is one of the least investigated yet most significant aspects in the study of Ayahuasca. (2001, 124)

What justifies this generalization then? As I have already explained before, these medicines are theorized by Western scholars as no more than a combination of, at least, two plants. Although in some cases, as the one presented by Schultes et al., (2001), the powerful visions might be the result of the combination of the *B. caapi* along with plants such as the forest lianas of the same family. Or, as in the cases explored by Luna (1986) in Ecuador and Colombia, the admixture can also be made by B. caapi and Diplopterys cabrerana. Yet, regardless of the plant combinations used in its preparation, it is enough for Western scholars to surmise that they are all the same, since they have all been proven to produce the same reaction in the body (a serotonin syndrome (see Callaway (2006)). It seems epistemologically correct to make such a conclusion and to group them under the label of Ayahuasca, right? Not so fast. To say that "it seems epistemologically correct", we need to first concretize and situate the epistemology from which we are allowed to "logically" infer. Situated in the Western epistemology, defined by The Union of Indigenous Yageceros Doctors[13] (UMIYAC, 2000) as one to which what counts is just the bodily material. Namely: the flesh, the bones and the blood, as they note in their Medical ethics code. From such an epistemological position I believe it is right to assert that there exists an indigenous brew called Ayahuasca that has been used in "Latin-America" by several indigenous communities. The generalization falls then over the fact that Western scholars found the 'scientific' proof –the bodily material effects– for all those different brews to be the same. Through an unattached position, that of the hubris of the zero point, scholars were able to extract what is objective and thus scientific about this indigenous practice.

[13] The UMIYAC is an organization that "was created in 1999 and includes five indigenous groups from the Colombian Amazon rainforest. We work to preserve the Amazon rainforest and to revitalize and protect our cultures and our ancestral medicine. We are spiritual authorities, medicine men and women of knowledge, and our role is to ensure the health of the territories and the physical and spiritual wellbeing of our communities and territories" (UMIYAC, 2017)

But, if instead, we were instead to situate ourselves in indigenous epistemologies, at least the ones coming from the Inga, Cofán, Siona, Kamsá, Coreguaje, Tatuyo and Carijona communities living in Colombia, the conclusion would be entirely different. For the UMIYAC, a person's health must be regarded as a whole in relation to others, with nature and the spiritual world. The bodily material is not at the center for this epistemological stance and thus, the understanding of the medicine for these communities goes beyond the serotonin syndrome. From an indigenous epistemological position, the generalization seems flawed to the extent that it erases the particularities and singularities of the medicines developed in different indigenous contexts, whose relationships within and with the spiritual world varies from one to another.

One can rightly say that the very term "Ayahuasca" has become a colonial concept that works in the same way *Latinidad* does by disguising "the internal colonial difference under a historical and cultural identity that apparently included all while, in reality, producing an effect of totality that silenced the excluded" (Mignolo, 2007, 89). By presenting *a brew* –considered not even a medicine– that is commonly partaken in "Latin-America" by several indigenous communities, the scholars are disregarding/ignoring not only their own knowledges, but their epistemologies, while endowing it with new meanings, those coming from the epistemological position of the "educated lay people", as McKenna (2006) put it.

Clearly, ***(2) the scholarly discourse does not engage with indigenous epistemologies and experience about their own medicine.*** In relation to its effects, for instance, Ayahuasca has been defined as a psychoactive brew (Shanon, 2002), hallucinogenic beverage (Barbosa et al., 2009; Brierley & Davidson, 2012), hallucinogenic plant (Metzner, 2006b), entheogenic purgative (Shoemaker, 2014), among others. According to Metzener (2006): it has been called "psychotomimetic ("madness mimicking"), psycholytic ("psyche loosening"), psychedelic ("mind manifesting"), hallucinogenic ("vision inducing"), and entheogenic ("connecting to the sacred within")" (Ibid., 2). The brew, however, has not been recognized as a medicine, which is how the indigenous define it. Even more important, none of those terms resonate with indigenous knowledge. This lack of recognition demonstrates once more

the incapability of Western scholars to engage with these communities in a constructive way. For it will demand to a Western scholar to position her/him/them within a different epistemological framework that will enable her/him to understand why these communities mean by medicine. As well stipulated by the Inga, Cofán, Siona, Kamsá, Coreguaje, Tatuyo and Carijona communities from Colombia, at the beginning of its medical ethical code: "We [The Union of Indigenous Yageceros Doctors] cannot expect for our terms to be the same as those used in modern medicine. We are still very far from being able to understand the meaning that have for us words such as "code", "medicine", "health", "illness", "patient"' (UMIYAC, 2000, 8, translation is mine).

However, it is possible to find assertions such as the following one:

> Those who are ideologically committed to the still-prevailing Newtonian-Cartesian paradigm will at best consider the statements and descriptions of the ayabuasqueros as drug-induced "hallucinations," incapable of being scientifically evaluated or verified. From the perspective of a Jamesian radical empiricism however […], contrary to the assumption of materialist science, it is possible to be objective to one's subjective experience. In fact, Buddhist mindfulness meditation and Gurdjieff's self-remembering are practices designed to help one learn to do just that. (Metzner, 2006a, 251)

The explanation refers and compares to other epistemologies, such as the Buddhist one. Or to the postmodern science, as Metzner continues: "I should point out however that many features of the traditional and newly revived shamanic-animistic worldview appear to be quite compatible with the most recent, growing edge theories of postmodern science" (Ibid, 252). How can it be that an indigenous epistemology resembles a postmodern science and not the other way around? In any case, none of these definitions recognizes the brew as medicine, nor the fact that these indigenous communities, the UMIYAC for instance, reject Western judgement about yagé that attempts to classify it as a hallucinogenic plant. The UMIYAC maintains that they do not understand how it is possible for Western scholars to make such statements about something with only twenty to thirty years of knowledge about it, in comparison to the hundreds of years of experiences these communities have.

What might be even more interesting, is that every piece of information coming from the indigenous communities about the medicine is presented in quotation marks. An example of this can be found in the introduction of *Sacred Vine of Spirits AYAHUASCA* by Ralph Metzner (2006) when explaining

that "The plants are referred to as 'medicines'," (Ibid., 3) or "Indigenous healers refer to the entheogenic plants as 'plant teachers'." (Ibid., 15). Not to mention the lack of recognition on the part of some of these scholars who usually make statements such as the ones offered above without acknowledging the indigenous people to whom that knowledge belongs. Another example of this is the one found in Dennis J. Mckenna (2006) who says that Luis Eduardo Luna "was also the first to report on the concept of 'plant teachers' (plantas que enseñan), which is how many of the admixture plants are viewed by the mestizo ayahuasqueros" (Ibid.,52-53). Or, when tracing back the history of the brew, he states: "Just how this discovery was made, and who was responsible, we may never know, though there are several *charming myths* that address the topic" (Ibid., 43, italics added). Interestingly though, is the authority with which Mckenna contends that:

> Ayahuasca is a symbiotic ally of the human species; its association with our species can be traced at least as far back as New World prehistory. The lessons *we* have acquired from it, in the course of millennia of coevolution, may have profound implications for what it is to be human, and to be an intelligent, questioning species within the biospheric community of species. (Ibid, 57, italics added)

Following this 'reasoning', is the knowledge that has been acquired from the so-called "Ayahuasca" a property of Western scholars and not indigenous communities? Or who is this enigmatic "we" of whom he speaks?

