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Ayahuasca's Attractions and Distractions

Examining Sexual Seduction in Shaman-Participant Interactions

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Ayahuasca tourism is a rapidly growing set of enterprises in which participants and shamans become global tourists or visitors within their own towns or countries, or abroad, in an explosion of diverse encounters. This variable set of hosts and guests partakes in shamanic rituals in which the ayahuasca brew is consumed within ritual settings with the aim of producing hallucinogenic visions deemed to be personally beneficial to all participants.[1]

Whereas only a few decades ago, the ayahuasca experience required that a lone traveler make his or her way to the forests of South America, now notions of local, global, space, and place converge as shamans and tourists travel throughout the world to perform and participate in a diversity of ayahuasca ceremonies. For example, an eighty-year-old Shipibo shaman who once mostly healed within his community in Pucallpa, Peru, began to travel nationally and then around the world, while his apprenticing son began to appear in international films as a healer and opened a tourist's lodge. Some newcomers to the rituals, also interested in bringing ayahuasca to a larger public, have introduced it in dance raves.[2] Not only are more people eager to participate in ceremonies, but also more individuals want to become *ayahuasqueros* (shamans who heal with ayahuasca). Furthermore, the ingredients of the brew are now available for purchase on the Internet.[3] Moreover, many Euro-American ayahuasca tourists who have apprenticed shamans are now based in South America and travel throughout the world performing ayahuasca rituals. These are but a few examples of the novel expansion of ayahuasca ritual practices.

The inventive global expansion of ayahuasca rituals creates a set of encounters that bring together individuals with highly divergent epistemologies and experiences, creating a sundry montage of cognitive, emotional, and practical cultural systems rife with contradictions and potential misunderstandings. Although these are also settings for positive exchanges, as would be expected, the

convergence of translocal and transnational flows of communication, knowledge, and practices also comes with its challenges.

This study focuses on a more obscure, yet growing, consideration of what happens when various belief systems are brought together within transnational ritual contexts by examining the relationship between sex, seduction, and gendered power relations in the context of ayahuasca rituals. By "sex" and "seduction," I refer to sexual imagery, meanings, attraction, arousal, and/or the physical sexual act in relation to the ayahuasca ceremony or ceremonial space. Initially, I will examine the historical, symbolic, and practical relationships between ayahuasca and sex. I will focus on how, in the historical and contemporary associations of sex with ayahuasca, the adoption and reinvention of ayahuasca rituals is part of the ongoing challenges that ayahuasca usage and practices undergo. Through an analysis of local and global narratives, the paper also engages with Amerindian epistemologies and theories of perspectivism, countertransference, and "the male gaze" to examine local concerns and interactions between shamans, their apprentices, and ayahuasca participants, and how they variably position themselves as authorities, intermediaries, and gendered individuals. In the broadest sense, I will explore gender relations between shamans and local as well as nonlocal participants and the resultant ensuing debates about sex and sexuality as discussed among locals and web-based audiences. Importantly, this discussion is not meant to detract from the legitimacy ayahuasca rituals deserve.

Ayahuasca Tourism

There is a growing literature on ayahuasca tourism from a social science perspective.[4] Several authors in this volume describe how ayahuasca rituals have spread in today's post-traditional environment, referring to the new non-indigenous contexts in which these rituals increasingly take place. By focusing on sex and gender, I hope to highlight how flexible, yet fragile, social interactions can be in the context of health and healing through ayahuasca ceremonies worldwide. I will examine the way in which many ayahuasqueros and participants creatively use or reinvent these rituals for accommodating or imposing local and global conditions and desires, including gender relations.

The central locus of this paper is Puerto Maldonado, Peru, a regional Amazonian capital and its environs, where I have conducted fieldwork over the last two decades, particularly among Ese Eja.[5] Most individuals interviewed either reside(d) in or visited this area, unless indicated otherwise. In this chapter I refer only to male ayahuasqueros. This does not imply that women do not drink or play key roles in ayahuasca ceremonies; merely that here, women do not identify themselves as ayahuasqueras.

Figure 10.1. Puerto Maldando, Madre de Dios, Peru. Photograph by Daniela Peluso.

I have previously provided an overview of the predicaments of ayahuasca tourism as a contribution toward understanding how ayahuasca tourism affects the localities in which such encounters take place.[6] I examined local concerns and interactions between shamans and participants regarding the recent proliferation of ayahuasqueros, the sanitization of rituals, and the discounting of potential roles of malevolence and conflict within ayahuasca tourist rituals. In forthcoming work, I describe ayahuasca ceremonies as *hypertraditions*, whereby the tradition flourishes and intensifies within a context of amplified contact and conflict, as occurs in global tourism.[7] In brief, my past research concluded that ayahuasca tourists tend to be uninformed about the local politics of ayahuasca and how their roles as tourists can negatively affect the local social and political economies of health, particularly as these traditions grow increasingly popular and widespread.

Ayahuasca and Sex

Although a discussion of sex and ayahuasca may appear provocative, it is not a novel subject, since sex has a historical context. Thus, before I discuss sex in terms of its relationship to the recent proliferation of ayahuasqueros and tourism, I will underscore the significant pan-Amazonian role sex has in ayahuasca

symbolism, discourses, and practices. First, sexual abstinence is part of a broader pan-Amazonian epistemological outlook that acknowledges the existence of cross-realities replete with sexual imagery and an ethos of appropriate sexual behaviors, of which abstinence is only one. To comprehend this, one must understand how indigenous notions of personhood, agency, and transformation are intrinsic to Amerindian ontologies. This entails paying close attention to the invisible, intangible, and inalienable aspect of all "life." For instance, for Ese Eja, the world we live in is a Kantian inversion whereby humanity—who we really are—is but a symptom or intuition of reality. Ese Eja maintain that we do not perceive reality ("the world as it really is"); instead *it* perceives us through multiple invisible life forms. As such, animals and plants are seen as having personhood (with its ensuing sociality) and individual perspectives. Viveiros de Castro's theory of *multinatural perspectivism* clearly sets forth how, in Amazonia, intentionality and consciousness form the multiple subjects of humans, animals, plants, and spirits and their ability to see each other differently.[8] Concomitantly, multiplicity (the fluidity of human identity and the permeability between realities) and transformation (the ability to change between various singular and plural forms) are prominent themes among Lowland South Americans, as demonstrated through dreams and creation narratives.[9] The taking of ayahuasca, certain states of illness, dreams, solitary hunting, and extreme negative emotions are some of several states of consciousness that Amazonians consider to be crossing points between realities. This is why a person's behavior in ayahuasca visions is not considered to be exclusively hallucinatory, but rather a crossing over of one's self from one reality to another—realities that have implicit effects on one another. Hence, one way the otherwise invisible world of multiple personhoods that influence human reality is revealed, accessed, and consulted is through ayahuasca visions. Ayahuasca links the "seeing," "learning," and "knowing" that transpire through visions to ultimately see the world as it truly is.

