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Smoky Boundaries, Permeable Selves: Exploring the Self in Relationship with the Amazonian Jungle Tobacco, Mapacho

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Abstract: As more Westerners travel to the Amazon Jungle to seek healing through the increasingly popular plant medicine, ayahuasca, they are exposed to an environment pervaded by the use of tobacco smoke. *Mapacho* is the name of the potent jungle tobacco that is central to the shamanic practices of Amazonian plant medicine healing, regarded locally not as a pathogen but rather as a potent ally: a spirit that can be co-opted as a purifier, healer, protector and teacher. In order to render these functions available to patients, *Mapacho* must be smoked, its efficacy, along with that of the shaman, activated through the absorption of each into the other. By means of this relationship, *Mapacho* smoke pervades culturally-recognised boundaries of the Western Self, simultaneously permeating both the internal and external realms that constitute the healing environment. In this paper, I explore the relationship between *Mapacho*, Peruvian Shipibo shamans, and Western patients, suggesting that the boundaries that are often conceived by Westerners to distinguish each from the other may well be as smoky as the medicine practices they engage in.

Keywords: Smoke, Mapacho, Shipibo, boundaries, Self-permeability

Rapidly escalating numbers of Westerners are travelling to the Peruvian Amazon, pursuing both healing and spiritual growth through the use of the psychedelic plant medicine, ayahuasca. While relatively well-informed of the possible experiences and outcomes they might encounter under the influence of ayahuasca when they arrive, most seekers are generally unprepared to interact with one of the most central and more complex characters in the pharmacopoeia of medicines that infiltrate the shamanic practices involved: the potent jungle tobacco, *Mapacho*. *Mapacho* is the common name in South America for *Nicotiana rustica*, reportedly ‘much more potent, chemically complex, and potentially hallucinogenic’ (McKenna 1984, 196) than *Nicotiana tabacum* (the tobacco that is widely used for commercial sale), containing anywhere up to 26 times the nicotine (Beyer 2009, 268). In Western medical and political discourses, tobacco smoke is widely conceptualised in terms of its chemical composition: a scourge on the public health system that, when taken into the boundaries of the physical body, constitutes pathogenic pollution. For the Shipibo shamans of the Ucayali region of Central Eastern Peru, called *Onanya*, the chemical constituents remain irrelevant. For them, *Mapacho* is an essential ally that is central to their healing processes. Like all of the plants that they work with, *Mapacho* has a spirit, known to the Shipibo as the *ibo*, the animating force that they ‘meet’ through the process of ‘dieting’ the plants—a practice that is central to their education as healers. They ingest *Mapacho*, initially in the form of a liquid infusion, and thereafter through the medium of smoke, to initiate and maintain what is arguably the most important relationship in their medical arsenal. As a physical medicine in its own right, *Mapacho* is applied to the body in various forms congruent with conventional medicine: as a salve for ulcerated skin, a digestive tonic, and a potent remedy for sinus maladies, for example. For many Western patients, while its diverse efficacy often proves surprising, its use in these ways generally remains philosophically unproblematic. In its form as smoke, however, pervasive cultural ontologies absorbed by Westerners tend to encourage vehement rejection of its use at worst and a clear ambivalence at best in response to an often difficult paradox that arises in the face of strikingly different cultural understandings. To confront tobacco smoke, not as a killer but rather as a healer, not as a plunderer of life force but as a source of immense benevolent power, and not as a pathogenic mass of chemicals but rather a vehicle for a form of consciousness with agency, is to necessarily confront conceptualisations of the Self that invite this smoke into being.

From a database comprised of almost 1,800 sources, Wilbert (1987, xv; 1991, 179) identifies a long-standing, integral relationship between South American shamanism and the use of tobacco. ‘Therapeutic shamanic blowing [of tobacco] is an age-old ritual of almost universal distribution’, he says (1991, 181), identifying ‘nearly 300 societies’ across the continent in which shamanic practitioners have used tobacco to effect protection and wellbeing for their communities for up to 8,000 years (Wilbert 1991, 179). Applied through the medium of smoke, mixed with saliva, ingested in the form of a juice or as a powder, and applied as a paste, tobacco is central to shamanic technologies of wellness (Wilbert 1991, 180). For the shaman, tobacco has historically served an additional function. Stressing a significant difference in tobacco use between Western ‘secular’ (i.e. recreational) users and shamanic specialists, Wilbert (1991, 180) observes that Amazonian shamans actively seek what