Last but not least, Metzner (2006) explained that 'Shaman' is not a concept elaborated or used in South America, but rather it comes from the Siberian language. According to him, the term has, nowadays, come to be a popular way of referring to "any practice of healing and divination that involves the purposive induction of an altered state of consciousness, called the "shamanic journey", in which the shaman enters into "nonordinary reality" and seeks knowledge and healing power from spiritual beings in those worlds" (Ibid., 2). Yet, Metzner does refer to the indigenous doctors as shamans and to their practice or ceremonies as shamanic traditions. One example of this can be found when, surmising about the challenges this indigenous practice poses to Western scholars, he argues: "The two elements in the *shamanic traditions* that pose the most direct and radical challenge to the accepted Western worldview are the existence of multiple worlds or realms of consciousness, and the reality of spirit

beings" (Ibid.,17, italics added). Later he does this again, when elaborating about the origins of Ayahuasca: "What is truly amazing is that the Indian and mestizo *shamans* of the Amazon rainforest appear to have figured out or discovered these plant and biochemical interactive effects using only careful naturalistic observation and experimentation" (Ibid., 25, italics added). This demonstrates a blatant disregard for indigenous knowledges. Colombian indigenous communities, for instance, sustain that:

> We see that non-indigenous people have been calling us Shamans for a few years, but that word has never been used for us and thus it has no meaning. Many also give us the name of Cacique, but this is a term that applies only to our political authorities.
> Rather, since the entry of the Spaniards, we have received the name of Curacas and it is a term that we understand and accept in our communities, so that it could still be used. The word Taita has also become widespread among us. It is a term of the Inga's language that means "papa" and now we all use it to call the parents, grandparents and, in general, the elderly. In some regions it is used to call the governors of the cabildos and the traditional authorities.
> We have also been referred to as Curacas, especially the elderly (over 60) and more respected for their wisdom. It is above all a word of respect and, although it is still used, we consider that it cannot always be interpreted as an indigenous doctor. (UMIYAC, 2000,12, translation is mine)

They preferred to be called indigenous "yageceros doctors" instead of traditional doctors to distinguish their practices from those used by peasant and black communities. Clearly, the term "Ayahuasca" has become a colonial one, where the discussed scholarship cannot account for this indigenous epistemology or experience other than by imposing pre-established Western categories and medical observations. Instead, it takes and endows them with new meanings. This confirms Aníbal Quijano's ideas of coloniality, as he elaborates:

> […] the relationship between European culture, also called "Western" culture, and the others, remains a relationship of colonial domination. It is not only a subordination of the other cultures to the European, in an external relationship. It is a colonization of other cultures […] It consists, first of all, in a colonization of the imaginary of the dominated. That is to say, it acts in the interiority of that imaginary […] The repression falls, above all, on the ways of knowing, of producing knowledge, of producing perspectives, images and systems of images, symbols, modes of meaning; on the resources, patterns and instruments of formalized and objectified, intellectual or visual expression. It was followed by the imposition of the use of the own patterns of expression of the dominant ones, as well as of their beliefs and images referred to the supernatural, which served not only to impede the cultural production of the dominated, but also as very effective means of social and cultural control, when the immediate repression ceased to be constant and systematic. (1992, 12)

As well as Mignolo's argument about the theo-ego-political foundation of a Western epistemological position that has been grounded as the detached observer capable of seeing and explaining it all: "Such foundation legitimizes the assumptions and claims that knowledge was beyond bodies and places and

that Christian theology and secular philosophy and science were the limits of knowledge-making beyond and besides which all knowledge was lacking: folklore, myth, traditional knowledge, were invented to legitimize imperial epistemology" (2009, 177). The Western dominant epistemological position is then, one that recognizes and self-reaffirms through the construction of Other non-valid epistemic positions, i.e. folklore, myth and traditional knowledge. From this dominant epistemological position, Western scholars are incapable of recognizing those other ways of knowing, which explains why they do not find another way to relate to it but as either folklore, myth or tradition.

2.3. Implications

To talk about the implication of this colonial project, cultural appropriation must also be examined. Following Bruce Ziff and Pratima V. Rao (1997), cultural appropriation has been defined as the taking of "intellectual property, cultural expressions or artifacts, history and ways of knowledge" (1) from a subordinated culture into a dominant one. That is to say, cultural appropriation is concerned with relationships among people. Ziff & Rao sustain that what has been discussed as the passing from one culture to another is just cultural transmission. And that, for cultural transmission to became cultural appropriation, the cultural transmission should be voluntary. This is to say that there exists cultural transmission that is not voluntary, which they define as assimilation (Ibid). Thus, when the cultural transmission does not happen as a product of the hegemonic impositions, cultural transmission turns into cultural appropriation. Focusing on the difference between cultural assimilation and cultural appropriation can help one understand how cultural transmission is, in general, mediated by power relations. Under such conditions, cultural assimilation is always imposed by the dominant culture. On the other hand, cultural appropriation is rather a choice. Power relations became the center of analysis then, and its critical approach entails the understanding of the political impact that it has. Namely, the degradation it can cause to communities in need of their identity politics to claim back rights they have been denied, which is the case of, for instance, indigenous communities. In other words:

> Even in a society in which diversity is *not* treated as a state goal, cultural cohesion may still be crucially important because cultural identity forms the basis of what is sometimes called the politics of difference or

> identity politics […] In liberal democracies, oppressed groups vie for attention. For them, cultural connections can provide a cohesive force that allows for the development of identity, solidarity, and strength. To the extent that cultural appropriation can lead to cultural degradation, the ability to practice identity politics may be compromised. (Ziff & Rao, 1997, 10, Italics original)

How exactly does the process of taking tangible and/or intangible property produce cultural degradation? Say, Colombian indigenous communities found this natural medicine, as Yovany defines it, and have come to develop a whole knowledge about it that is inherent to their communities. How would the already presented Western scholarly (colonial) discourse affect such property? Following Rosemary J. Coombe (1998), I would argue that it is through the recognition of the Western discourse, and not the indigenous one, about their own medicine that degrades their heritage and therefore, their cultural identity. This is because, first and foremost, what cultural appropriation does, according to Naomi Roth-Arriaza (1997), is that it separates "what is considered knowledge from what is considered physical resources". Western scholars take physical resources, transform them into "units of knowledge" (Ziff & Rao, 1997) and separate them from their original meanings, that of the indigenous communities for example. Or, in Anzaldua's words, it tuns a traditional object into a dead one: "An Indian mask in an American museum is transposed into an alien aesthetic system where what is missing is the presence of power invoked through performance ritual. It has become a conquered thing, a dead "thing" separated from nature and, therefore, its power" (1987, 68).

But, what in particular motivates the taking of this medicine? What is behind this borrowing? Departing from Western scholarly discourse, I would argue that the main interest in borrowing this indigenous practice is to conquer the spiritual, healing-enhancing experience that has been widely documented. This, however, does not mean that there is no such thing as a negative experience with Ayahuasca, but there is great interest in presenting the conscious-enhancing kind of experiences as well. Charles S. Grob writes:

> I was particularly interested in selecting those who reported more ecological consciousness, more awareness of the threats and challenges facing our culture, and a greater commitment to a lifestyle that incorporates both spiritual practice and respect for all of nature. This is not to deny that some ayahuasca experiences may be painful and unpleasant and that some may not have very profound consequences. (2006, 117)

Furthermore, the fact that long time users of this medicine present a particularly positive psychological situation has triggered even more interest in it. Barbosa et al. (2009), for example, show in their case-study how "long-term regular users of ayahuasca within the UDV suffered from less psychopathology, and had better scores with respect to some measures of memory function and personality traits compared to non-ayahuasca users" (206). Likewise, Michael Winkelman (2015) in his study of *Psychedelics as Medicines for Substance Abuse Rehabilitation: Evaluating Treatments with LSD, Peyote, Ibogaine and Ayahuasca*, contends that the treatment of addiction through the consumption of Ayahuasca has shown promising results. He continues: "These shamanistic approaches attribute therapeutic effects to a variety of factors, including pharmacological as well as psychological, but most significantly the interactions of the biological and personal levels with the spiritual" (Ibid., 113).

