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Psychedelic Extractivism: Distilling Indigeneity into Exchange Value

Introduction

Psychedelics are undergoing a cultural makeover—the days of Nixon, criminalization, and moral panic have all but seemed to disappear, and have been replaced by wellness retreats, scientific research, medical applicability, and institutional support. Some of the most accredited universities in the world such as Johns Hopkins, Imperial College London, University of California Berkeley, and NYU have opened centers for psychedelic research, and psychedelic mental health companies have made strides in eventually bringing psychedelic products to market (Lee, 2021). Too often, Indigenous peoples¹—the original stewards of psychedelic plant medicines such as psilocybin mushrooms, ayahuasca, and peyote—are left out of the media recognition, conferences and panels, and financial or institutional gains of these therapeutic applications. There is a lineage of harm done to Indigenous communities as a result of the West’s psychedelic renaissance, as Indigenous community-held assets have been stolen, their knowledges cast aside as psychedelic plant medicines are distilled into isolated compounds in order to be sold as pharmaceutical commodities.

¹*All research, writing, and revision for this work has taken place within the traditional and unceded territory of the Kumeyaay Nation. I want to pay respect to the citizens of the Kumeyaay Nation, past and present, and their continuing relationship to ancestral lands. For millennia, the Kumeyaay people have been a part of this land. This land has nourished, healed, protected and embraced them for many generations in a relationship of balance and harmony. As a member of the San Diego community I acknowledge this legacy. I promote this balance and harmony. I find inspiration from this land; the land of the Kumeyaay. (Adapted from Mike Connolly Miskwish’s Kumeyaay Land Acknowledgement)*

This work seeks to examine the colonial logics and extractive neoliberal practices that transform psychedelic plant medicines into profitable and legitimate commodities. Dominant psychedelic culture as well as psychedelic capitalists, startups, VCs, investors, scientific researchers, and pharmaceutical and biotech corporations operate from an extractive lens that absorbs psychedelic culture and compounds into the marketplace to remake them as legible, productive commodities. These practices distance psychedelics from the Indigenous communities and knowledge systems they originated from; transform psychedelic plants into isolated compounds through Western technological means; sequester and own such compounds as intellectual property through patenting; and utilize Western productions of knowledge to impose novel pharmaceutical uses of these compounds in a codified and controlled Western context. This imperative thus reflects the values of the marketplace and global systems at large, creating a discord between the interests of psychedelic biotech corporations and those of the psychedelic underground community as well as Indigenous communities that these medicines originate from.

How these psychedelic plants and fungi have been so quickly descended upon in the West—as if in a frenzy, with investors, scientists, and corporations racing one another to fragment, manipulate, control, and own them as property—begs a deeper, critical investigation of where this behavior comes from. What ideas and worldviews give certain people the license to exert dominance and ownership over natural substances at the expense of other cultures that live in relationship with the plant? How did Western cultures come to view humans as separate from the natural world? Where did these ideas come from, and how have they shaped the landscape of psychedelics? The Natural Colonial Gaze framework provides a structure for tracing the ideological lineage of the nature-culture divide and identifying colonial thought and encounter as

the key agent in disseminating and enforcing this way of engagement as the dominant way of relating to nature. Building off the works of cultural anthropologists, Indigenous scholars, ecofeminists, and social ecologists, the Natural Colonial Gaze framework highlights the role of the colonial project in separating nature from humans through a presupposed separation of humans from one another in the form of gendered and racialized class-based hierarchy. As I have outlined in my previous work, the Natural Colonial Gaze:

1. *Emerged and originated due to human hierarchy, class relationships, and hierarchical social restructuring*
2. *Rose to prominence during the Enlightenment era as a result of the culmination of new philosophies, ideas, and technologies*
3. *Progressed alongside the expansion of capitalism*
4. *Was imported from the European colonial metropole into the New World under the guise of development, progress, and modernity, shaping the formation of US national identity*
5. *Has accelerated to the point of destruction and catastrophic climate change with the development and expansion of neoliberal globalization*
6. *Currently is and has always been resisted, challenged, or worked against by various peoples and cultures, including Indigenous peoples (Gomez-Barris), 'third world' women of color (Shiva), and anarchist intellectuals (Bookchin)*