Second, sexual abstinence is part of an overall *dieta* that indigenous and mestizo ayahuasca shamans undergo, restricting certain food and activities such eating sugar, strong spices, and having sex.[10] Sexual abstinence is expected of ayahuasqueros who are in training; it is a time in which they are focusing on acquiring and sharpening their skills and most likely enduring exigent trials and quests with other beings in nonvisible realities. For instance, it is common for novice Shuar shamans to refrain from sex for five to six months to ensure a successful apprenticeship whereby they will gain the power to harm or heal.[11] In turn, sexual restraint, for Machiguenga, demonstrates a commitment to socialize with the spirit worlds.[12] Usually, once shamans are initiated, they are no longer required to abstain from sex for such long periods of time, but may choose to do so when they undergo specific additional dietas they deem appropriate.

In light of perspectivism, which considers how nonhuman subjects see human activities differently from how humans see them, sexual abstinence can be understood as reflecting an awareness and sensitivity toward other selves, as an "expression for the bond of 'community' with the spirits."[13] Narratives about relationships between different types of beings indicate that sexual desire—its implications and consequences—defines much of human and nonhuman social relations. Abstinence can also deemphasize the incompatibilities between human and nonhuman others. For instance, abstinence avoids the alleged repugnant stench of human sex that other beings find offensive[14] and that might cause them to perceive human activity as something different from their own. This perspectivist outlook further concurs with why indigenous hunters often refrain from sex, claiming that the resulting stench interferes with their ability to seduce nonhuman beings; in contrast, they focus on smelling good and acts of cleanliness.[15]

Third, there is a complex relationship overall between sex and the ingestion of plants or animals, a relationship that many ethnographers have identified and explored.[16] One aspect of this relationship is expressed through sexual abstinence as a way to prevent food pollution, ensuring that food is appropriately collected and ingested. For instance, among Ese Eja, particular animal and plant foods harvested by adults must be entirely consumed before the harvester can have sex; otherwise the foods become pathogenic.[17] Once harvested, food must be stored away from places where people copulate so as to prevent contamination.

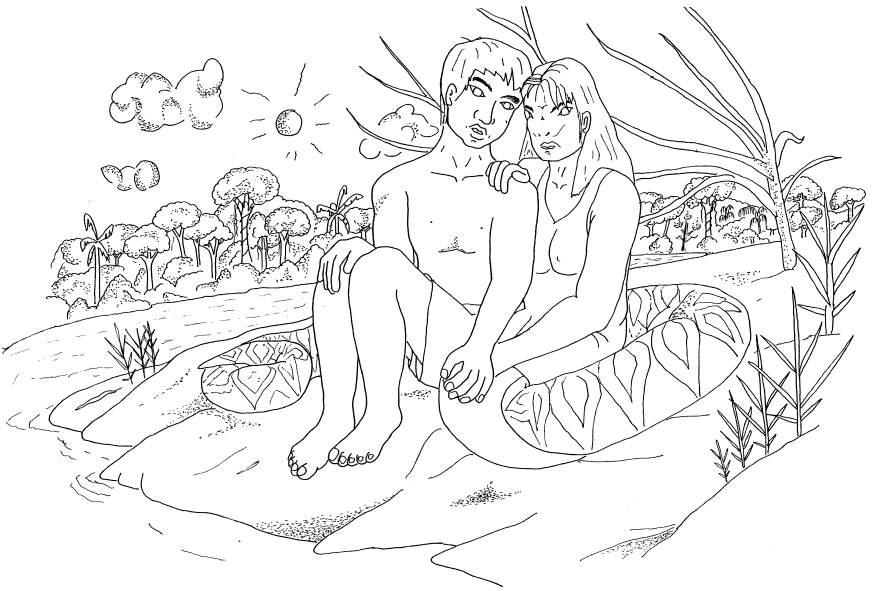

Figure 10.2. Human man with anaconda woman. Sketch by Sydney Solizonquehua, commissioned by Daniela Peluso.

People commonly express this threat by describing plants and animals as spirits prone to "jealousy" or "possessiveness." Amazonians take great precautions to abide by notions set forth by animal and plant personhood, what I have thus far attributed to perspectivism, in order to ensure their own safety and well-being.

The ayahuasca vine is widely recognized as being a female spirit and, in relation to shamans-in-training, is often referred to as being "jealous."[18] Sex can further taint the relationships that apprentices are attempting to form with nonhuman beings and the surroundings that the ayahuasca introduces them to in their visions. Among Amerindian peoples, jealousy is a key negative emotion that underpins most forms

Figure 10.3. Ayahuasca is widely recognized as being a female spirit. Photograph by Daniela Peluso.

of exchange, including gender relations. Yet jealousy, as Amazonians speak about it, can also be an admirable quality, especially when expressed in regard to children. For instance, in many contexts jealousy signifies a sense of caring for someone, guardianship, supervision, protection, or a feeling of responsibility. In this sense, the spirit of ayahuasca is seen as protecting its obliging apprentices.

The gendering of plants and animals is another significant, yet scantly addressed, topic[19] whereby shamans and ayahuasca participants can form allegiances with plant and animal spirits on the basis of their own notions of gender and kinship relations. Male shamans use notions of seduction to describe how they establish and negotiate affinity with invisible beings. These descriptions are not mere tropes but portray practical and strategic relations that mirror male attitudes toward women as they are narrated through stories about seducing women or hunting prey. These relations of exchange whereby sex and seduction are mediums to gain meat and women, or means to gain women through meat, have been referred to as an "economy of sex"[20] and are contentiously debated in the Amazonian literature.[21] Although there is no consensus, it is minimally agreed that sex is a figurative, metaphorical, and practical trope whose significance is conveyed in the everyday lives of Amazonian peoples.