These studies exemplify and encourage commodification of this medicine. Daniel I. Brierley & Colin Davidson state: "Recent developments in ayahuasca use include the sale of these compounds on the internet and the substitution of related botanical (anahuasca) or synthetic (pharmahuasca) compounds to achieve the same desired hallucinogenic effects" (2012, 263). Similarly, Alan Shoemaker explains that, with the increasing available literature on the internet, Ayahuasca has become a rather simple operation, since it "can be made from an extraction of DMT from a variety of plants […] and blended with Syrian rue (*Peganum harmala*) seeds to replace the Beta-carbolines found in the ayahuasca vine" (2014, 121, italics original). This indigenous practice has been brought to light to the "educated lay people" who framed it as indigenous art has been framed: "within Western discourses about how to see art (via artist/material/meaning)" (Zittlau, 2014, 107). In this case, the frame explains about how to understand a brew and its work –composition/production/bodily effects. Its commodification makes it possible for anyone to use this practice and to even profit from it. In the making of a hegemonic discourse, Western scholars have conquered, controlled and even set a single name to this indigenous practice. A practice that, nowadays, is one of the very few ways these communities have to survive the ferocious forces of the neoliberal economic system.

I do not mean to say that this has been a desirable outcome of such academic work; Shoemaker is sincere in saying:

> When I read these kinds of articles, I feel as though I am reading instructions for how to prepare a drug, not a medicine. It is the life force contained in the entire plant that activates its healing energies, and it is the manner in which the plant is harvested and prepared and ceremoniously consumed that allows the synergism between us and the plant's spirit and life force energy to effect a cure. When we extract only the alkaloid, we take the plant out of balance. We turn these Sacred Power Plants into something they were never meant to be, and in the majority of instances we create a substance more closely resembling a drug than a true medicine. (Ibid)

As well as Grob, when expressing:

> Intention, preparation, and structure of the session are all integral to the content and outcome of any encounter with hallucinogens, a clear distinction from virtually all other psychotropic agents. The diligent attention to these factors are known to be integral to the shamanic model of altered states of consciousness, minimizing risks and enhancing the likelihood of salutary results. (2006,74)

They all, however, overlooked the implications of their work. As Said argued in *Orientalism* (1978), the fact that knowledge is produced under the impression that it is "true" knowledge and thus, in any way, connected with politics, does not equate with not having political consequences. And in the case of this indigenous practice, I am afraid that this Western scholarly discourse has had a terrible consequence, not only for the indigenous communities but for the people who use the medicine out of context with the expectation of getting something they are very unlikely to get, because of the lack of experience and knowledge.

2.4. Performing Colonial Control

Now that I have presented to you with what I have found in the academic work that has been developed about yagé, under the category of Ayahuasca, let me answer the questions I posed in the introduction. I should start by saying that what has been said about Ayahuasca is that it is a brew –not a medicine–, produced in the Amazon region of "Latin-America" through the combination of, at least two plants. Such "plant technology", as it has been called, is capable of producing in the brain what is known in Western medicine as a serotonin syndrome. It is through the explanation of such a syndrome, that the powerful journeys it produces have been explained. Regarding the engagement with indigenous epistemologies, I must say that even when the scholarship does present information

regarding the histories of how some indigenous communities got to find the brew, or the medicine as they call it themselves, as well as some of the different preparations used to produce it, when it comes to engaging with their own understanding of how the medicine works, this information is presented in quotation marks, and as mere informative facts. None of the scholars engage in a constructive conversation with such knowledges. That leads to the question of what are the implications of such a production of knowledge, and what does this production of knowledge demonstrate?

I would argue that the presentation of indigenous knowledge in quotation marks and the following discourse of rationalism and positivism about this cultural practice is yet another example of coloniality at work. This implies, not only the appropriation and control over an Other's knowledges-practices, but it also prevents this culture from reproducing and maintaining their culture over time. Similar to what happens with indigenous art in museums, the framing of this practice within the theo-ego-politically founded colonial discourse takes away inherited knowledge, while giving the impression of it being static, unchangeable, a mere combination of plants, as in this particular case. Coloniality here works in the way dioramas work "featuring static figures […] frozen in a specific moment of time. Born in the late 19th century, together with panoramas and ethnic shows, the diorama satisfies the voyeuristic need to observe without being observed, to encounter without ever meeting" (Zittlau, 2014, 100). In other words, Western knowledge-production in the case of Ayahuasca, freezes this indigenous practice to satisfy scholars' drive to observe and explain from an invisible point, that of the objective observer. This demonstrates the inability or, better yet, the disinterest in understanding this practice as something beyond a simple combination of plants. Coloniality works in this particular case, similar to how certain religions were dismissed/disregarded by the colonial project. "The method of the tabula rasa was the coherent result, the conclusion of an argument: as the indigenous religion is demonic and the divine European, the first must be totally denied" (Dussel, 1992, 57). In the case of Ayahuasca, nonetheless, it is not so much a matter of demonic vs divine, but of myth vs knowledge.

This appears to be, as in the case of Orientalism, a very indelicate attempt to perform colonial control through the framing of this practice under the label "Ayahuasca". Ayahuasca becomes an exotic brew

and as such, it becomes tamable, available. As Graham Huggan says: "in the 'global' cultural environment of the late twentieth century, exoticism becomes a function not of remoteness but, on the contrary, of proximity. Exotic artifacts from other cultures circulate as commodities within the global economy- it is precisely their availability that renders them exotic" (Huggan, 1994, 27). In other words, the now well-endow-by-colonial-connotations Ayahuasca, as an exotic indigenous brew, is more than ever available for consumption and profit. This takes me to the next question: who benefits from this knowledge? As I have explained in the last part of this chapter, the borrowing of an object from one culture to another, as a voluntary act, is called cultural appropriation (Ziff & Rao 1997). This borrowing, as I have shown through this chapter, happens through the separation of the object from the knowledge that has come to be developed with it (Roth-Arriaza, 1997), through its fixation under the Western discursive frame. By doing so, the scholarship has built on a new, very different imagery around this indigenous medicine which has opened the possibility for non-indigenous people to use the brew without any sort of training and yet, profit from it. This harms not only the people that come to use the brew under such conditions, but also the very economy and cultural identity of these indigenous people, who sustain:

> In previous times the taitas could not charge for their services. Simply the community took care of the wellbeing of their taitas […] However, our current situation is very different. We have lost our territories and also our ways of surviving. There is no hunting, no fishing, no possibility of collecting resources from the jungle. Neither do we have the possibility of acquiring money or goods for the product of our reservations and settlements. In the same way, it is no longer easy for us to obtain yage and other medicinal plants in our territories and most of the time we have to move to very distant places or we have to buy them from other indigenous people or settlers. For these reasons, we need to charge for our services. (UMIYAC, 2000, 20)

This means that not only coloniality has forced these indigenous communities to charge their services –by taking away their land and imposing a neoliberal economic system– but also, that Ayahuasca, as a colonial project, is taking away from them the very possibility of making a living out of it. I believe it is important to ask what happens then with the indigenous economy? What happens with their need to preserve their own culture and practices as taught by their ancestors? More importantly: how can this actually harm people because of the lack of experience with the medicine? For this reason, my

next step will be to evaluate how this hegemonic discourse has opened this very possibility of harmfully using the plants.