amounts to ‘acute nicotine intoxication’ in order to instigate trance-like states for the purpose of connecting with the spirit world. With this outcome a priority, they may ingest tobacco in an astonishing variety of ways: it can be smoked, chewed, drunk, licked, snuffed, and administered directly through application to the skin, through the rectum, and through the eyes (Wilbert 1987). As navigators of the spirit realms—and of life and death—the shaman’s status as a ‘Supernatural’ renders tobacco their ‘soul food’ (Wilbert 1987, 173; 1991, 182). In its role to support ‘shamanic agency in the cosmos’, Barbira Freedman (2010, 152) says that tobacco enables ‘access [to] the undifferentiated, transformative spaces in which the boundaries of human persons can be dissolved and redrawn’. It is this notion of bounded personhood that informs the exploration of tobacco use in this article.

Although not discussed in these terms by local practitioners, the management of permeable bodies is central to Amazonian shamanic healing techniques. Recognising compelling similarities between the notions of dividuality and partibility emerging from Melanesian ethnography in the 1990s, Vilaça (2005, 2009, 2011) has engaged in extensive comparisons between Melanesian and Amazonian ontologies of the self, with a particular focus on human-animal relations in Amazonia. Vilaça (2011, 247) notes that Amazonian bodies are ‘continually fabricated’ by the assimilation of ‘others’, particularly food, other humans (via processes of sociality), and the natural environment in an ongoing process of reformulation that renders personhood inherently unstable. While these themes are increasingly being explored from emic perspectives (see Vilaça, 2009, 2011 for comprehensive overviews), tobacco tends to be mentioned only cursorily in Amazonian ethnography (e.g. Brabec de Mori 2009; Campbell 1995; Gow 1996, 2001; Murphy 1995). Where more extensive investigations have been carried out on tobacco, the focus has remained on its uses, efficacy, sociocultural meanings, magico-religious and psychoactive effects (e.g. Dobkin de Rios 2009; Janiger and Dobkin de Rios 1973; Russell and Rahman 2015). While Barbira Freedman (2015) has presented some analysis on the use of tobacco across boundaries of the Self, a specific focus on Self-permeability, specifically the mutual effects of each of the participants in a tobacco healing session on the others, has not, to my knowledge been undertaken. My intention in this article is to investigate the interrelationship *between* tobacco, the shaman, and the patient, across the boundaries of each into the other. This occurs through the realms of spirit, and through the energetic realms in which the shaman’s work is most potent, where selves become less easily defined through processes of hyper-dynamic interaction and transformation.

This paper is an exploration of the power inherent in the relationship between the Self and *Mapacho*, activated by the invitation of smoke into the personal landscape of the smoker, and the possible implications this relationship reveals with regard to the conceptualisations of the Self in relationship with an environmental ‘Other’.

The Temple of The Way of Light and Ayahuasca

To understand the diverse and complex uses of *Mapacho*, it is helpful to contextualise it within the setting of shamanic plant-medicine healing as a whole. I carried out fieldwork for 12 months to November 2013 at the Temple of the Way of Light (‘the Temple’), a Shipibo

Ayahuasca Plant Medicine Centre located in the Amazon jungle, just outside of Iquitos, Peru. The Temple is a purpose-built facility developed and run predominantly by Westerners for use by Westerners who are seeking healing through the increasingly popular method of ingesting the psychedelic plant medicine, ayahuasca, within the context of ceremony run by indigenous Shipibo *Onanya*. In these ceremonies, the *Onanya* and the spirits of the plants work together to effect healing. *Mapacho*, in this context, is a constant companion.

‘Ayahuasca’ is a Quechua name most commonly translated to mean ‘vine of the dead’ or ‘vine of the soul’. It variously refers to the woody *banisteriopsis caapi* vine that grows in the Amazon, as well as to the bitter, viscous brew consumed for ceremonial use that is produced by boiling this vine with the leaves of the *psychotria viridis* or *chacrana* plant together (commonly referred to as ‘the medicine’),¹ and to the spirit or *ibo* of the brew that ceremony participants may ‘meet’ under its effects. The combination of beta-carboline alkaloids in the ayahuasca vine and the potent psychedelic, N,N-dimethyltryptamine (DMT) in the *chacrana* act together to produce strong purgative (purifying), psychedelic and divinatory effects.² The Shipibo name for ayahuasca is *Oni*, meaning ‘knowledge’ or ‘wisdom’. In its capacity as a metaphorical ‘bridge’ between the human and spirit worlds, in addition to being a teacher and healer in its own right, ayahuasca is essential to mobilise the active relationships that develop between the *Onanya*—‘one who has wisdom’ (Temple of the Way of Light, 2017)—and the plant spirits they work with to perform their healing.