This work seeks to apply the framework and decolonial analysis of the Natural Colonial Gaze to the burgeoning psychedelic² landscape. I offer that through deconstructing the Natural Colonial Gaze as a dominant way of thinking about and engaging with the natural world, we can begin to “create, imagine, and reconnect with alternative ways of relating and solutions that address environmental issues from a decolonial perspective,” allowing us to “highlight existing alternatives, what Gomez-Barris calls ‘submerged perspectives’ that work to challenge, disrupt, and resist the natural colonial gaze as it exists today,” (Mohr, 17; Gomez-Barris, xix). By

²A Note: For the sake of brevity this work will be focusing on psychedelic compounds associated with plants or fungi that were originally stewarded by Indigenous communities. When speaking of “psychedelic plant medicines” this work will mainly be referring to: psilocybin mushrooms, peyote, and ayahuasca and any synthetic versions or analogs of these substances (including non-active compounds, past, present, and future analogs or alkaloids not previously discovered or created). This work may also apply to 5-MEO-DMT and Iboga/Ibogaine, although it does not focus on these substances specifically.

utilizing this framework, I attempt to contextualize and deconstruct ideological roots within the psychedelic landscape and identify key issues within the contemporary psychedelic ecosystem. This framework will allow for the unearthing of colonial logics and extractive practices as the throughline from the past to the present, highlighting “submerged perspectives,” or existing alternatives to challenge these logics and practices within the psychedelic ecosystem.

Historical Background & Context

This section will serve as a brief historical contextualization of the contemporary psychedelic ecosystem within global systems of power, and as such does not seek to provide a comprehensive history of colonial thought and encounter in regards to psychedelics. The following is a selection of moments in time, rooted in place and impacted by systemic socio-political contexts, which will attempt to draw out continuities, parallels, and themes of the homogenizing force of colonial rule. These events follow a pattern tied together by the contact of two cultures: Indigenous peoples and the colonizing West, and the consumption or rejection of cultural signifiers and practices of Indigenous communities.

Peyote has been used by Indigenous cultures in the Tamaulipan thornscrub region of Northern Mexico for millennia—first banned by the Spanish Inquisition in 1620. The Aztec use of peyote was demonized as heathen superstition and intoxication, representing a threat to the colonial project committed to transforming new lands, cultures, and subjects by civilizing, purifying, and disciplining Christian bodies (Dawson, 2). Throughout the rest of the Spanish colonial times, and prior to the nineteenth century, peyote use and experimentation continued within Huichol (Wixárika) culture, campesino communities, folk healing traditions, scientific laboratories, and Mexican research institutions. Dawson notes that peyotism proliferated during the dislocations and upheaval of Indigenous peoples in the latter half of the nineteenth century,

in which peyote's 'sites of diffusion' were Indian boarding schools. Smithsonian employee and ethnographer James Mooney observed the Kiowa uses of peyote in the late 1880s, noting that they commonly used it for curing consumptive diseases, which saved the lives of many native students returning from the damp climate of eastern boarding schools. He writes that these students were "the staunchest defenders of the [peyote] ceremony, having found by experience that the plant brings them relief," (Mooney, 23; Dawson, 17). Within these boarding school communities, institutions of Indigenous removal, dispossession, extermination³ and genocide, young Indigenous men joined the peyote way "in search of a language that at once embraced healing—from alcoholism, tuberculosis, malnutrition—and could express their discontent with the forms of colonial rule to which they were subjugated," (Dawson, 42). In this context, peyote acted as an escape from white impositions toward something that Dawson calls "truly an Indian thing," something "shared within secret networks" that represented the dual roles of "sacrament and medicine" (Dawson, 42). The peyote tradition's focus on community and Indigenous solidarity offered an opportunity for individual and collective healing that was adept at meeting the needs of reservation communities. The spread of the peyote ceremony across Indigenous communities in the 20th century culminated into the largest Pan-Indian religion in the United States today, the Native American Church. For these tribal communities, the peyote way acts as a spiritual resistance movement to United States' ethnocide, where "the ability and strength to handle the trauma of cultural and social disintegration wrought by the reservation system and policies of forced acculturation were necessary for the survival of individuals, families, and communities of Native peoples," (Feeney, 2016). Peyote can thus be understood as a spiritual and medicinal plant ally that aided Indigenous peoples' survival and resistance during times of

³ It is just now coming to light how deadly and horrific the Indian boarding schools were. At the time of writing, over 1,300 unmarked graves and remains of First Nations children have been found at residential school sites across Canada, with potentially an untold amount unknown in the United States (Deer, 2021).

extreme colonial violence and cultural suppression, and continues to play a critical role in the resurgence of Indigenous ways of life across Turtle Island. This resource is currently being threatened, as peyote is an endangered species in its' U.S. habitat and multiple converging factors contribute to a drastic decline in supply, correlating to a sharp increase in price and limiting the access and quality of peyote buttons that are available to members of the Native American Church today (Feeney, 5).