Chapter III:

Assessing Colonial Effects/Implications

We came to meet through dreams. We were looking for this encounter.
We came together in such a way that we embodied energy, experience, wisdom.
How naïve to believe that there was a 'you' who looked for a 'me' and who came to achieve a master combination.
The combination of our universe. One that connects all living things in a magical encounter.
An encounter in which it is not possible to distinguish boundaries of what has been called subjectivity in that very small part of the world located at the north-west.
But which cannot be considered neither as "posthuman".[14]

Now that I have discussed how Western scholarly discourse represents a colonial project, which works through the separation of an object –plants admixture– from its traditional usage, while disowning it from its cultural origins, the importance of its traditional set and settings must also be examined. For this purpose, I performed 13 interviews which helped me elaborate on the importance of set and settings involved on a yagé experience. As well as, how the appropriation of this cultural practice affects the outcome of the experience itself by overlooking those set and settings. Furthermore, and with the help of Yovany's experience, I provide some reasons for a bad outcome with the misuse of yagé. With the help of Yovany's knowledge I expose the blind spots of the epistemic position held by Western Scholars who, by understanding/explaining the plant's work from the zero point's position, disregard the spiritual side of the experience, along with the indigenous expertise.

The interviews were carried out mainly with a group of women from Colombia named Cinnamon Workshop. This circle of women, as they self-defined, was created, according to Elle[15], with the intention of "returning to the feminine essence. To return the female lineage to the planet. It is a space of connection, communication and healing between us through loving and benevolent energies. The circular form represents a relationship without hierarchies and egalitarianism" (Personal

[14] This is a piece of creative writing I produce during the writing course *Write! Poetics, Passion, and Performativity in Academic Writing Practices* at Linköping University, on April, 2018.
[15] The names of the interviewed are not their real names for confidentiality reasons.

communication, June 14, 2018). Additionally, I interviewed another Colombian woman who currently lives in The Netherlands and has joined Ayahuasca ceremonies in Rotterdam, The Netherlands, as well as yagé ceremonies in Colombia. The remaining interviews correspond to two women living in The Netherlands who have only joined Ayahuasca ceremonies in that context and, to Yovany, the indigenous man with whom I myself have partaken yagé for more than seven years.

During the course of this chapter I engage with these subjugated knowledges along with my own lived experience, which I believe are cornerstone for a decolonial-feminist account of yagé. This is because, "Feminist thinking and practice require taking steps from the "margins to the center" while eliminating boundaries that privilege dominant forms of knowledge building, boundaries that mark who can be a knower and what can be known" (Hesse-Biber, 2011, 3). Since the Western scholarly discourse was developed mainly by men[16] and from a very patriarchal-colonial perspective, both; women and indigenous knowledges and experiences have been left out. I certainly believe it is important to bring them back into a counter-discourse, different from the hegemonic one.

The interviews that follow were based in semi-structured questionnaires which give both, myself and the interviewed the possibility to add comments and/or additional questions. Although the interviews were performed mainly via email, the open questionnaires also gave us all the opportunity to discussed, in a less structured manner, their stories. The interview with Yovany, however, was carried by phone call. For his interview I prepare a questionnaire that did not aim to be extensive but a guide for the conversation, in a way to give him the freedom to speak, as well as it give me the freedom to come back to his ideas, when I did not understand its meaning. I had a total of two conversations with Yovany. The second conversation was more an explanatory one, which helped me clarify the ideas I did not grasp about his knowledge when going over the first recording. All the interviews' transcripts are attached to this research project as annexes.

[16] From a total of 250 authors I compiled along with the 61 papers, around 70 were women. I say around, because I couldn't account for trans authors, since the count was based on names only.

3.1. Yagé Ceremony in Colombia

Yagé ceremony is the name given to the traditional set and settings involved when partaking yagé with either Inga, Cofán, Siona, Kamsá, Coreguaje, Tatuyo or Carijona –indigenous communities from Amazonas, Colombia. A yagé ceremony usually takes place in a maloca[17] (hut), as the one in ***Illustration 1***, where all those who are going to partake in the indigenous medicine gather in the evening at around 20h00 to take a place inside. The places are taken around the bonfire and consist of a camping pad and a couple of blankets. Once everyone is accomodated and the bonfire has been fed –as many of the Colombians interviewed expressed the turning on of fire– Yovany, the indigenous doctor, proceeds to wear his indumentari; necklaces of saíno's fangs and his crown of showy feathers, which, according to Elle, "emit a sound similar to a waterfall" (Personal communication, June 2018). He then explains what yagé is, for those who are there for the first time. Yovany usually begins by saying that yagé is a natural medicine that contains the live element of the plants he uses for its preparation: "The Chacruna, [which] is the pint, the vision that it gives, yes? Then the yagé [which] is the force" (Yovany, Personal

Illustration 1 Yovany's Maloca in Santa Elena, Antioquia, Colombia
Own elaboration

communication, May 31, 2018). By the live element of the plants he is refering to the spiritual world that comes with it, as he explained to me. The medicine's work, according to him, by scanning the body and all that we have created. Yovany assures, we create sickness and feed it via our own

[17] With Yovany we also have been into the woods, near his maloca, to hold the ceremony in the midst of nature. But not everyone is prepared to do it in such a natural environment, because one usually needs toilets during the ceremony, which the maloca has nearby.

weaknesses, i.e. sadness, pain, anger. So, the medicine scans the being as a whole, composed by body and spirit and "corrects all those things that we have to improve every day, yes?[18] [It teaches us] How to overcome all those weaknesses that we are feeling and help us to think beautiful, look nice[19], do things with love, with clarity" (Yovany, Personal communication, May 31, 2018).

After the explanaition, comes a sharing of purpose for those who are there for the first time, and for those who have been there before and feel like sharing their purpose. Then, Yovany continues by elevating a prayer, while everyone remains silent and expectant. He explained to me that the elevation of the prayer is made through the chants[20] he performs to the bottle containing yagé, to assert the sanctity of the place. Once the medicine has been prayed upon, Yovany begins to ask to those present, one by one, to approach the altar –the place where he is seated– to recieve the medicine. We kneel or sit in front of him and elevate a prayer along with him: "Yagé, heal me, heal me with your holy will. I forgive myself before God, before the father. May the light of God descend through my body, my mind, and my spirit. Pardon, permission and thanks, father creator"[21]. After the prayer we drink the medicine, the dark, thick, strong, bittersweet brew, and go back to our place. By the time everyone has drank their portion of medicine, we are all seated around the bonfire on our pads, in a meditating state, waiting for the medicine to start working.

Around a half-hour following the partaking of the medicine Yovany begins to play the harmonica while the medicine begins to take affect[22] on everyone in the maloca. For the rest of the ceremony,

[18] This is an expression he uses constantly during the interview. I sensed it as a way of keeping an engagement during the conversation, while presenting me with his ideas.
[19] When he said "look nice" I understood it as having a positive perspective about life.
[20] The chants are a combination of sounds Yovany performs with his throat and songs he, along his helpers, performed in Spanish.
[21] Yagé: curame, saname con tu santa voluntad. Yo me perdono ante dios, ante el padre. Que la luz de dios descienda por mi cuerpo, por mi mente y por mi espíritu. Perdón, permiso y gracias, padre creador
[22] I expressed the medicine's work as affecting, instead of effecting, because from my conversations with Yovany, he explained: "Many times your mind will be calmer and you can better enter to view, the visions are clearer, more precise, everything you see, begins to look and stays. Then you say 'I look at this and that'". This means the medicine does not just produce an effect on you in a passive way but engages you in a visual experience that aims to teach you, to show you where your weaknesses are and how you can correct them. For that to happen you must engage with the visions in a productive way.

while everyone is dealing with her/his own chuma[23], Yovany, who also takes the medicine, sings the ceremonial chants, which aim to harmonize the environment and everyone's chuma. The chants are a very important part of the ceremony, because, as he explained to me, it is through them that one reaches inner peace by the end of the ceremony. I myself remember how, during one of my experiences, I visualized the anger and pain that I was still holding from my abortion. I saw snakes moving inside my body and I named them. One was the pain I felt from being a victim of ignorance, of not knowing better. The rest of the snakes were my anger. I felt anger towards my mother because she did not teach me properly –or so I taught. I felt anger towards my sister, because she judged me. I felt anger with the world because I had to go through all of it pretending like it never happened. The snakes were climbing to the top of my throat. The snakes, which I named with my weaknesses, reached my mouth and I vomited. The vomit was followed by pain, real, psychical pain, so I began to cry. At that moment, Yovany approached me and spat over me an essence he makes out of plants and started chanting. His songs, along with the guitar sounds of one of his helpers, brought me back again to the maloca, I stopped seeing the snakes and opened my eyes, because I felt the closure. I felt the peace coming from the medicine in combination with his songs.