Finally, notions of sensuality and seduction are also predominant within many ayahuasca visions and the discourses that surround them. Although seduction is a way of engaging in social relationships, sex with nonhumans simultaneously carries the potential threat of transgression and pollution. However, several shamans have described how, while under the influence of ayahuasca, their libidinal responses increase, which they experience through a state of arousal that they consciously control. One shaman described how, throughout his training, he was warned to avoid having sex with nonvisible others because they were probably traps set up by rivals or enemies who wished him to "fall" and "lose his power." Locally, shamans and participants alike are also cautioned to resist following beautiful beings appearing in their visions, since these beings will divert them from their intended path through inherently dangerous sensual temptations. There are many cautionary tales against having sex with nonhumans for fear of permanent transformation into another type of being no longer able to return to a human form.[22] One common narrative is that of mermaids attempting to seduce men, and of pink dolphins attempting to seduce women.[23] A Shipibo-trained shaman described how only very experienced shamans might one day, in their visions, meet and get to know a woman who, over time, will become his spiritual wife and sexual partner. However, there are strict rules that this relationship not interfere with the shaman's terrestrial life or produce any cosmic children. Although for shamans there is the possibility that sex or sensual experiences might lead to beneficial exchanges with other beings, it may also drain them of their vitality and cause their death.[24]

Tourist-centered ayahuasca ceremonies have transformed the legacies of local rituals through continuity and reinterpretation. For instance, when tourism websites refer to the "spirit of ayahuasca" as being jealous, they refer only to its possessive connotation; one website advises, "The conscious spirit of Ayahuasca desires our undivided attention when in her presence. Temporary sexual abstinence might also be seen as an offering of one's higher intention to the Divine."[25] This is a one-dimensional understanding of what jealousy and sexual abstinence mean in the local context. As already mentioned, rather than possession, jealousy can signify a caring form of protection.

Also, in local ayahuasca contexts, participants often abstain from sex as part of the diet they undergo for apprentice training or to treat difficult illnesses. Although most tourists are not training to be shamans, numerous ayahuasca tourism websites informing ayahuasca tourists of what to expect during ceremonies advise prolonged sexual abstinence. Perhaps the Western tourist's self-prescribed sexual abstinence suits the script of his or her own view of the ayahuasca quest as an adventurous exotic journey,[26] as indicated on numerous blog sites where ideas of celibacy complement New Age ideas about spirituality and self-healing, and individual self-empowerment is valued and emphasized.[27] Returning from an ayahuasca lodge in Puerto Maldonado, a female tourist exclaimed, "I am a shaman, I now need to diet like one. This will keep me pure." In an interview, she indicated that her assertive, self-imposed stance on celibacy was influenced by her Buddhist beliefs. Some websites also encourage sexual abstinence as a way to conserve energy and invest oneself fully in the ritual by focusing on spirituality rather than physicality.[28] In sum, Amazonian ideas of sexual abstinence are often combined with Western notions of purity, monkhood, and New Age enlightenment as tourists integrate themselves into local and global ayahuasca practices.

Similarly, references to seduction and arousal are common on blog sites.[29] One tourist interprets ayahuasca's attractions: "Seduced by the undulations of her serpentine body, I followed her willingly inside the rhythmic trance. She said coyly, 'Watch me dance.'"[30] Another reports the shaman chanting into the brew in the "high key of a tin whistle or courting bird, seducing the plant spirits to aid me."[31] Local and nonlocal participants alike link seduction to the desire to enlist nonvisible allies in a ritual that addresses health and well-being; yet seduction has its limits, since sex is resisted and proscribed.[32]

Shaman-Participant Seduction

As I have just discussed, sex is a highly charged subject in relation to ayahuasca and people's relationships to the nonvisible world. Sex, as a universal activity, seems to traverse human, cultural, and language barriers. Alongside the proliferation

of ayahuasca shamanism and tourism, locally and abroad, ayahuasca settings bring together shamans and participants who have different imaginaries about each other and the reasons they wish to participate in a shared ritual. Among the increasing occurrence of such encounters, there is an alarming incidence of ayahuasqueros (and/or their assistants) making sexual advances toward their female participants during or following ayahuasca ceremonies.[33]

There are now many recorded cases of shamans who intentionally seek out sexual relations with participants, showing that, for these particular men, sex with participants is premeditated and part of a routine.[34] Individuals I have interviewed and on blogs have described how some shamans seem to "canvas the room" and target their attentions accordingly. One woman referred to a particular shaman saying he "has a predatory pattern of how he chooses women to attempt to seduce."[35] A male anthropologist described to me how, when he traveled with one of the young indigenous men from a community he worked in, the young man would pretend he was a shaman explicitly as a tactic for seducing women, mimicking the success his own village shaman had in seducing female ayahuasca tourists.

Some ayahuasqueros in the tourism circuit use particular substances to "aid in the seduction of female participants in rituals."[36] One shaman told me he had apprenticed under Shipibo shamans who knew particular herbs that could blur women's sexual boundaries. The Amazonian pharmacopeia includes charm spells used explicitly for seduction. They are meant to last only for a short time, unless renewed, creating a temporary lapse in rational thinking. Yet some described how ayahuasca itself, because of the sensual feelings it provokes, is deliberately used by some as a tool for seduction.[37] There are also rare, tragic cases in which shamans or their assistants stalk women and brutally force themselves on them.[38]

Typically, shaman-participant seductions take place as the ceremony is winding down, though sometimes they happen while the participant is experiencing the hallucinatory affects of ayahuasca. A young woman explained, "It's not so much about seduction: it is about sexual harassment. I got felt up by a shaman!" She explained that she went with a male friend and colleague, local to the Colombian Amazonian town she was staying in, to drink ayahuasca at the home of a well-established healer. On drinking, she found that the hallucinogen came on quickly and intensely: "I had full-bodied tingling and my vision blacked out and I was in space! My body was completely gone." She attributed her extraordinary visions to the recent death of a loved family member who she was mourning. Amidst her extraordinary visions she also felt violently ill.

> The shaman's assistant was helping several of the participants who were nauseous like me. He was helping a woman several people away from me. Then he came over to me and put his hands on my back. He had

> some great healing skills because he made my nausea go away. He spoke softly reassuring me that I would be well. He told me to lay down and he placed his hands on my tummy and it felt a lot better. Then, all of a sudden, his hands were down my pants! [She laughed incredulously] I had to physically fight him off and I was still under the influence of ayahuasca. He whispered 'tranquila, tranquila' (relax, relax) when I said 'no, no' and pushed away his hands. He tried to lie next to me but finally went off. I noticed that he went to help other young women, ignoring older women and men: The young women were all non-locals.

Some participants are seduced while they are experiencing visions and are thus in a hallucinatory state. A young woman who had participated in a ceremony in which she was the only nonlocal explained:

> I was so delighted that the shaman placed me next to him and that he began to pay special attention to me. When he began to rub my body I had no way of knowing what he intended but it soon became obvious when he… [she gestures where he placed his hands]…I pushed him away but felt extremely sad and confused and even wondered if it was part of my vision. I also felt somewhat frightened as the visions had only just started setting in and I felt abandoned by the person meant to guide my experience. I spent the whole time resisting the visions for fear that I might lose any sense of control. For ages I kept on thinking of what I might have done to make him think that this would be OK. He was a well-known and respected shaman. The only thing that makes sense is that either his opinion of Western women from cinema made him feel that we were all sluts or that somehow he interpreted my enthusiasm toward him to be sexual. That was it for me, I never drank ayahuasca again.