Similar to the origins of peyote use, Spanish colonists reported the use of psilocybin mushrooms by Indigenous communities, associating the practice with devil worship (Feinberg, 127; Benítez 1964). It was not until Dr. Gordon Wasson, a JP Morgan banker-turned-amateur-mycologist, traveled to the Sierra Mazateca to study Indigenous uses of psilocybin mushrooms that these plant materials were introduced to the West. In Huautla de Jimenez, he met the now infamous curandera named María Sabina who could perform the mushroom ceremony, also known as the *velada*, for him. Wasson recorded Sabina's *veladas* and disseminated her image, chants, and name against her wishes. Wasson's materials were published in the sensational and iconic Life magazine article, titled "Seeking the Magic Mushroom: A New York banker goes to Mexico's mountains to participate in the age-old rituals of Indians who chew strange growths that produce visions," on May 13, 1957 (Lutkajtis, 122; Letcher, 86). This represents a moment in history in which Western audiences came into contact with a cultural 'other', and in which the practice of psilocybin mushrooms and the culture that developed this practice became available for Western consumption. As word spread about the psychedelic mushrooms, tourists, hippies, researchers, and experts in many fields descended upon Huautla to encounter the psychedelic, spiritual, scientific, and ethnographic opportunities of the mushrooms and the Mazatec people. Feinberg reveals that on one of Wasson's successive trips to the Sierra

Mazateca, he was accompanied by a man supposedly representing the research institution that had given him an academic grant. In reality, the man was a CIA agent who had traveled with Wasson in order to collect mushrooms for the agency's now notorious mind control experimentation project, MK Ultra (Feinberg, 130; Tim Weiner, personal communication). The surge of Western tourism during this time presented opportunities as well as dangers for the community, but by and large the Westerners left spiritual abuses, destruction of cultural heritage, and a long term police presence in its wake. Maria Sabina herself experienced misfortune during this time—on three different instances she was shot, arrested by the Mexican police for suspicion of being associated with drug trafficking, and her house was burned down (Estrada, 44, 56). The presence of foreigners upset the social dynamics of Huautla's campesino community, and Sabina was blamed and ostracized for her role in bringing the foreigners to the Sierra Mazateca. Later admitting his role in this extractive legacy, Wasson himself publicly confessed:

“I, Gordon Wasson, am held responsible for the end of a religious practice in Mesoamerica that goes back far, for millennia. ‘The little mushrooms won't work anymore. There is no helping it’. I fear she spoke the truth...A practice carried on in secret for centuries has now been aerated and aeration spells the end” (quoted in Rothenberg 2003: xvi).

Today, Huautla is still marked by Western associations of psilocybin mushrooms and Maria Sabina's image in a way that has been damaging for the community and degrading to the reputation of Mazatec healers in Huautla de Jimenez (Lutkajtis, 131).

The origin of ayahuasca in the Amazon region is murky, with some evidence suggesting use dating back to at least to 800-1200 AD, and Tukano-Desana cosmogonies including ayahuasca's origin story to a ‘time before time’ (Kahpi.net, 2021). The first written accounts of ayahuasca use were the reports of Jesuit missionaries, who wrote that the use of ayahuasca “serves for mystification and bewitchment...for superstitious practices and witchcraft,”