Dietas

In order to gain their knowledge, an apprentice *Onanya* undergoes a series of *dietas* or diets in which they ‘meet’ the spirits of the plants under the guidance of a *maestro* (Spanish for ‘teacher’ or ‘master’). A vast amount of their knowledge is attained through their direct relationships with the plant spirits. To ‘open’ a *dieta*, the apprentice usually drinks ayahuasca with their *maestro* who will facilitate the original connection between the apprentice and the plant spirit. The apprentice then imbibes a preparation over the following days, most commonly in the form of a tea or a tonic made from the plant they are dieting, and retreats into the jungle for anywhere from a few days up to a year or even longer. There, they remain in social isolation, often eating only grilled plantains and *boquichico* (a small fresh water fish), and drinking only water. This asceticism acts to transform the *Onanya* into a more plant-like form, thus allowing them to interact with the plant’s spirit (Brabec de Mori 2009; Gow 1996). It is mainly through their (day and night) dreams that the plant spirit will approach them and teach them the skills they require. While generally humanoid in form when they present to the mind of the dieter, the plant spirits can appear with decidedly un-human features. One of the large trees, *Ayahuma*, for example, manifests with its face in its

¹ Many other admixture plants can be included in the ayahuasca brew (see Schultes, Hofmann and Ratsch 2001, 134), however these two basic ingredients were the only ones used at the Temple.

² For a description of the complex chemical activity central to ayahuasca’s effects, see Callaway, et al. (1999). For the latest overview of the possible therapeutic benefits of ayahuasca, see Frecska, Bokor and Winkelman (2016). For an in-depth account of the phenomenology of the ayahuasca experience, see Shanon (2010) and Metzner (1999). For an overview of the many and diverse ways ayahuasca has been historically used throughout South America, see Harner (1973).

chest. Once a *dieta* is completed, the spirits continue to work with the *Onanya* during ceremonies in their capacity as ‘doctors’, imparting information and guidance for the purpose of healing a patient. As part of their education, the spirits may impart songs or *ikaros* to the *Onanya*. Singing the *ikaros* is the main method used by an *Onanya* to ‘dispense’ medicine during healing ceremonies, effectively sung to ‘weave’ the medicine of the plants into patients through the mediums of sound and intention.

Meeting Mapacho

In a *Mapacho dieta*, the tobacco is initially imbibed in the form of a liquid infusion. Based on my own experience of this *dieta*, my understanding is that its preliminary functions are to both purify and to teach.³ When the liquid is first consumed it often targets areas of physical pain or energetic congestion, considerably exacerbating them before acting as a purgative and, almost violently at first, inducing vomiting and/or diarrhoea, which acts to expel the *mal* or the ‘bad’ from the body. This act of purification can effect healing for the dieter as recalcitrant, ‘dis-ease’-producing ‘debris’ is expelled from the body. This transforms the dieter into a more ‘refined’ energetic form better capable of communication with the plant’s spirit. The lucid dreams that may follow tend to be filled with rich, detailed, symbolic learning experiences that can feel as ‘real’ as if lived in the waking state. Within the dream state, the spirit of *Mapacho* can appear in order to impart learning. For some Western dieters, *Mapacho* manifests as a ‘masculine’ presence whereas for others, the spirit is experienced as ‘feminine’. The *Onanya*, in the rare cases that they discuss the forms of the plant spirits, say that they are generally androgynous and can show up in various forms depending on the state and stage of the dieter. One *Onanya* did reveal, however, that *Mapacho* always presents as a ‘large’ person.