In another ceremony that took place in the United States with a Peruvian-based European shaman, one male participant expressed how strange he felt when he noticed that a woman was seemingly being seduced toward the end of an ayahuasca session. He described how it was dark and mostly a time for reflection and gentle speaking when he became aware of the shaman lying down next to a woman. They maintained a spooned position cooing to each other and simulating what appeared to be sexual foreplay or intercourse, leaving the participants who took notice confused and distracted.

Sexual harassment[39] also occurs within local or indigenous ayahuasca settings. Indigenous women are reticent to drink ayahuasca with an unknown shaman unless accompanied by family, friends, or their children. One indigenous

friend in Puerto Maldonado described what happened when she drank with a local urban shaman:

> I arrived with my two boys. He looked at me. He said that I was very ill and in danger of dying, that people had done terrible things to me with *daño* (intentional harm). He put my boys in a separate room and then prepared a blanket for me to lie on. I immediately felt that his intentions were not good, that they were sexual. I gave it some time but every sign imaginable was there telling me that he was going to force himself on me: the tone of his voice, the way he looked at me, the way he touched me, and then separating me from my children. I never drank with him because I left before anything could happen. It has happened to me before, but I was stupid then, trusting in everyone.

Another indigenous friend described what happened with her when she drank with a famous indigenous healer in a native community who she knew had been desiring her for many years.

> He knew that I wanted nothing to do with him in that way; I had pushed him away many times, which was why I wouldn't drink [ayahuasca] with him. But this time there were many friends and family there and a gringo friend [male]. I drank and sat away from him even though he had asked me to be next to him. When my vision came it was amazing, so beautiful that I wanted to cry. I was on the verge of understanding [something] but then he came and stood in front of me and blocked my vision. It was like an eclipse! Afterwards, he told me: "If you want to 'see' then you need to drink with me alone." I knew what he meant by that and so now I am afraid of ever drinking.

Still, some urban Amazonian, Latin American nationals and even Western women who reported experiencing inappropriate sexual advances have simply brushed it off, claiming to give it very little importance. Many women have told me, generally, "This is how men are here; you just need to tell them that you're not interested. It's not a big deal." Others have said, "It's weak and insecure women who do not know how to handle these men." Perhaps sidestepping the question of ethics, these interviewees seem to presume that power relations are negotiable on the basis of strength of character and an understanding of local culture and gender relations.

However, in a few rare cases some women feel complimented by the shaman's sexual advances. One woman I interviewed expressed feeling empowered by the dedicated attention, and used the sexual encounter as a way to confirm her own

sense of uniqueness and aspirations for divinity. Some shamans capitalize on this by offering obliging women a special status in ayahuasca ceremonies. On one blog thread that discussed a particular shaman's pattern of sexual advances on ayahuasca ceremony participants, a woman with a history of "falling in love" with shamans, and who proclaims herself to be shaman, expressed that sex was a potentially fulfilling aspect of the ayahuasca experience[40]:

> . . . I found his closeness very comforting and helpful to the sacred work I was sent to do with the Medicine . . . who is to say what is really appropriate or not when it comes to this kind of work? . . . if you can't take the heat stay out of the kitchen. . . . That's what I say anyway. . . . For me the experience was totality . . . and Completion with a Man on all levels. . . . [He] is a very talented conductor of sacred energies and has a strong Male Force that is God-Like in many ways, meaning beyond the ordinary realm of power . . . it was like a true Sacred Union and Divine merger. I had never in my life felt such completion. Being there was like being in the arms of God in Heaven. . . . I cannot describe this insatiable longing for Completion and Ecstasy. . . . There is no Shaman, no amount of money that one could pay to have this experience. So, for me, being with the Medicine in this way was completely priceless . . . ."

This narrative reiterates that some cases of seduction under the influence of ayahuasca are mutually consensual. Yet, as is argued on the blogs, many believe that the ultimate accountability lies with the shaman, who is responsible for resisting both arousal and star-struck women, to seek ways of healing that do not depend on his phallus. The blogs are in agreement, with a general consensus among shamans and serious students of shamanism.

Reactions to Sex and Seduction: Global and Local Considerations

For those immersed in ayahuasca circles, whether as shamans, participants, or scholars, the occurrence of sexual scandal has become common knowledge. Another well-known sex scandal concerns a key leader of the Santo Daime church, who was accused on multiple occasions of inappropriate sexual advances on women who had gone to him to be healed through *daime* (ayahuasca). The leadership's unwillingness to reprimand the "padrinho" leader in question resulted in many people leaving the church and describing it as an exploitative system of patriarchy.[41] In general, bloggers assert that these shamans are not fit for their profession.

Sexual harassment clashes with the variable reasons women want to drink ayahuasca. As Winkelman describes, most ayahuasca tourists are generally seeking "personal spiritual development; emotional healing; and the development of personal self-awareness, including contact with a sacred nature, God, spirits, and plant and natural energies produced by ayahuasca."[42] Furthermore, according to ayahuasca blogs, many participants interested in spiritual healing are themselves victims of childhood sexual abuse and thus find the sexual advances of shamans to be emotionally damaging and cruelly exploitative. This is compounded by a tendency to idealize shamans,[43] thus masking the usual boundaries ayahuasca tourists might normally encounter in hierarchical gender settings.

A common public response by bloggers who witness or experience shamans' inappropriate behavior is to claim that these men are not "real shamans" and are thus "inauthentic." Such responses are not limited to ayahuasqueros; they include any individuals who refer to themselves as shamans.[44] These positions do not take into account that shamans are humans who may have detrimental flaws; they also overlook the historical and ongoing possibility that indigenous women are sometimes sexually harassed within contexts of traditional ayahuasca shamanism, and they further ignore the necessary rewriting of a gendered landscape for many local practitioners who now frequently travel abroad, as well as the significant number of Western shamans and apprentices who are now fully aware of the Western allure and mystique surrounding ideas about shamans.

In sum, my study has found people generally respond negatively to a shaman's inappropriate sexual advances. Female participants feel vulnerable, ashamed, exploited, and betrayed. Male onlookers are also disturbed and confused. Both assume that the shaman or his assistants are taking advantage of their power and status, and the actuality that the participants are unsure of any of the roles, methods, and consequent boundaries. In these cases, people feel that the shaman has undermined the trust they have given him as a caretaker, guide, and healer. Furthermore, many feel that the experience of ayahuasca and their outlook toward it has been tainted.