(Kahpi.net, 2021). Westerners such as Richard Spruce and Manuel Villavicencio were the first to discover ayahuasca as a subject of research in the 1850s, while the infamous American ethnobotanist Richard Evans Schultes introduced ayahuasca to the American public (Bosse, 2021). Ayahuasca spread throughout Amazonian communities during the boom of the rubber tapping industries, which has been historically noted as an era of intense destruction, horror, and exploitation for the Amazon forest peoples. During this time, Indigenous groups were enslaved and dislocated, experiencing mass death due to disease (Kahpi.net, 2021). Thousands of Amazon forest people died in a very short time as a result of the murder, abuse, and disease brought on by the rubber trade, and in many circumstances, ayahuasca and other medicinal plants were the only resources available to these communities for healing. In his influential tome *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study of Terror and Healing*, Michael Taussig recognizes the rise of ayahuasca shamanism during a time when Indigenous communities were stripped of their traditions and “transformed into labor for the global industry” as an expression of the “disorderly brutality of colonialism and capitalist expansion” (Kahpi.net, 2021). He was especially interested in how notions of the “primitive” and images of the “wild Indian” were projected onto Indigenous groups and Indigenous healing practices by Western colonists and capitalists during this time of encounter. In recent decades, ayahuasca tourism in the Amazon has become a surging market, which has presented economic benefits and cultural challenges for Amazon forest communities. Maestro Pedro Tangoa Lopez claims that ayahuasca tourism and commercialization are distorting the cultural originality and traditions of the medicine, contributing to a “huge cultural devastation”. Maestra Vicky Corisepa laments, “our culture has been disappearing, due to all the transnational invasions green lit by the government. It is disrespecting the native people,” (Corisepa, 2020). Maestro Lopez also voices

concerns regarding overharvesting of ayahuasca that is causing scarcity and fears of deforestation in local areas: “if we don’t do anything, I think that in 10 to 15 years we’re going to be talking as we did with the disappearance of mahogany in the Amazon,” (kahpi.org). The declining supply of local ayahuasca has caused prices of the B. caapi vine to more than triple in the past six years, with younger and thinner vines being used more than ever before to keep up with tourist demand (Opray, 2017).

These accounts reverberate occurrences of Western contact and ‘discovery’ with a resource, practice, or culture that is followed by colonial appropriation of that resource through exploitation, extraction and domination. The Natural Colonial Gaze framework allows for a glimpse into the eye of the Western ‘discoverer’ who, upon encountering the Other, envisions making a natural resource productive through rational means, effectively harnessing the value of the resource that those who originally stewarded the natural resource ‘could not understand’. The next sections will break down how the contemporary psychedelic ecosystem operates from a Natural Colonial Gaze, and works to extract value, knowledge, and spirit from psychedelic plant medicines and the communities they originate from.

Extracting Value: Psychedelic Capitalism

“When Europeans first colonized the non-European world, they felt it was their duty to ‘discover and conquer,’ to ‘subdue, occupy, and possess.’ It seems that the Western powers are still driven by the colonizing impulse to discover, conquer, own, and possess everything, every society, every culture.”
-Vandana Shiva (29)

The actions of large players within the psychedelic industry reveal many of the extractive practices and colonial logics lying at the center of the psychedelic ecosystem. The Natural Colonial Gaze framework can assist in identifying the ideological lens through which corporate interests operate with regard to psychedelic plant medicines stewarded by Indigenous

communities. Many psychedelic companies refuse to acknowledge Indigenous communities, protecting potential profits of commercialization over the livelihoods of entire peoples, and ignoring their deep rooted relationships to these plant medicines that make Western use and commercialization possible in the first place. Psychedelic industry is growing concerning parallels and convergences with other extractive and fundamentally colonial economic sectors, such as natural resource extraction, data analytics and surveillance. The profits made from psychedelic plant medicines are codified through patents, similar to the way original settler colonists consolidated wealth through codifying private property regimes into law, extracting natural resources out of the hands of Indigenous peoples, and guarding profits through an apparatus of surveillance.

The psychedelic industry has many ties to other extractive industries, most notably the mining industry. There are a plethora of psychedelic companies founded, advised by, or otherwise associated with individuals with a background in the mining industry. Many psychedelic startups and companies share ties to the extraction of gold, silver, copper, platinum, lithium, nickel, cobalt, copper, uranium, coal, oil, natural gas, and fracking, in areas such as South America, Africa, Central Asia, and the South Pacific. There are also a large number of psychedelic companies that emerged in the marketplace through a reverse takeover (RTO) of a mining or resource extraction company, with two examples being MindMed's (a biotech company focusing on LSD commercialization) reverse takeover of Broadway Gold Mining Corp and Field Trip Health's reverse takeover of Newton Energy Corp., a Canadian oil and gas company (Benzinga, 2020).