The next morning, around 4h00 to 5h00, as the ceremony reaches its end and everyone has overcome the chuma, Yovany proceeds to do what he calls cleanings. The cleanings are performed at his altar, where one has to sit, in groups of two to three people, depending on the quantity of people participating in the ceremony. He will spit the same essence he uses to calm and harmonize during the ceremony and he will pray, whilst moving his feather-fan over the people he is cleaning. This, according to him, ensures everyone leaves the place in complete harmony. Once everyone has gone through the cleaning process, the ceremony is called to an end and everyone is invited to have a bite of bread and some panela water before leaving the maloca.

[23] This is how Yovany refers to the yagé process or journey. Hence, I refer to it as chuma henceforth.

3.2. Importance of the Ceremony and an Experienced Curandero

When I asked the 9 Colombian women from the Cinnamon Workshop about the importance of the ceremony, and an experienced curandero, they all agreed both are essential for the chuma to be safe. Eme, for instance, explained that the curandero's assistances "is essential when the trance [the chuma] or healing [process] is difficult and a person does not have command of their process[24]" (Personal communication, June, 2018). Likewise, Esse, expressed that only a curandero has the wisdom to manage all the situations that can happen during the ceremony, as the chuma can induce overwhelming visions. This is echoed by Elle who maintains: "The taita or shaman [SIC] is the mediator between the supernatural forces which influence the disease and the possible healing of the individual. He is a person who holds power" (Personal communication, June, 2018). Similarly, I remember one experience of a friend who, during a yagé ceremony, began to move desperately over his pad. He was screaming someone's name out loud. It was disturbing, so I opened my eyes and look for Yovany. He was seated on his altar, silently looking at my friend. After a couple of minutes he approached my friend with his feather-fan and his essence. He spat the essence over him and chanted, whilst moving his feather-fan around. Yovany, as Esse said, managed the experience my friend was having, as he managed mine when I was envisioning the snakes.

During the interview, Yovany also explained to me the importance of an experienced curandero, as well as the ceremony s/he can actually hold with her/his experience. According to Yovany, in order to be a curandero; to perform a yage ceremony, one needs not only training with a former curandero, but also with the element of the plant. The training, he explained, can take years –10 years on average– and is provided first and foremost by the element of the plant:

> It's like a call. If the person wants to learn and dedicates her/himself[25] to that, the yagé will teach her/him. But if there are many things that s/he does not have clear and the person does not help her/himself in the process [It will not work], because first it's like cleaning [the process of recognition of weaknesses], the yagé

[24] All women from Cinnamon Workshop refer to the chuma as "the process".
[25] I use both personal pronouns in my translations to keep the sentences gender neutral in English. Since Yovany was referring to the neutral third person in Spanish.

> checks everything, how is the person, all that. If the person is a good person, yagé recognizes that and so it will teach her/him. (Yovany, Personal communication, May 31, 2018)

A former curandero will teach the apprentice the ceremonial basics, but it is also the element of the plant who teaches the apprentice its healing chants and sounds. I remember once asking Yovany to teach me how to play the harmonica as he does during the ceremony. I bought my own harmonica and brought it to one of the ceremonies. Before everyone was in place inside the maloca, I approached him and asked: "Taita, can you teach me how to play my harmonica". He smiled back at me and told me "No Juliana, I cannot, the medicine is the one who teaches you, you just need to be patient". To which I said: "Can I try then, to play it during the ceremony, while I am affected by the medicine?" and his reply was, again, no. He explained to me that as I had no training with the element of the plant I could not play the harmonica inside the ceremony, for the sake of the harmony.

I also discussed with Yovany the implications of non-indigenous people providing the medicine without training. To this matter he sustained:

> What happens is that, you see, many times there are people who have come [to Colombia] from other countries, to drink the medicine, and many times they drink yagé and stay for a while, a year or two. But many times they drink yagé and already they think they can provide the medicine. But it turns out that many times they do it just because, but they do not have like that gift that was given, they do not have that power to dominate the spirit of the plant, the elemental of the plant. As if to say, I take this and I want to share it, but I do not have the faculty or the power to dominate that spirit. Yes? Then, also, there may also be a risk there. The risk is that many times people remain in this medicine [the chuma…] they can have different reactions, a stronger reaction, and many times they [the provider, which is not yet a curandero] do not know how to dominate, and as they do not know how to master the spirit, the elemental, then, many times, the person can go crazy or die or anything can happen. (Personal communication, May, 2018)

By mastering the spirit Yovany refers to the chants, the playing of the harmonica, the spreading of saumerio –a plant's smoke– over the maloca and everyone inside, the spitting of the essense. The plant's element is dominated by all those rituals that he performs in the company of his helpers. It is worth saying that he never interrupts anyone's process, as was reiterated by the members of Cinnamon Workshop. During the introduction of the ceremony, when he explains how the medicine works for those participating for the first time, he explicitly says that it is important not to interrumpt anyone during the chuma. He says that we can all have frightening visions, but that no matter how scared someone is or how sad, we need to remain focussed on each one's chuma, and that he will handle any

difficulty by himself if necessary. However, he will never speak to you during the chuma either. As I said before, the mastering of the plant's element is performed by the chants, the saumerio, the spiting of the essense. He does not have to actually interfere in someone's chuma to produce peace, to help the chuma continue smoothly.

3.3. Ayahuasca Ceremony in The Netherlands

In the last chapter I discussed how Western scholars and their scholarly discourse have come to appropriate this indigenuos practice in a way that makes it appear as a mere combination of plants. I also espoused the possible consequences of such a colonial project, i.e. less chances for the indigenous communities to make a living, and the harmful experiences people can have with Ayahuasca[26] when it is produced and partaken without experience and knowledge. In this section I want to explore the last possible consequence. To this end, I interviewed three people, one Colombian woman who has partaken yagé in Colombia, and Ayahuasca in The Netherlands, as well as two other woman who have participated in Ayahuasca ceremonies only in The Netherlands. With these interviews I want to assess the effects of the non-desired-but-still-at-work colonial project. Enne, to begin with, is a Colombian woman who has been living in the Netherlands for more than three years. She participated in a yagé ceremony for the first time in 2014, in Colombia near her hometown Bogotá, with an indigenous person. Once in The Netherlands, she decided to participate in an Ayahuasca ceremony, because: "I was sick for more than a year and I thought Ayahuasca was the best way to recover my health and get insights on how to keep my body healthy" (Personal communication, June 2018). When I asked her to compare both experiences this is what she said:

> They were very different. In Colombia the healer was a Shaman [SIC] and the ceremony was held outdoors. There was a ceremonial fire and there were trees all around. I think the fact that I was able to walk around and sit on the ground next to the fire enabled me to have a very different experience than the ones I have had in Europe […] The ceremonies [in The Netherlands] are guided by the healer (a man) and his helper (a woman). During the ceremony they sing and go around cleaning, replacing the bottles of water and assisting whoever needs help (to call their attention we only have to raise our hand). The ceremony begins when all participants are sitting in their spots and facing the healer (each participant has a mattress, pillow, blanket, bucket, big bottle of water, and toilet paper). Each participant speaks up her/his intention and then the healer goes around to give each participant a kind of liquid Tabaco (I think it is called mapuche). After

[26] Once again, Ayahuasca, with a capital A, states its commodification as a simple formula anyone can use.