If we are to regard shamans from a broad Western perspective, then clearly sexual advances toward participants are unethical. If we pay attention to local or indigenous perspectives, then we also find that such behavior is frowned on. In Puerto Maldonado, the indigenous and non-indigenous Amazonians whom I have interviewed and conducted fieldwork with over the last few decades do not feel that sexual relations of any degree are acceptable between shamans and their patients, unless these are preexisting or legitimate relationships that occur outside of the ayahuasca experience and ceremonial context. There is significant social criticism when such norms are violated. The women I have interviewed who have experienced such behavior clearly attribute it to an abuse of power both in terms of gender and community. They feel that particular men are

imposing their physical and political dominance over women, and that as shamans they intentionally use their power to intimidate or try to seduce them. For these reasons, most women are reticent to drink ayahuasca with an unknown shaman unless accompanied by family, friends, or their children, and even then, as shown in an earlier narrative, sexual harassment may still occur.

Nonetheless, issues of trust are important to many ayahuasca healers and participants to the extent that, in the last several years, tourist websites for ayahuasca package tours have begun to address concerns about the potential seduction of female participants by ayahuasca specialists. One website resolves this problem by dealing exclusively with female shamans:

> Ayahuasca facilitation in Peru has typically been a male dominated world. It is not uncommon for male shamans in Peru to misuse their leadership role to seduce unsuspecting foreign women that come to them for shamanic healing. The fact that we almost exclusively work with elder, female Shipibo ayahuasca shamans provides a safe environment for women coming to the Amazon for ayahuasca experiences. . . . These Shipibo shamans represent the highest level of integrity that you can find anywhere in the Amazon region.[45]

In response to the sexual exploitation of women at ceremonies, one blogger questions tourists' general gullibility when searching for a shaman:

> Now, if you get met at the airport in Iquitos, don't speak Spanish, and decide that the taxi driver, who asked, "Ayahuasca? Ayahuasca? Mi Padre!" is your guiding light; well then, you're on your own. But if you've looked around, found out who's who and what's what by talking to people who have been there, then things will generally be pretty kosher.[46]

This narrative suggests that tourists themselves have a responsibility to be informed and not be trapped within their own idealizations and romanticizations of apparently non-Western worlds and practices. Yet, tourist encounters take place at the juncture of local and global gender relations that reflect a broad and diverse panorama of gender performances and practices. Locally, gender relations vary, but there is a predominant notion that, in most circumstances, women will surrender to male sexual advances if they find themselves in a vulnerable position or merely alone with a man, as such behavior is aligned with gender expectations. In most contexts, any time men and women are together, there is a constant barrage of sexual overtones that inform all verbal and nonverbal behavior. To circumvent vulnerability, indigenous women avoid smiling directly at men, laughing with them, paying too much attention to them, being in their

presence without close kin nearby, and traveling alone. Not coincidentally, these precautions prescriptively describe most nonlocal female ayahuasca participants, particularly if they openly esteem the shaman, converse and laugh freely, are unhindered by local customs, and travel alone.

However, an explanation of mismatched gender codes cannot fully justify the increasing sexual exploitation of women by shamans. Further trends contradict this; first, nowadays, many of the most popular tourist-focused shamans are themselves Westerners who have apprenticed with local shamans and then gone abroad to allow others to experience ayahuasca; second, many shamans in traditional ayahuasca ritual settings have sexually harassed local and indigenous women; and last, many local shamans have now traveled extensively and are exposed to numerous forms of expression and understand that there are codes for gender relations in different places. Yet it is precisely this set of individuals from which the most active perpetrators of sexual harassment spring forth.

Before returning to the ambivalence implicit in gendered and unequal encounters and the disjuncture embedded in these translocal encounters in which the idea of the "other" is romanticized, I would like to turn to a discussion of ethics in the Western healer-practitioner relationship.

Countertransference

Trichter, in writing about his concerns that Western ayahuasca participants are not sufficiently informed about the traditional uses of ayahuasca, raises the point that in the ayahuasca healing rituals, shamans might experience countertransference toward their participants just as a therapist might with patients.[47] He also suggests that shamans might "project their erotic fantasies into their work with participants" and, consciously or not, may "wield their power over the participants in drug-induced states" or suggest sex as being part of the ayahuasca experience to a novice participant.[48] Although shamanism and psychoanalysis are two very different therapeutic traditions, the comparison between therapist-patient and healer-participant relationships raises questions about the ethics of sexual interactions between these actors.

In any vocation in which people rely on an individual for health and healing purposes, there is an ethical code of conduct, even if unwritten. The person being healed is in a position of vulnerability, and the healer is expected not to create further suffering or to entangle that individual within his own projected emotional issues, particularly his own erotic feelings.[49] According to psychoanalytic principles, transference is a misguided projection of emotions toward the therapist, commonly in the form of sexual attraction. For Freud, transference constitutes a healthy process within therapy by unearthing the patient's otherwise repressed emotions and allowing the therapist to address them and help the

patient heal.[50] However, with countertransference, therapists unconsciously respond to the patient's transference onto them. According to psychoanalytic principles, cases of erotic countertransference that remain unchecked serve to heighten both the patient's and the analyst's neurosis,[51] causing the healer to become "locked into a position in which her own wounds cannot be used in service of the client, and the client's inner healing capacities are denied."[52] As Freud warned, "We ought not to give up the neutrality toward the patient, which we have acquired through keeping countertransference in place."[53] For these reasons, occurrences of countertransference need to be acknowledged and examined for successful treatment of the patient.

Ayahuasca visions have their own language and symbols whereby the explicit and obvious are determined by what is implicit and not obvious. Nonetheless, the implicit is intended to examine the participant's unresolved conflicts, not the healer's. There is no doubt that ayahuasqueros possess, wield, and aspire to hold increasingly more power. Their reasons and motivations are ideally for advancing personal spiritual growth and well-being, and the positive effects that ensue. Yet the sexual exploitation of female participants, alongside acts of sorcery, is certainly a reminder that shamanistic power is not always implemented for positive deeds and that shamans can be diverted from their path. Ayahuasca tourism can certainly serve as a setting for such a distraction, particularly when shamans are romanticized and treated with unrealistically high regard.