Compass Pathways, a British biotech company focused on developing psilocybin-based treatments for depression is especially prominent, with a current market cap of \$938 million and

a 71% increase immediately post IPO (CNBC, 2021). Early COMPASS investor and ATAI Life Sciences co-founder Christian Angermeyer is the largest investor in Rock Tech Lithium, with COMPASS investor Peter Thiel also owning a stake in Rock Tech Lithium. Peter Thiel, Paypal co-founder and early Facebook investor, is also the chairperson of Palantir, a data analytics surveillance corporation that has extensive ties and contracts with the Pentagon, the Department of Justice, the Department of Homeland Security, and ICE. Palantir's software utilizes data consolidation and analytics for crime forecasting and predictive policing, which has facilitated ICE raids that Latinx organizer Jacinta Gonzalez describes as "human rights violations," with "people being arrested at work, separated from their children, [and] detained in inhumane conditions," (Motherboard, 2020). Additional documents from May 2019 reveal the utilization of Palantir's case management software in ICE operations that specifically targeted the families and caretakers of unaccompanied migrant children, leading to 443 arrests (Biddle & Deveraux, 2019). Essential to the extraction and ownership of resources as private property is the protection and enforcement of private property, a fundamental objective of modern policing. Surveillance software such as Palantir that operates through data collection and consolidation can be seen as an extension of the global policing apparatus that works to ensure protections for capital and property wherever it is appropriated, targeting and criminalizing marginalized communities, and emboldening traditional structures of power.

COMPASS Pathways has come under fire by many in the psychedelic community, not only for its intimate affiliations to extractive industry and surveillance capital, but also for its aggressive patent strategy⁴. This backlash has culminated in the psychedelic community with the emergence of the Statement for Open Science and Praxis, which calls for intellectual integrity, a

⁴ In 2021, Christian Angermeyer himself addressed the patent backlash, writing: "*In no way do I believe the for-profit medical model will negatively impact the lives of indigenous shamans,*" (Angermeyer, 2021).

spirit of service, open exchange of knowledge and research outcomes, and “placing the common good over private gain” (CSP, 2021). However, the harms of patenting go far beyond restricting the scientific community from making further advances in research due to the free, open exchange of information. As Gerber et al., write in the article, *Ethical Concerns about Psilocybin Intellectual Property*, researching psilocybin creates a bioprospecting project with an asymmetrical relationship of power “resulting in the pharmaceutical industry pursuing innovation through intellectual property rights with no plans for reciprocity with or compensation for the indigenous communities who have protected these traditional mushroom practices for millennia,” (Gerber et al., 2021). As of January 2021, there were at least 24 registered patents for psilocybin—and none of these pharmaceutical corporations seeking psilocybin commercialization and patents have attempted to reach any genuine benefit sharing or reciprocity agreements with the Mazatec people, in the face of many international accords detailing protections for Indigenous intellectual property and cultural patrimony (Gerber et. al, 2021).

A Western person patenting, or attempting to patent, a psychedelic plant used and stewarded by an Indigenous group is not a new occurrence. Ayahuasca itself was patented in 1986 by an American citizen named Loren Miller, director of the company International Plant Medicine based in California. He applied for the patent in 1984, 10 years after being given a sample of the B. caapi vine by an Indigenous leader in Ecuador (Kahpi.net, 2021). In response to plant patent 5,751, the Coordinating Body of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon River Basin (COICA), representing over 400 Indigenous communities across the Amazon basin, criticised the plunder and disrespect of the sacred symbol and requested a reexamination of the patent alongside the Center for International Environmental Law (Fox, 1999). In an open letter to

the United States Congress, COICA declared Miller an “enemy of indigenous people” and prohibited his entrance into any Indigenous territory (Jacanimijoy, 1998). The reexamination highlighted requirements that a plant must be new and distinct in order to be considered patentable as well as arguing for a case of biopiracy and invoking a moral utility doctrine to prevent the theft of Indigenous community-held knowledge. The patent was rejected in 1999, citing lack of novelty yet rejecting the claims of biopiracy and moral utility. Loren Miller appealed, and the USPTO sided with Miller’s appeal, reinstating plant patent 5,751 in 2001 lasting for the remaining two years of its term.