Once a relationship is established with *Mapacho*, its maintenance takes on a unique form in comparison to the other plants. Unlike other plants, which may be consumed periodically as food, medicine, or in beverage form subsequent to the completion of a diet—a practice that is not necessarily required for the *Onanya* to undertake at the time they wish to co-opt the healing potential of the plant—the relationship with *Mapacho* is consistently reaffirmed through the regular intake of smoke.⁴ *Mapacho* smoke is usually taken only into the mouth rather than down into the lungs, and it is through the comingling of smoke and Self at this juncture that they enter a mutually empowering working relationship. Just as the passage of smoke reveals its simultaneous existence both within and outside of the smoker, the relationship between the *Onanya* and *Mapacho* expands the existential boundaries of each. The *Onanya* acts as a metaphorical ‘chimney’ (Connor 2008, 4), utilising smoke to connect the realms of the interior to the unbounded realms of the spiritual world. Rather than

³ The *Onanya* holds sacred the learning they receive from the plants during their *dietas* and most are reluctant to share it. My discussion is based on the information that was shared from Westerners who dieted *Mapacho* and from my own experience. It should be noted that our *dietas* were usually ‘introductory’ in nature; descriptions from researchers such as Wilbert (1991) indicate that tobacco initiations can be extreme, often involving near-death and ‘ego loss’ or ‘ego death’ experiences (for further information on ‘ego loss’ see Leary, Metzner and Alpert 2008 [1964]; and for ‘ego death’ see Grof and Halifax 1978).

⁴ The notable exception to this is the necessity to imbibe the ayahuasca brew for the purpose of mobilising its effects.

rendering these realms separate, however, this act simultaneously stimulates an embodied experience of the unbounded spiritual realms accessible *within* the Self while enabling a perceptual experience of the Self as expanding beyond previously recognised boundaries of ordinary consciousness, ultimately revealing each as part of the other. Simultaneously, *Mapacho*'s agentive effects expand into to the embodied realms of the *Onanya* and their patient(s).

The *Onanya* co-opts *Mapacho* as a source of power: an experience of personality, agency and wisdom that is recognised *through* the internal landscape (of embodied consciousness) as arising from the Self *infused with* an entity other than the Self. The efficacy of *Mapacho* is simultaneously mobilised through this same relationship. Rather than participation *between* discrete and diverse entities as conceptualised by Lévi-Bruhl (1985), interactions of the Selves involved here more closely reflect those of ecological phenomena (Abram 1996), each absorbing and expressing the other phenomenologically through 'spontaneous sensorial engagement' where the 'perceiving body and that which it perceives' effectually become inseparable (Abram 1996, 57). Ultimately, the 'power' and thus the reputation of the *Onanya* emerges from their ability to facilitate and maintain this connection (with *Mapacho* as with all of the plant spirits) rendering the power of the Self and that of the Other inseparable; neither can manifest for the patient without the other. This transformative effect of interrelationship is foundational to the multiple uses for which *Mapacho* is engaged.

The Power of Smoke

Apart from its consumption in its form as smoke, another unique aspect of *Mapacho* — as one of numerous plant medicines in the vast dispensary available to the *Onanya* — is the diverse range of functions it has. As an enticement, a purifier, a regulator, a healer and a protector, it stands alone as the constant that is incorporated into virtually every phase of ceremonial procedure and act of healing. It does not act in isolation, however, but is mobilised as part of a co-operative with the *Onanya*'s intention and through their body/bodies. In this way, *Mapacho* and the *Onanya* act less like discrete 'places' that meet at their boundaries, and rather more like what Bateson (1987 [1972]) refers to as 'contexts', Buckminster Fuller (in Buhner 2014, 232) as 'scenarios' and Buhner (2014, 235) as 'living field[s]', each permeable to the other, adapting to and initiating change in the other through their relationship of blended interdependence.

While ayahuasca is the 'bridge' that allows for connection between the human and spirit worlds through its effect on human consciousness, *Mapacho* is the lure that tempts the plant spirits to 'cross that bridge'. As one *Onanya* told me: 'Well, in my conversations with the medicines, I've seen that they need just a small gift: the *mapachito*, the tobacco. That is what they want. Nothing else.'⁵ Tobacco is known across many Indigenous cultures for its ability to attract the attention of, and to feed, the spirit world (see, for example, Beyer 2009, 268; Barbira Freedman 2015, 73; Wilbert 1987, 172-7). Because it is unavailable in their realm,

⁵ The Spanish suffix, *ito*, indicates either smallness or, as in this case, an affectionate reference: 'my little tobacco'.