The Tourist Gaze, Perspectivism, and Critical Feminism

Gender relations need to be examined within the production and consumption of tourist experiences.[54] A useful concept is the "tourist gaze," the culturally constructed way tourists watch and transfix themselves on the places they visit.[55] Such a gaze repeatedly inscribes itself on local geographies of ayahuasca tourism,[56] and the advertising of these locales invites such a gaze—particularly the male gaze, with its emphasis on extreme adventures and quests amid general associations of the vacation as hedonistic outlet.[57] Furthermore, tourist destinations themselves are eroticized in such a way that tourism can depend on the "sensual mythologies of exotic places."[58]

I argue that ayahuasca tourism is a set of encounters whereby the tourist gaze does not go undeflected. In the ayahuasca tourism cases discussed earlier, the shaman can redirect the gaze away from himself and toward female participants through seductive desire. It is the familiar "male gaze," constituting an actively controlling patriarchal maleness voyeuristically invoked upon women as fetishized passive objects of desire.[59] Although Foucault[60] links the surveillance "gaze" to power rather than to gender, in feminist theory the male gaze reflects a

nuanced gendered power asymmetry whereby men hegemonically impose their *unwanted* gaze on women.

The production of ayahuasca tourism privileges shamans as idealized, nearly supernatural beings. This is reflected in the propaganda, websites, and blogs that hail these men as celestial beings, obliterating their humanity and often their economic reality.[61] This corresponds with a general trend that privileges "masculinized themes" and glorifies "Great Men," scripting all other needs and desires as subservient to a male norm.[62] I argue that, in ayahuasca tourism, male and female tourists may render themselves into seemingly passive states, as is familiar in Western pedagogical learning when one is in the apprenticeship of an esteemed teacher[63] or a medical doctor.[64]

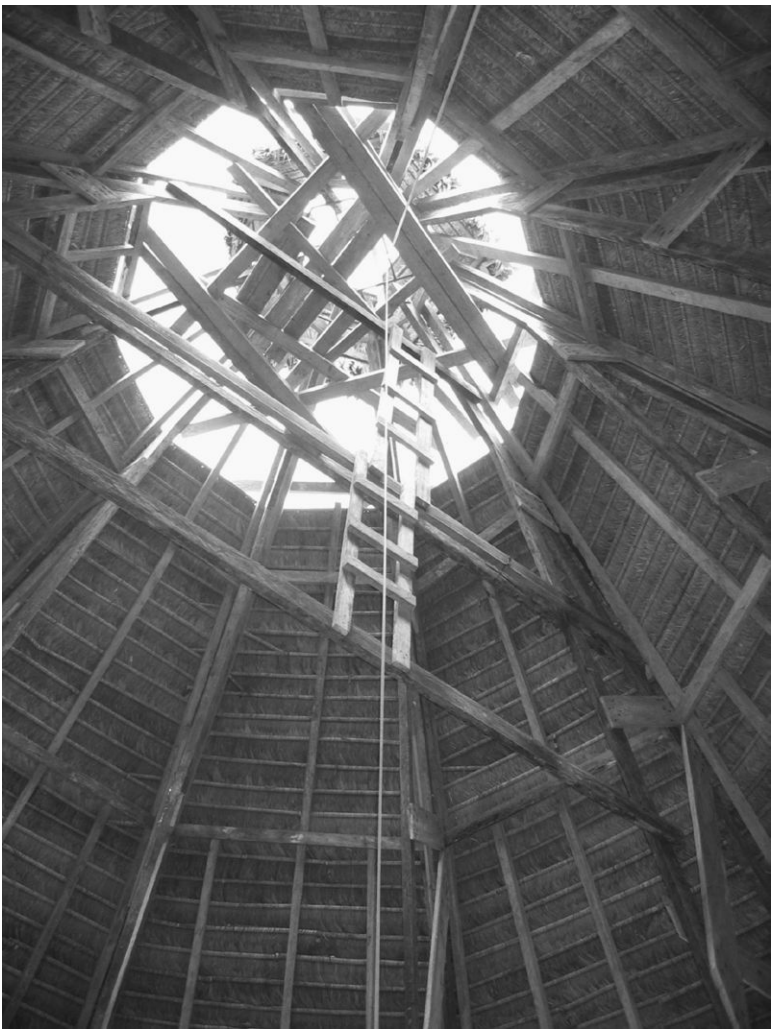

Figure 10.4. Maloca built for tourists, Madre de Dios, Peru. Photograph by Daniela Peluso.

Mulvey's ideas about the "male gaze" derive from critical cinema studies that characterize the male audience and camera as privileging an active male viewpoint and focus on passive women. Historically, and as elsewhere[65] in Amazonia, the exposure of local peoples to Western women is principally via the cinema and tourism. In the former, women are portrayed as sexually loose. In an earlier account, when an ayahuasca participant tried to make sense of her predicament, she articulated these conflicting notions of gender: "The only thing that makes sense is that either his opinion of Western women from cinema made him feel that we were all sluts or that somehow he interpreted my enthusiasm toward him to be sexual." Whereas Urry stresses how men are conditioned to see women of color as being sexually available, I suggest that non-Westerners of all shades are informed through the media that Western women are highly sexually driven and independent.[66] Compounded with this, as mentioned earlier, female tourists' gestures and fashion are often in conflict with local gender norms whereby Western customs can be misread and misunderstood. For instance, among many indigenous Amazonian people, making eye contact and smiling directly at a male is a sexual invitation, a code so implicitly understood that it is naturalized in terms of gender relations. Therefore, it would not even occur to a man that a woman, albeit a Western tourist, would not also subscribe to the same understandings.

Yet, as discussed earlier, in ayahuasca tourism settings, any misunderstandings concerning gender roles are further embedded within behaviors that are linked to the romanticization and idealization of the shaman. I argue that, in these contexts, including cases where women participants desire shamans, the male gaze deflects the female gaze and redirects it toward the participant through sexual desire.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have reviewed historical, symbolic, and contemporary relationships between sex and ayahuasca through gender relations, shaman and local and nonlocal participants behaviors, and ideas of countertransference and the male gaze within the local-global contexts in which ayahuasca ceremonies currently take place. Yet, this analysis would be incomplete if it did not remark on the disproportional social, economic, and political inequality that generally tends to occur between shamans and their nonlocal and international participants, as well as their respective cities and countries, as part of the broader context in which ayahuasca tourism takes place.[67] Moreover, ayahuasca shamanism cannot be divorced from the economic incentives that further motivate its recent proliferation. As one European ayahuasquero pointed out to me, the new economic incentives can reshuffle the priorities that are usually in place when one

practices shamanism. Furthermore, the emerging neo-shamans do not have adequate shamanic training or community vigilance to give them the tools necessary to maintain the integrity of their work. An experienced South American woman described how an itinerant Peruvian shaman she was well acquainted with had been tactically seducing women within the ceremonial context of ayahuasca for years: "He had sex with strategic women that could organize sessions for him, open doors, make contacts, etc. He would choose women with financial resources that were potentially ongoing participants and could bring new clients to his sessions or women who were just young and pretty, as it was revealed he had done for years."