The act of patenting can be understood through the Natural Colonial Gaze framework as a manifestation of the Newtonian lens of reduction, fragmentation, control, and ownership. A patent is an exclusive right granted for an invention that allows the owner of the patent to exclude others from the creation, sales, distribution, and use of the patented product (Shiva, 9). As Mohr writes, “the white settler saw, through the natural colonial gaze, the American landscape as potential commodities— and through the Newtonian worldview, the white settler was able to break this landscape down into manageable parts to be rationally reorganized, controlled, and owned,” (Mohr, 4; Corliss, 31). Looking through the perspective of the Natural Colonial Gaze, it is easy to see that patents are a mechanism borne out of the colonial need to seek value where it is regarded as ‘vacant’ or used improperly by cultures deemed as less than human, to possess and to own. Shiva writes, “the creation of property through the piracy of others' wealth remains the same as 500 years ago...the duty to incorporate savages into Christianity has been replaced by the duty to incorporate local and national economies into the global marketplace, and to incorporate non-Western systems of knowledge into the reductionism of commercialized Western science and technology,” (Shiva, 14). By using technological

methods to extract, isolate, concentrate, or synthesize compounds derived from a natural resource, Western biotechnology companies are able to legally create compounds that can be owned, excluded, and commercialized. Maestra Vicky Corisepa details the irony of this situation with regards to natural psychedelic compounds and their synthetic derivatives:

“The scientists have been trying to copy everything from nature...it’s quite embarrassing that nature is not recognized and respected. They don’t respect the medicinal plants. The big scientists don’t go around saying “Thanks to the plants I have created this.” They should promote respect for the world of nature, but they don’t. They say instead: ‘I’m the maker.’ And, oh boy, they deplete and clean away everything that helped them,”
(Kahpi.net, 2021)

Maestra Corisepa’s experience describes instances of biopiracy and bioprospecting in which the ability to create novel synthetics is valued higher than traditional uses of a plant. Indigenous peoples are excluded from intellectual property regimes because of patent restrictions on products of nature and patent requirements for human intervention, novelty, inventive step, and industrial application (Shiva, 16). Indigenous peoples’ depth of knowledge, intimate relationships, and innovative uses of natural resources are unrecognized, while a Western scientist’s ability to duplicate that knowledge and distill a natural product into a novel molecular compound is rewarded with exclusive ownership and property rights.

Intellectual property regimes in reference to psychedelic plant medicines provide an inadequate legal framework of property itself for Indigenous communities, act as an extension of colonial development, and signal the foreclosure of Indigenous community assets. To highlight the incompatibility of patent law with Indigenous conceptions of property, McGonigle analyzes a case study of a patent incident involving genetically engineered Taro at the University of Hawai’i. Taro is culturally significant within Kānaka Maoli cosmology, wherein the Kumulipo creation story narrates a primordial kinship with taro, “as elder brother and ancestor Haloa,” (McGonigle, 220; Gugganig, note 17). It did not matter if the plant was genetically engineered or

not, and was felt as a violation of the collective rights and resources of the Kānaka Maoli community, thereby conflicting with normative Western frameworks and conceptions of property. Many Indigenous groups believe plants, animals, and the land itself to be other-than-human kin, relatives, or local spirits with animist qualities, and therefore are not eligible to be owned or traded in the marketplace. The Wixárika Council for the Defense of Wirikuta declared in a December 2020 press release that Wirikuta, the sacred site of the peyote pilgrimage, “IS NOT FOR SALE, IT IS LOVED AND DEFENDED!” (Wixárika Regional Council, 2021). Similarly, Brazilian medicinal plants specialist Thiago Martins e Silva notes that in indigenous settings, “nobody pays to take ayahuasca...what is sacred should not be for sale,” (Opray, 2017). Tink Tinker (Eagle Clan, wazhazhe /Osage Nation), Clifford Baldrige Emeritus Professor of American Indian Cultures and Religious Traditions at Iliff School of Theology, emphasizes that Indigenous peoples traditionally do not have the vocabulary to conceptualize private property:

“Indians don’t have that word [‘property’], it’s not in any of our languages. In fact, we can’t imagine converting our grandmother into commodifiable property that can be divided up, split up among individual human owners...that’s kind of like, in our mind, a human being owning a human being. Except that these same Euro-christians did exactly that too, didn’t they?” (October 2021)

Global conventions such as the GATT and TRIPs agreement create a legal landscape only recognizing Western conceptions of property, in which legal proprietorship of plant life can be achieved through a small biotechnological modification and application for industrial use—a system favoring corporate actors that can develop synthetic alternatives over Indigenous communities that have been in relationship to the plant for generations (McGonigle, 223). Intellectual property regimes act as a function of what Enrique Dussel calls the developmental fallacy, or “the imposition of modernity as a universalized mode of governance,” a yardstick by

which other ways of knowing, being, and relating to community assets are measured by in the context of Western measures of modernity and progress (Gomez-Barris, xviii; Dussel, 2003). The act of patenting as development works as a colonial tactic to manage and shape the natural world in a way that works towards the economic goals of colonial-capitalism, in this case, the legal theft and proprietorship of Indigenous community-held resources by Western biotech and pharmaceutical drug developers and their stakeholders.