> that the healer comes back with the first round of Ayahuasca (there are 3 in total). (Personal communication, June 2018)

From this we can see that the ceremony is clearly different from that of indigenous communities, at least those from Colombia. An Ayahuasca ceremony in The Netherlands, following Enne's report, is one taking place inside a room with very small windows, no bonfire, no saumerio, no essence. The chants are not chants, they are songs in either Dutch or English, as also reported by Eche and Chan. Eche is a Dutch woman who participated in an Ayahuasca ceremony because: "I have been in a burnout since April 2017 and I have always had the idea I may have been sexually abused. My intention using ayahuasca was to find answers and to find peace in myself" (Personal communication, June 2018). The ceremony to which she participated was also performed in a house, without bonfire and with religious images even: "The place […] was a big house in the middle of nowhere. There was 1 'shaman' and 3 people who were there to support. There were 12 participants. There were paintings of Jesus on the wall, there were stones in different colors in the middle on a big carpet" (Eche, Personal communication, June 2018). Ayahuasca ceremonies are not only performed without respecting indigenous expertise, but also adding elements that do not resonate with indigenous beliefs, such as the painting of Jesus. This demonstrates how coloniality is not a project developed by scholars only, but rather a never-ending enterprise developed by western people who, under the misleading illusion produced by the hegemonic discourse, endow foreign practices (objects) with the meanings they have been taught by Western scholars themselves.

Chan, on her part, has participated in Ayahuasca ceremonies in two different settings: "Groningen in a house, in quite a big room and in Nijmegen in a wooden lodge that they built themselves" (Personal communication, June 2018). The fact that the Ayahuasca ceremonies are performed indoors, far from nature actually has implications according to Yovany. Yovany has also traveled to Europe on a couple of occasions to perform yagé ceremonies, but when he has done so, he has always managed to find a place in the midst of nature and, even there, the ceremony is different from those performed in Colombia. In other words:

> It changes a bit, because one of the things here in Colombia is, because yagé is from this territory and is more like the jungle and the strength. But it always changes. But there is always different because it is another energy, there are other things different as the plant can take harder, too, but the energy more than anything influences. Many times, softer, yes?. (Yovany, Personal communication, June 2018)

This means that the ceremonies that are performed far from the jungle –where the force of the medicine comes from– would always represent a challenge for the curandero or the person in charge. If, to that equation one adds as a performer someone without experience or knowledge about the medicine, then the chuma's outcome can be, very likely, not a positive one. I myself have participated in a yagé ceremony with Yovany that was performed in Turkey in 2017. I went there to meet him and we drove all the way to a deserted kind of mountain in Izmir. The Turkish person who arranged all the details for the ceremony rented a place there, so we could have a ceremony in nature with a bonfire, as it must be done. We made a circle with the bonfire at the center and Yovany did his usual ritual. He began by explaining what yagé is in Colombian, which was translated into Turkish by the person who arranged everything. Then, he started calling everyone, one by one, to take the medicine. I was the last one and, as I do speak Colombian, we both pray to the medicine. For the rest of the participants the prayer was done by Yovany only. The ceremony was entirely different. Some things I had never seen before in my seven years of participating in yagé ceremonies happened there. But Yovany managed every single situation with his songs, his feather-fan, his saumerio and his essence. He did not have to communicate with anyone, he never used words with the participants, he did not need them.

Although the first experience Enne had with Ayahuasca was not bad at all, the second one tells another story:

> The last time I participated in a ceremony I did it to ask for help with my 'addiction to think'. I wanted to somehow get rid of my ego (It did not when very well, it was one of the most painful and extreme experiences I have gone through, but I survived and I am grateful)". (Personal communication, June 2018)

She also expressed that during this experience, she felt scared many times and so she asked for help to the "healer", as she called the person in charge. The man who was performing the ceremony, approached her every time, but the only thing he did was to stand next to her and provide her company. Enne reports this response as enough for her to feel at ease, but it clearly demonstrates the

performer's lack of experience and management of the plant's element. When I ask Chan about the experience held by the people who performed the ceremonies to which she participated, she comments:

> In Groningen it was Joop[27]. He is a very spiritual man that drinks ayahuasca every weekend. He finds himself quite spiritual and experienced […] In Nijmegen it's hosted by three/four people that want to share the medicine. They only have a year experience with ayahuasca. They don't come across as they think they know it all. They are quite humble. (Personal communication, June 2018)

She also recalls hearing them sharing their stories of how they got their experience, but she does not remember the stories well enough to share them. Nevertheless, as demonstrated through Yovany's knowledge, a couple of years with the plant is not enough for someone to be able to handle the ceremony. Certainly, drinking Ayahuasca every weekend is neither the way to get the knowledge and experience required to master the plant either, which is the case of Joop, with whom Chan contends she did not feel safe with during the ceremony. This lack of experience, in the case of Eche had a bad outcome. Her only experience happened over a weekend during which she took the medicine for two consecutive nights. The first night, according to her report, went well:

> We would do 2 evenings of ayahuasca. 2 drinks every evening. After these talking sessions we have been singing Dutch and English songs about ayahuasca and 'the plant' and 'the mother' with a guitar and harp. I had the feeling we were very comfortable with each other. After the singing everybody had his own mattress where we would lie down in white clothing. Then we took the drink. I had to puke a lot so the first round did not work. The second round on the first evening was amazing. I heard people crying and puking but it was fine. The room was calm and it went alright. (Personal communication, June 2018).

The second day, however, was horrible as she reports. During her second experience she explains that people were talking too much, which disturbed her quite a lot. While she was trying to get into reflection and connection with the element of the plant, the songs and the small talk made her anxious. She did not feel assisted, nor helped. She explains:

> I could not stand the sounds. Everything was so confusing. I was already hallucinating a lot and everybody was still so noisy but there was no music. Only noise […] Then everybody lied down and the music started again. The music was way too loud. Hard guitar strums and 'happy' music. It did not resonate with my feelings at all. […] I sometimes opened my eyes and I was afraid that everybody was feeling the same as me and that everybody would go mad at some point. I felt very unsafe and I asked for help. Some helper who did not take ayahuasca asked me what was wrong, I did not understand her words. I told her I was not feeling well and that I was going mad. She said that it was a trauma from within and that I should face it. I did not feel I was experiencing anything at all. I was only very confused and afraid. I felt so alone. This

[27] Joop is a name of the guide in Groningen

> lasted for a very long time. I waited for people to stop walking around. I waited for the music to be calm but the noises were so incredibly loud. Then I went to the bathroom to find some peace. The helper followed me and sat down with me. I told her that I could not experience anything of the ayahuasca because of all the noises. She said it was me. I told her that she did not understand because she was sober. They started a discussion about how that does not make a difference and I went totally crazy. I told her to go away. […] Then the ceremony was over but I was still in the middle of the ayahuasca. I did not understand what was going on. They called me to close the circle with them. I could barely walk. Then I called another helper and said: 'Okay, I'm in a bad trip, you need to help me. Bring me upstairs, give me slow music and calm me down, please". She helped me and did what I said but it did not work. I was trapped in my mind and I wanted to go out so badly. She stayed with me for an hour but nothing helped. […] After a few hours I saw another participant walking to the bathroom who was also feeling very, very bad. I walked up to him and hold his hand. We realized that we were in the 'same' bad trip. We understood we were experiencing the same hell. We sat down on the floor of the bathroom, holding hands without speaking. Comforting each other by leaning on each other's shoulders and we waited till the morning […] This has been the most horrible experience I have ever had. (Eche, Personal communication, June 2018)

This event happened on the second day, after they practiced rebirth. According to Eche and Chan's experiences, the people appropriating this practice explain to participants that rebirth is something very likely to be experienced during an Ayahuasca ceremony. In Eche's case, the person in charge actually asked them to practice it:

> […] one would lay on the ground, the other would hold the head tight and then the person on the floor had to push when the music started (drums) to push themselves through the hands of the other person. He explained that a difficult birth can influence your life and that rebirth can be a very good to experience. (Personal communication, June 2018)

Clearly, this proves how yagé has been appropriated and become a colonial commodity endowed with new meanings, practices and even imageries, as those of the Christian religion. Below I evaluate the implications this can actually have in someone's life.