Wilbert (1991, 182) says, the spirits remain reliant on humans for their sustenance, ultimately rendering the shaman as ‘partner of the gods’ in a reciprocal relationship enabled by their control of ‘the power of the tobacco alkaloid’ (Wilbert 1987, 182). Peter Gow (1996) indicates that many of the river and forest spirits despise humans, particularly their scent. To overcome this, shamans ingest plants such as ayahuasca and tobacco, he says, which allows them to become more like a spirit and changes their bodily scent, thus seducing the plant spirits and enticing them into co-operation. Shipibo *Onanya* regularly offer gifts of *Mapacho* in its physical form, placing it in the dirt at the base of the plants that they have dieted or that they intend to use therapeutically, in order to give thanks and to maintain close relationships with the plants’ *ibo*. In its smoke form, *Mapacho* also acts as a ‘perfume’ (Latin for ‘through smoke’) that attracts the plant spirits (Gow in Beyer 2009, 268).

One *Onanya* explained that the elemental spirits called upon are neither inherently benevolent nor malevolent, but rather encompass the whole and can thus be co-opted to both heal and to wreak destruction. When they have the attention of the spirit world through their use of *Mapacho*, therefore, the intentions of the smoker become paramount. In this interaction, the smoke acts as an amplifier of the smoker’s intentions; the spirit world is now paying attention, and through this enhanced connection, the *Onanya* and *Mapacho* form a working relationship.

Although it has many important roles, I suggest that *Mapacho*’s capacity for protection is possibly its most important function. While neo-shamanic understandings of plant medicine ceremonies are developing with a strong focus on love and light for Westerners, Amazonian shamanism is a potentially dangerous practice, often based in jealousy and envy that manifest in war-like confrontations in the spiritual realms. Much of the illness that an *Onanya* traditionally treats is understood in terms of social unrest and troubled relationships (Brabec de Mori 2009). Even many of the physical ailments that present to them are conceptualised as being a result of malicious intention that has been ‘sent’ to the sick individual by another person, often via a *brujo* (a ‘witch doctor’ or ‘sorcerer’) who sends a *virote* (energetic ‘dart’) into the energetic field of the sufferer. During a ceremony, *Mapacho* acts as a sentinel, guarding the *Onanya*, the patient, and the ceremonial space. An *Onanya* must also protect themselves from jealous or malicious *brujos* at all times, even outside of ceremony, or risk ‘attacks’ that can make them sick or even kill them. To do so, they blow smoke over themselves consistently throughout the day, and even throughout the night. While they may utilise the services of other elemental spirits to stand guard for them while they sleep, *Mapacho* is by far their most important and effective protection, activated through the smoke, which they wake to apply every few hours. This protective capacity also infiltrates many of its other uses.

Through the preparation phases for ayahuasca ceremonies, both when the ayahuasca brew is being prepared and when it is about to be consumed, *Mapacho* smoke is blown into the medicine and the ceremonial space to inject intention, to activate plant agency (through calling in the spirits), to purify and to protect. Thereafter, once a ceremony has begun, two of the most important techniques used by the *Onanya* (in addition to their *ikaros*) are (1) the

chupar and (2) the *soplar*, which they perform using either *agua de florida* (floral water) or *Mapacho*.

(1) *Chupar* means ‘to suck’. If the *Onanya* can see that there is something (such as a *virote*) stuck in their patient’s body or energy system that is not responding well to the *ikaros*, they might use this technique to remove the obstruction. Before performing a *chupe*, however, the *Onanya* must act to protect themselves from the malevolent energy. When they engage *Mapacho* for this task, they do so by ‘swallowing’ the smoke in order to activate the ‘phlegm’ that they develop during *dietas*. Beyer (2009, 210) states that:

‘the shaman’s phlegm [is] the physical manifestation of shamanic power within the body, used both as a defense [*sic*] against magical attack and as a container for the magic darts that are the shaman’s principal weapon.’

Swallowed smoke is used to pull the phlegm from the stomach or chest to the throat where it acts as a shield. Once activated, the *Onanya* physically sucks on the patient’s body at the location of the obstruction and then spits the removed blockage into a bowl.⁶

(2) *Soplar* means ‘to blow’ and this technique is used at the completion of a healing session. The *Onanya* may blow *Mapacho* smoke into the patient’s hands and into the crown of their head to protect the medicine that has been woven into the body through the *ikaros*, and to seal it inside. Smoke can also be used in this way to carry additional medicine into the patient.