Shamans using their special status to exploit women in a state of vulnerability within the ayahuasca ritual and its ceremonial spaces is part of a broader trend of South American–based men who prey on female tourists by using the currency of cultural legitimacy. In some instances, such men play off Western notions of authenticity to seduce vacationing women with displays of "Inca-nismo,"[68] as does the *birichero* who poses as a spiritually sensitive Inca descendant and typically plays Andean music and makes and wears jewelry and clothing from traditional natural materials and motifs. The birichero offers sex and mysticism in exchange for free meals, entertainment, and, hopefully, a ticket to visit the traveler abroad. Similarly, ayahuasqueros, even those who are Westerners, might flaunt local traditions and privileged knowledge to allure gringas. Such behavior reflects how global tourism tends to amplify economic and political inequities that some men directly challenge through their sexuality.[69]

With the advent of ayahuasca tourism, as ayahuasca rituals further transform, the unwritten codes of what are and aren't considered acceptable transgressions—codes normally dictated by culture, locale, and training—are pushed further and further into the background though local-global encounters between

Figure 10.5. Young man with a birichero-like appearance. Photograph by Miguel Alexiades.

particular shaman (be they weak, lost, greedy, perverted, or sexist) and particular participants (be they uninformed, delusional, romanticist, or idealist). Just as transference and countertransference can be valuable, so can the desire for transgression, but not when it is unchecked and unrestrained. In cases where seduction is attempted, the clash between variable shaman and participant imaginaries is blatant. As I have shown, such attractions and distractions align with historical continuities of shamanism and ayahuasca rituals. Yet, whereas Amazonian women tend to view shamans as humans who can potentially be abusive, uninformed Western women do not. Within the spectrum of shamans and participants, it is the coinciding of shamans who view women as easy prey with women who idealize shamans that exacerbates the trend of seduction within ritual contexts. For these reasons, this chapter is not meant to detract from the benefits and legitimacy of ayahuasca rituals, but rather to urge an awareness of the conditions that create these possibilities within ritual contexts. In conclusion, the increased incidence of inappropriate or unwelcomed seduction by shamans toward female tourists is a manifestation and repercussion of the conceptual and practical disjuncture between the global and the local dynamics of ayahuasca uses and practices, as well as underlying disparate notions of gender relations, healer-participant ethics, appropriate uses of power, and the broader economic and political contexts in which they transpire.

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Notes

1. The brew combines a vine (*Banisteriopsis caapi*) and leaves (*Psychotria viridis*) that contain dimethyltryptamine (DMT), a tryptamine compound.
2. One such rave was organized on Facebook (http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=327741552347#) and mentioned in ayahuasca blogs: http://dawnontheamazon.com/blog/2011/02/24/proposal-an-ayahuasca-organization-for-iquitos/.
3. http://www.iamshaman.com/eshop/10Browse.asp?Category=Roots%20Barks:B%20Caapi.
4. See bibliography for Davidov (2010), Fotiou (2010), Holman (2011), Peluso (2006), and Tupper (2009).
5. Ese Eja are an indigenous Amazonian group who reside in Peru and Bolivia.

6. Daniela Peluso, "For 'Export Only': Ayahuasca Tourism and Hyper-Traditionalism," *IASTE Working Paper Series (Hyper-Traditions and "Real" Places),* edited by Nezar AlSayyad, 189 (2006): 482–500.
7. Daniela Peluso, "Altered States of Dislocation: Ayahuasca Tourism in the Peruvian Amazon," *Journal of Tourism and Culture Change* (forthcoming).
8. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "Exchanging Perspectives: The Transformation of Objects into Subjects in Amerindian Ontologies," *Common Knowledge* 10 (2004): 463–84.
9. Daniela Peluso, "'That Which I Dream Is True': Dream Narratives in an Amazonian Community," *Dreaming* 14 (2004): 107–19.
10. See bibliography for Chaumeil (1983) and Luna (2011).
11. Michael Harner, *The Jivaro: People of the Sacred Waterfalls* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972).
12. Dan Rosengren, "Transdimensional Relations: On Human-Spirit Interaction in the Amazon," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 12 (2006): 803–16.
13. Ibid., 892.
14. Luisa Elvira Belaunde, "Entrevista con Herlinda Agustín, mujer *Onaya* del Pueblo Shipibo-konibo," in *Ayahuasca y salud,* eds. Beatriz Labate and José Carlos Bouso (Barcelona: Los Libros de La Liebre de Marzo, 2013: 48–65).
15. Michael Brown, *Tsewa's Gift: Magic and Meaning in an Amazonian Society* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1985).
16. Miguel Alexiades, *Ethnobotany of the Ese Eja: Plants, Change and Health in an Amazonian Society* (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1999).
17. Ibid.
18. Evgenia Fotiou, "From Medicine Men to Day Trippers: Shamanic Tourism in Iquitos, Peru" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, Madison, 2010). Also, notwithstanding ayahuasca is occasionally attributed as being a male spirit.
19. See Alexiades, *Ethnobotany*; Barbira-Friedman (2010) in bibliography; and Fotiou's Chapter 7 in this volume.
20. Janet Siskind, "Tropical Forest Hunters and the Economy of Sex," in Daniel Gross, ed., *Peoples and Cultures of Native South America* (New York: Natural History, 1973), 226–40.
21. Brian Ferguson, "Game Wars? Ecology and Conflict in Amazonia," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 45 (1989): 179–206.
22. Peluso, "That Which I Dream Is True."
23. Eduardo Luna, "Indigenous and Mestizo Use of Ayahuasca: An Overview," in Rafael Guimarães dos Santos, ed., *The Ethnopharmacology of Ayahuasca*, (Kerala, India: Transworld Research Network, 2011), 1–22.
24. Fernando Santos-Granero, "Sensual Vitalities: Noncorporeal Modes of Sensing and Knowing in Native Amazonia," *Tipití: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America* 4 (2006): 55–80.
25. http://www.biopark.org/peru/sqcleansing-01.html.
26. See bibliography for Davidov (2010), Holman (2011), and Peluso (2006).
27. For example, see Maria Guiterrez, "A Date with the Vine Spirit," posted Feb. 28, 2011, at http://www.suite101.com/content/my-summer-of-foggy--love-in-san-francisco-a357294 (accessed on July 1, 2011).
28. http://www.biopark.org/peru/sqcleansing-01.html.
29. http://www.ayahuasca.com/spirit/primordial-and-traditional-culture/mermaids-by-steve-beyer/ (accessed on July 1, 2011).
30. Georgina, New Mexico, June 2009, http://tierravidahealing.com/Testimonials.html (accessed on July 1, 2011).
31. Andy Isaacson, "Amazon Awakening," *New York Times*, Oct. 13, 2010.
32. Yalila Espinoza, "Erotic Healing Experiences with Ayahuasca" (presentation at the First International Psychedelic Science in the 21st Century conference, Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies or MAPS, San Jose, CA, April 15–18, 2010), retrieved from