3.4. Ayahuasca Ceremony: A Harmful Experience

Eche's experience with Ayahuasca, as shown above, was one of confusion and complete discomfort. She not only went through a very anxious state but found no help or comfort in the persons performing the ceremony. Which, according to her report, was not just her opinion. When I ask her if she felt safe during the ceremony she comments: "No, not at all. It was awful. I talked to the others the next day and there were other people who also felt very unsafe. They also felt like the setting was way too noisy and that the shaman did not do anything to make us feel alright". Even though after the Ayahuasca ceremony Eche got some good insights about her life and the medicine itself: "the beautiful part of the experience is also there. I accept other people and I accept myself, way more. I feel like

what I am doing is right. I don't blame the ayahuasca for the bad experience, ayahuasca itself is the most beautiful thing in the world". She has gone through a difficult period ever since. Which she feels it might be related with the experience she had there. In her own words:

> Now, almost one year after the experience I still have anxiety and panic attacks when I hear sounds. I cannot go to a train station, a bar or a party. I walk with earplugs and headphones all day. Even in my own house. I don't know if it is the ayahuasca that created this because I already had a burnout when I took ayahuasca. But, whenever I think back to the experience I feel like I'm thinking about a trauma. I try to not think about the chaos, the noise and the immense anxiety I felt because it makes me want to cry. I hope I will be able to function normally again. (Personal communication, June 2018)

She also explains:

> I think we don't understand what ayahuasca actually is. During the experience I realized that the ceremony we did makes no sense. It also felt like we are mis-using such a saint medicine. Using this medicine in the setting we did felt very wrong. I don't really know why. It was like the shaman knew what he was doing, without taking the indigenous practices into account. It felt like he was doing it 'his way' and that it was not the way it is supposed to go. (Personal Communication, June 2018)

Eche's case is just one of many. Ever since I arrived in The Netherlands and I have shared my experience with yagé with people I have heard similar stories. Interestingly enough, I could not find anyone else attracted by my study. But I believe Eche's case is a very important one, along with the statements of Enne and Chan regarding the safety of these ceremonies. Coming back to the interviews I conducted with the women from Cinnamon Workshop I never encountered expressions such as "I felt unsafe" or "I felt confused" or "I felt helpless". They instead have joined this indigenous practice with the intention of empowering themselves: "it has helped us to regain confidence in ourselves, to recognize the capacities we have, to recover the power we have" (Be, Personal communication, June 2018). When I ask them how has yagé empowered them, their replies reflected a more holistic approach to healing, to which every aspect of life is connected to the spiritual world. Greatly resonating with UMIYAC's explanation of what health is, i.e. a whole in relation to others, with nature and the spiritual world. Moreover, their motivations were significantly different from that of the Dutch women when using Ayahuasca. While the Dutch women were looking to fixe specific situations, such as lack of self-love in Chan's case, or an undesirable psychological status, as in Eche's case. The women from the Cinnamon Workshop were looking for a deeper connection that could lead them to improve and enhance their lives.

Ann, for instance, said that "Yagé is a means to work our obscurities of the past and present, finding them and releasing them gives us a touch of freedom and connection with our Primordial Source. (Personal communication, June 2018). Where the primordial source is, as I have understood, that spiritual-abstract place within where true health can be achieved, in UMIYAC's sense of health. Thus, yagé for these women has not only served them to heal "the physical body but also […] the mental and spiritual, and as a group we have strengthened […yagé has provided] Better quality of life, lighter luggage, we have learned to release diseases from the body and to heal it" (Eme, Personal communication, June 2018). In the same line of argument, Esse expresses "[…] yagué helps you to heal from the physical, mental and spiritual and helps one to be in harmony and balance with oneself, and therefore the empowerment and healing that is required is achieved" (Personal communication, June 2018). Their stories also reflect a deep understanding and engagement to Yovany's epistemic position, as in Trin's account: "[…] by taking the medicine and going inside myself in a meeting with myself, with my weaknesses and shortcomings. When I meet the best doctors of nature and can heal and release, I realize the great assistance you have with this medicine" (Personal communication, June 2018). For these women, yagé has significantly helped them, "So much so that we plan to attend the ceremony of taking yagé as a sublime act, as a therapy that works on our body, conscience and spirit" (Lili, Personal communication, June 2018). It has allowed them to

> […] change the vibration in which I moved and when I achieve awareness of my role [in the personal, social, work or family] I change my way of acting, thinking, speaking, it is as well as I realize that only those who surround me teach me and that I must know how to identify my role in each of them. (Yaz, Personal communication, June 2018)

Or, as in Elle's case: "It has definitely been very helpful not only at the level of the women's circle but also at the family, personal and general levels. We are better women now. More open, sincere and loyal. We are reliable and enlightened women" (Personal communication, June 2018). I myself, from my own experiences, and all these years sharing yagé with Yovany, have never felt unsafe, uncomfortable, or helpless. Yagé helped me overcome the depression I suffered as a consequence of my illegal abortion, but it has never been my only motivation to participate in yagé ceremonies. Through the years, I have learned with the help of Yovany and the women of the Cinnamon

Workshop, that my physical and mental health are connected to one another and that in order to keep them in a good status I must become aware of my spirituality. This is not to say that none of us, nor me, nor the women from the Cinnamon Workshop, have never experienced overwhelming visions, my point is that with the help of Yovany –an experienced yagecero doctor– we have always sorted them out in a very positive way. Thus, I would argue that such feelings of insecurity are no more than the result of the commodification of an indigenous practice. To understand this, we need to remember that coloniality works not only by endowing new meanings but by the transformation of cultural practices into objects that can be used away from its original practice.

3.5. An Effect of the Zero Point's Epistemic Position

To conclude, I argue that yagé ceremonies are an indigenous practice coming from indigenous communities living in Colombia. This indigenous practice is one that requires years of commitment and learning with the element of the plant, as Yovany explains. The training is also always accompanied by someone who has already learnt to master the element of the plant, as shown through Yovany's interventions. It involves learning the chants, the prayers, how and when to use the saumerio and essence made of plants. It involves domination of the plant's element without using words, without interfering in anyone's chuma. Thus, participating in a couple of yagé ceremonies is not enough to perform them. It is instead, unsafe and can harm participants due to the lack of experience and knowledge when it comes to dominate the element of the plant. Moreover, when these ceremonies are reproduced by non-indigenous-non-trained people in different sets and settings, the chuma can turn out to be disturbing, scary and confusing. Which, in combination with the lack of training of the performer, can produce real damage to those who are participating, as it was the case of Eche presented in this chapter.