Mapacho can be smoked to enhance the effects of ayahuasca if the brew has not produced very strong effects, and it is also used to calm the effects when the patient’s response to the ayahuasca has been too strong. In this way, it works through the *Onanya* as a regulator of the relationship between ayahuasca and the drinker. Similarly, if a patient becomes upset or panicked during ceremony, *Mapacho* is blown over them as a calmativ and as an instrument of increased focus.

Through the act of smoking *Mapacho*, human selves, as conceptualised and experienced within Shipibo ontologies, are intrinsically changed.⁷ While they do not speak of this

⁶ While I did not hear it mentioned in the field, Wilbert (1987, 190) indicates that the skin of a patient is understood to become relatively permeable to tobacco smoke due to the affinity between the smoke and the ‘pathogenic spirits inside the patient, who take pleasure in partaking of the drug’. Through this relationship, the malevolent energy is mobilised, enhancing the possibility of easier extraction.

⁷ It is important to note that the concept that entities exist separately from the Self is culturally informed. In discourses derived from Eastern mysticism, for example, the ‘soul’ that constitutes the essence of the individual Self is indistinguishable from all else in creation, which is equally born of the same essence. Based on such conceptualisations, and further incorporating rationalist Western scientific understandings, some Westerners at the Temple maintained the notion of the Self as a locus of the entire Universe where everything exists within. Rather than recognising the connection with a discrete ‘plant spirit’, they were inclined to interpret such experiences in terms of chemically enabled access to other aspects of their own consciousness; other aspects of the Self. While this interpretation is valuable in considering theories of the relative permeability of the Self,

relationship in the terms that I will now present, their representations, I suggest, can be understood as follows. The ingestion of smoke renders the human Self more attractive to plant spirits due to its resulting metamorphosis into a more spiritual, aromatically superior form. Protection of the Self from malevolent Others through the ingestion of smoke results not so much from a physical barrier—smoke dissipates quickly—but is rather elicited from within a Self that has effectively been infiltrated with the protective agent, rendering it a protected space. *Mapacho* smoke, then, acts to reconstitute the Self, potentially making it more permeable to the effects of other plants, and/or fortifying the Self against attack and overwhelm. In each of these contexts within the healing environment, intention (mind) merges with the smoke (physical/body), which is infused with the plant's *ibo* (spirit), comingling as they emanate from the *Onanya* and pervade the body and Self of the patient. All participants, then, are rendered existentially transformed as they emerge through the shamanic practices, entwined with each-Other.

Smoky Boundaries of a Permeable Self

In this section I move beyond the ontologies of the Shipibo to view the intrinsic relationships that evolve within the context of ayahuasca plant medicine through the lens of anthropological theory. I explore notions of the Self in relationship with *Mapacho* in terms of its relative permeability. Although there is extensive work in anthropology and the human sciences exploring more holistic understandings of the Western Self (see, for example, Appuhamilage 2017; Chopra 2007; Van Wolputte 2004), ideals of the corporeal individual as 'a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe' (Geertz 1984, 126) remain pervasive, particularly in public health anti-smoking discourses (Dennis 2011). Within these discourses, conceptualisations born of the Cartesian dualities of mind and matter have led to practices of reductionism prevalent in mainstream health discourses in Western society, and thus to pervasive experiences of the Self for Westerners, which posit a separable body, a (rational) mind, and (sometimes, but not always) a spirit. Human and Nature are similarly experienced as dichotomous, easily distinguishable by the physical boundaries that separate them.

Mary Douglas' (2008 [1966]) work has been influential in expanding the notion of the boundaries of the Self beyond the physical and into the conceptual realms. Douglas argues that boundaries of the Self and societal boundaries are metaphorically intertwined. Ritual, she says, provides access to potential power by facilitating movement of these boundaries. Douglas' representations of boundaries incorporate descriptions that allude to them in terms that indicate their relative 'solidity'. Focused more on the boundaries of the body that accommodates the incarnated Self, Douglas writes that boundaries can be 'pulled this way or that' (2008 [1966], 150), 'press[ed] on' (2008 [1966], 152) and 'transgress[ed]' (2008 [1966], 199). Her representations indicate that boundaries can be breached or permeated—specifically via the vulnerable orifices of the body that allow physical matter to cross them through the processes ingestion and excretion. Her symbolic representation conceives of

space limitations necessitate that I limit this discussion to Shipibo understandings that posit plant spirits as discrete (which were largely adopted by many Westerners in my fieldsite).

boundaries of the Self that are pliable—as indicated in their ability to expand to encompass non-ordinary states of consciousness and then contract again after a ritual. They remain, in her descriptions, however, relatively robust. Consideration of the relationship between the *Onanya*, *Mapacho* and the patient suggests that there is an opportunity to modify this notion of the boundaries of the Self to conceive of them not only as malleable, but also as intrinsically permeable. I suggest that the boundaries of the Self function more like a membrane, rendering the Self available to intersperse with Others in ways that indelibly incorporate (and effectively alter) each in ongoing relationships of energetic exchange.