http://vimeo.com/15201056. Espinoza contradicts widespread indigenous knowledge that cautions mixing ayahuasca with sex. She proposes that ayahuasca is popularly pursued as a positive erotic healing experience, physically, through experiencing orgasm, and spiritually, by having sex with nonphysical beings. I suspect her data, which are unspecified, refer to New Age participants because of the explicit nudity and exhibitionist acts described, which are generally deemed inappropriate among indigenous peoples in relation to ayahuasca. Although many refer to the work of Reichel-Dolmatof (1971) to indicate the connection between sexual pleasure and ayahuasca, his descriptions explicitly refer to the symbolic.

33. Stephen Trichter, "Ayahuasca Beyond the Amazon: The Benefits and Risks of a Spreading Tradition," *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 42 (2010): 131–48.
34. "Peru AYAHUASCA—A Bad Trip!" http://forum.davidicke.com/showthread.php?t=37987; posted June 2007 by Space Lizard on the David Icke Official Forums. The comment generated fourteen pages of discussion.
35. This post is from an archived record of a conversation that took place on Saturday, June 7, 2007, on the Tribe.net website from a defunct stream entitled "CAUTION! Shaman acting inappropriately."
36. Marlene Dobkin de Rios and Roger Rumrill, *A Hallucinogenic Tea, Laced with Controversy: Ayahuasca in the Amazon and the United States* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2008), 72.
37. Ibid.
38. "Joven Alemana fue violada y golpeada salvajemente durante una sesión de ayahuasca en Iquitos," *El Comercio*, Mar. 21, 2010, accessed June 15, 2011, http://elcomercio.pe/lima/450258/noticia-joven-alemana-fue-violada-golpeada-salvajemente-durante-sesion-ayahuasca-iquitos.
39. The term used is *"fastidiar"* (to annoy) implying normalized male behavior.
40. This post is from an archived record of a conversation that took place on August 19, 2007, on the Tribenet website from a defunct thread entitled "CAUTION! Shaman acting inappropriately."
41. Clancy Cavnar, "The Effects of Participation in Ayahuasca Rituals on Gays' and Lesbians' Self Perception" (Ph.D. diss., John F. Kennedy University, 2011).
42. Michael Winkelman, "Drug Tourism or Spiritual Healing? Ayahuasca Seekers in Amazonia," *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs* 37, no. 2 (2005): 209–18.
43. Peluso, "For 'Export Only'"; Trichter, "Ayahuasca Beyond the Amazon."
44. See, for instance, "New Age Frauds & Plastic Shamans" or NAFPS, an activist group of Native people and supporters whose website exposes fraudulent practitioners. NAFPS is "concerned about the fraud, deceit, money hunger, sexual abuse, racism, control, hunger for power and ego, and cult-like tendencies of the New Age movement and pseudo 'shamans.'" http://www.newagefraud.org/.
45. Winkelman, "Drug Tourism or Spiritual Healing?" 208. http://www.sacredperuadventures.com/programs/ayahuasca/2011_aya_intinerary.html (accessed on June 10, 2011).
46. Gorman, Peter, "A Couple of Thoughts on Ayahuasca in Peru," *The Gorman Blog*, Dec. 9, 2007. http://thegormanblog.blogspot.com/2007/12/couple-of-thoughts-on-ayahuasca-in-peru.html (accessed on June 5, 2011).
47. Trichter, "Ayahuasca Beyond the Amazon." Also, the notion of countertransference is close to the anthropologist's heart since it is considered as one of the potential pitfalls to avoid during ethnographic fieldwork (Robben and Sluka, 2007), whereby the ethnographer projects upon others his own worldview.
48. Trichter, "Ayahuasca Beyond the Amazon," 140.
49. Since the Hippocratic oath was first taken, it has been widely recognized that physicians, therapists, and counselors should not have sexual contact with their patients.
50. Sigmund Freud, *The Future Prospects of Psychoanalytic Therapy*, vol. 11 of *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works* (London: Hogarth Press, 1957 [1910]).
51. Ronald Britton, *Sex, Death, and the Super-Ego: Experiences in Psychoanalysis* (London: Karnac, 2003).

52. Jeffrey Hayes, "Playing with Fire: Countertransference and Clinical Epistemology," *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy* 32 (2002): 93–100.
53. Freud, "Future Prospects," 164.
54. Annette Pritchard and Nigel J. Morgan, "Privileging the Male Gaze: Gendered Tourism Landscapes," *Annals of Tourism Research* 27 (2000): 884–905.
55. John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze* (London: Sage, 1990).
56. Peluso, "Altered States of Dislocation."
57. Pritchard and Morgan "Privileging the Male Gaze."
58. Joanne Sharp, "Gendering Nationhood: A Feminist Engagement with National Identity," in Nancy Duncan, ed., *Bodyspace: Destabilizing Geographies of Gender and Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1996), 212–33.
59. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, eds., *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999 [1975]), 833–44.
60. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon, 1977).
61. Peluso, "Altered States of Dislocation."
62. Pritchard and Morgan, "Privileging the Male Gaze," 898.
63. Alex Moore, *Teaching and Learning Pedagogy, Curriculum and Culture* (Philadelphia: Falmer Press, 2001).
64. Christina Foss and Johanne Sundby, "The Construction of the Gendered Patient: Hospital Staff's Attitudes to Female and Male Patients," *Patient Education and Counseling* 49 (2003): 45–52.
65. Lynn Meisch, "Gringas and Otavalenos: Changing Tourist Relations," *Annals of Tourism Research* 22 (1995): 441–62.
66. Urry, "The Tourist Gaze."
67. Peluso, "For 'Export Only'."
68. Michael D. Hill, "Contesting Patrimony: Cusco's Mystical Tourist Industry and the Politics of *Incanis*mo," Ethnos 72 (2007): 433–60.
69. Glenn Bowman, "Fucking Tourists: Sexual Relations and Tourism in Jerusalem's Old City," *Critique of Anthropology* 9, no. 2 (1989): 77–93.

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