Eche's story, along with Enne and Chan's reports are proof of what happens when coloniality works to disregard Other's knowledge. Which is precisely the effect of producing knowledge from a zero point's position, i.e. the recognition of some aspects of a whole experience like yagé's, and the disregard

of what is seen as tradition, myth or folklore. By recognizing only, the chemical and therefore, medical aspects of it, Western scholars provide the impression that what counts for a yagé ceremony is no more than a combination of plants. As exemplified by the experiences of Eche, Enne, and Chan, who used Ayahuasca in the Netherlands, the people providing the medicine overlooked the importance of other factors in the (miss-) appropriation of this indigenous practice. Whereas, as it is evident throughout the interviews with the Colombian women, a yagé experience is one that involves a combination of plants, as well as a whole spiritual side which cannot be managed without the knowledge of an experienced curandero. Such aspects, as the spirituality and the expertise of an indigenous person, do not have an apparent function in the way the body functions seen through Western eyes as a machine, controlled by western medical and evidence-based knowledge.

The participants' stories are crucial in providing a more holistic account of the medicine, one that goes beyond what Western knowledge can elaborate. Esse, for instance, tells the following story:

> […] for several years I often suffered from many headaches, every time I had a headache, a slight pain began and as the hours passed, the pain worsened until I reached the point of pain. That pain was unbearable. In 2013 in a yagé ceremony, when I was in the trance effect of the medicine I went through a head surgery where my skull was opened and with the assistance of the specialists who were in that moment of healing they took out all the darkness I had in my head and they repaired the parts of my head that were not working very well and after that moment I was relieved, I did not experience the headaches I usually experience anymore, my testimony is that I went through an operating room where, in connection with my primordial source, I achieved a healing process. (Personal communication, June 2018)

Esse's account is one that might become troublesome if explained through the Wester scholarly discourse elaborated on Ayahuasca, since the healing she is recalling did not happen in a material space, so to say. This is not to say that there might not be a chemical or material explanation to what happened to Esse. Rather, I am trying to show what the epistemic position of the Zero point would miss if trying to understand/explain Esse's experience.

All in all, the commodification of this indigenous practice and its transforming into an exchangeable object, is then the result of a colonial project which has separated the indigenous medicine from the knowledge that the indigenous have acquired about it through thousands of years. Thus, harming people who are just looking for answers and healing.

Conclusions

In this research I exposed, analyzed and criticized the Western hegemonic discourse about yagé, under the label Ayahuasca. Arguing that coloniality/modernity is the domination of the Western-Europeans and its descendants, Anglo-North-Americans, of Africa and "Latin-America". I exposed how the hegemonic discourse about Ayahuasca is one produced by Western scholars in the –perhaps unconscious– attempt to perform colonial domination over this cultural practice. As elaborated in Chapter II, what has been said about Ayahuasca is that it is a brew –not a medicine–, produced in the Amazon region of "Latin-America" through the combination of two plants. In offering such explanation none of the scholars engages in a constructive conversation with indigenous knowledges regarding, for instance, the spirituality involved in a yagé experience. Which is why I argue that such an elaborate, rational, and positivistic discourse is yet, another example of coloniality at work. Thus, this implies, not only the appropriation and control over Other's knowledges and practices, but it also prevents the Other's culture from reproducing and maintaining their culture over time.

I conclude Chapter II by exposing the different colonial projects that influence to this particular case. The framing of yagé as Ayahuasca, to begin with, is similar to what happens with indigenous art in museums. The framing of this practice, within the theo-ego-politically founded colonial discourse, takes away inherited knowledge, while giving the impression of the practice being static, unchangeable, a mere combination of plants. Coloniality here works, in the way dioramas work: The Western knowledge-production about Ayahuasca freezes this indigenous practice into a verifiable chemical practice only, to satisfy scholars' drive of observing and explaining from an invisible point, that of the objective observer. In doing so, proving Santiago Castro-Gómez's concept of the 'Hubris of the zero point' (Mignolo, 2009), or that of the feminist Donna Haraway: the illusion of the God Trick (1988). This demonstrates the inability or, better yet, the disinterest in understanding this practice as something beyond that of a simple combination of plants. Moreover, coloniality works in this particular case, akin

to when religion came to be the colonial project and oppressed all other spiritual-religious beliefs with the argument that they were evil in the face of the Christian religion. In the case of Ayahuasca, nonetheless, it is not so much a matter of demonic vs divine, but of myth vs knowledge. Finally, as in the case of orientalism, this is an attempt to perform colonial control through the framing of a practice that becomes exotic, and as such, it becomes domesticable, available.

Therefore, the now well-endow-by-colonial-connotations Ayahuasca, exotic indigenous brew, is more than ever available for consumption and profit. Using Ziff & Rao's (1997), as well as Roth-Arriaza's (1997) theories of cultural appropriation, I explained how the borrowing of this cultural practice, which happens through the separation of the object (brew) from the knowledge that has come to be developed with it, has opened up the possibility for non-indigenous people to use the brew without any sort of training and yet, profit from it. Thus, in Chapter III, I exposed how; due to such a hegemonic discourse that took away an indigenous practice and coded it in a way that makes it useful within the neoliberal system; the use of Ayahuasca by non-indigenous-non-trained people can have detrimental consequences. To this end I used the experience and storytelling of 12 women who have participated in yagé and Ayahuasca ceremonies. As well as the knowledge coming from Yovany, the indigenous person with whom I have partaken yagé for more than seven years. Using the decolonial option, explained in Chapter I, I let the participants of my study tell their stories as freely as possible. Similarly, I made a conscious effort to engage with their stories through the elaboration of Chapter III and not to, instead, give them voice or (man-)explaining them, as it is usually done by Western scholars. The decolonial option also gave me the possibility to oppose the hegemonic discourse through the story telling of the Other, i.e. of women and indigenous people. As well as my own lived experience.

By contrasting the experiences of women participating in yagé ceremonies –mine included– and Ayahuasca ceremonies, I showed the importance of the set and settings developed by the indigenous communities from Colombia, when partaking the brew. As well as the presence of an experienced curandero who can master and manage the plant's element. Experience that cannot be achieved by

participating in a handful of yagé ceremonies. The training, as explained by Yovany in Chapter III, is performed by the plant's element in the company of a former curandero. It involves learning the chants, the prayers; how and when to use the saumerio and essence made of plants. The minute these ceremonies are reproduced by non-indigenous-non-trained people in different sets and settings, the chuma turned to be disturbing, scary and confusing. Which, in combination with the lack of training of the performer, can produce real damage to those who are participating, as it was the case of Eche, also presented in Chapter III. Eche's story is one of discomfort and anxiety, her experience was not managed by the people in charge of the Ayahuasca ceremony, who instead talked to her and told her that her experience was related with some issue she should have solved/worked out by herself. She felt helpless and contends that she has gone through some major anxiety, which prevents her from inhabiting public-noisy spaces, such as train stations, and the like, after she went through the Ayahuasca ceremony.

In totality, I demonstrated throughout this research project that coloniality(/modernity) is a reality which currently attempts to colonize and dominate Other's culture, not through violence, but through knowledge-production that can reach many, from the position of the "neutral" observer, as stated by Quijano (1992), Mignolo (2009) and many other Decolonial scholars. From the Hubris of the zero-point, Western scholars are still oppressing Other's knowledges, whilst appropriating their practices. In doing so proving Said's point when arguing that the production of "true" knowledge does have political consequences that Western scholars are overlooking (Said, 1978). Moreover, I used women's and indigenous knowledge to prove, and provide a counter-narrative in the attempt to make them accountable. But also, to demonstrate Tlostanova & Mignolo's (2009) assertion that one can twist the Western hegemonic narrative by producing epistemic contamination when speaking from the oppressed body-political location. I believe this is a never ending task, that of the decolonial thinker, who commits to the "unveiling of epistemic silences of Western epistemology and affirming the epistemic rights of the racially devalued, and decolonial options to allow the silences to build arguments

to confront those who take 'originality' as the ultimate criterion for the final judgment" (Mignolo, 2009, 162). But my hope is that this is my first contribution as a decolonial-feminist thinker.

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