Taking the physical form of the plant within the (physical) boundaries of the Self is an important act of establishing a relationship with the *ibo* of the plant by the *Onanya*. By imbibing the physical form of the plant, its energetic form permeates the matrix of the Self, initiating a relationship that acts beyond that of a metaphorical ‘bridge’, rather blending the multiple (previously perceived as discrete) entities in ongoing connection within the practitioner’s Self. Thereafter, the spirit of the plant and the dieter potentially have access to each other, even when the plant’s physical presence is absent, as occurs in the dream-state. Conceptualising the Self in this regard brings to mind representations of the ‘dividual’ person proffered distinctly by Marriott (1976) and Strathern (1988). Strathern (1988) describes the ‘multiply-authored’ Melanesian Self as one constituted by the substances and actions of other community members through their relationships, while Marriott (1976, 111) similarly recognises the ‘dividual’ Hindu Self that exists in relation to others through a mutual transference of ‘particles of their own coded substances—essences, residues, or other active influences’ such as blood, food and knowledge. In both of these cases, the energetic imprint of an-Other and/or their actions intermingles with that of the Self, rendering individuals inextricably intertwined, their conceptual boundaries indefinable. Marriott (1976, 111) suggests that as a result of this relationship, the ‘nature’ of one Self can emerge through another. This phenomenon can be identified in the case that an *Onanya* effectively ‘expresses’ *Mapacho* and the medicine of other plants they have dieted through the mediums of their *ikaros*, the *agua de florida* and their smoke. I would suggest, then, that the body need not stand only as a metaphorical symbol for other bounded systems as suggested by Douglas (1996 [1970]) but, following Long (2015, 32), can equally represent the ‘ultimate Natural Symbol’ for unbounded, permeable systems.

Conclusion

According to Durkheim (1912), the most significant symbolic boundary is that which demarcates the realm of the sacred from that of the profane. Just as smoke metaphorically straddles the worlds of the physical and metaphysical by virtue of its ethereal physicality, the use of *Mapacho* by an *Onanya* acts to intermingle the spiritual and secular realms, rendering that boundary diminished. The Western Self is not immune to this interconnection. The *Onanya* and *Mapacho* permeate the patient through their healing acts, which fundamentally alters the patient’s embodied experience of being. Infused by Other, the Self becomes multiply-constituted. As a result, it continues to transform through the phases of integration that occur after the healing event as the indelible imprints of interrelationship are

incorporated within. Each of the participants intertwine, insinuating themselves more in terms of ‘living fields’ than of discrete, bounded entities.

Many *pasajeros* arrive at the Temple with an impassioned contempt of tobacco smoke. Like the imbibed plant in the *dieta*, pervasive public health discourses on its dangers have left an imprint on many Westerners who encounter tobacco smoke as part of their plant medicine rituals. While some prove amenable to embracing novel cultural interpretations that recognise tobacco as an important ally, many remain reluctant to attribute less danger to a more potent variety of a substance they have long been encouraged to demonise. During my fieldwork I noted that its use was regularly shunned, often only tenuously tolerated as a consequence of perceived Indigenous ignorance. The vilification of smoking in contemporary medical and political discourses leads many who go to the Amazon for healing to avoid smoking *Mapacho*, even when they, themselves, are engaging in plant *dietas*. For the Shipibo *Onanya*, the rejection of *Mapacho* is one of the most dangerous practices of all, removing an essential source of connection, regulation, and protection. For them, healing is only possible for a Self that is available to the most intimate connection with Others. The relative permeability of the Self, however, is something that is closely monitored and guarded. While the application of plant medicine requires a high degree of permeability, the Shipibo recognise danger where protections are not rigorously maintained. *Mapacho*, more than any other plant, is central to the practices that ensure both efficacy and safety, not only in its physical form, but also as an essence that necessarily intermingles through the realms of Selves.

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