Extracting Knowledge: Making Legible the Unintelligible

"Why now? After so long, [do] you all want to know about the forest, about the plants as sentient, aware...we have always considered them to be family—the trees, ayahwasca, Brazil nuts, all of it! And now you want to talk about medicinal plants...What is this, another type of biopiracy?"
-Txai Tuwe, Huni Kuí (Goldstein, 18)

In the history of psychedelics and the contemporary movement of renewed interest in psychedelic plants for the use of treating mental health issues, Indigenous knowledge of psychedelic plants has systematically been ignored, suppressed, invalidated, and delegitimized—until it is “confirmed” by Western science. Currently, the psychedelic ‘renaissance’ is based on the revival of scientific research, drug development, and medical applications of psychedelic compounds for the treatment of mental illnesses such as depression, anxiety, PTSD, and eating disorders. An onslaught media headlines have been released in recent months with messaging along the lines of how new, groundbreaking discoveries in *modern science* and medicine have verified *ancient* or *traditional wisdom* regarding the therapeutic healing benefits of psychedelic plants and mushrooms⁵. An October 2021 issue of Newsweek Magazine featured psilocybin mushrooms on the front cover with the text “A New Treatment for Depression” and the subtitle “Global *Tech* Driving the *Future*: Psilocybin, aka MAGIC MUSHROOMS could be the *Biggest Advance* Since Prozac” (Piore, 2021, emphasis added).

⁵ “The Benefits of Peyote: Ancient Wisdom, Modern Medicine” (Lewis-Healy, 2021)

Michael Pollan's book, often cited as one of the largest influences for mainstreaming psychedelics in recent years, is titled "How to Change Your Mind: What The *New Science* Of Psychedelics Teaches Us About Consciousness, Dying, Addiction, Depression, And Transcendence" (Pollan, 2019, emphasis added). This reductive language is not uncommon when Western minds configure intellectual contact with Indigenous knowledges, creating a fundamental separation that Foucault calls "dividing practices" and what Val Plumwood calls "dualistic constructions" of the other, referring to the multitude of ways that dominant societies objectify the other through an "us versus them" hegemonic narrative (p. 208) (Dove, 196; Foucault, 208; Plumwood, 53). Similar to Western conceptions of traditional ecological knowledge, Western conceptions of Indigenous psychedelic plant medicine knowledge embodies three essentialized myths about Indigenous peoples: the exotic other, the intruding wastrel, and the noble savage (Berkes, 1999). By playing into caricatures of Indigenous peoples, this racialized, colonial mindset perpetuates the continued delegitimization of Indigenous community-held knowledge (Gerber et al., 576).

Scientific renditions of Indigenous plant medicine knowledge are manifestations of the Natural Colonial Gaze as a process of discovery, differentiation, assimilation, and possession. Healing benefits of sacred plants and fungi such as peyote, ayahuasca, and psilocybin mushrooms are (re)discovered by the colonizing world through the language of science. Sanabria urges us to consider what one calls "new" and for whom it is so, concerned that Western psychology and medicine's psychedelic revolution involves a "delicate exercise of becoming legitimate, of building an evidence-based regime and validating within the hegemonic science, new—well, actually very old treatments" (Sanabria, 2017; Goldstein, 21). This 'becoming legitimate' acts as the differentiating factor, the 'dividing practice' between the knowledge of

modern, civilized peoples and the *wisdom* of ancient, backwards, tribal peoples—a picturesque image of Indigenous peoples as the exotic other and the noble savage. Edward Said wrote that the other’s perceived deficiency invites the one “to control, contain and otherwise govern (through superior knowledge and accommodating power) the Other” (Said, 48). This governing of the other is seen as a process called *assimilation*, in which the one ‘incorporates’ the other into dominant culture by reshaping and remaking the other’s identity. Assimilation works in relation to colonized peoples and nature as both are defined by a perceived absence of the colonizer’s chief qualities, which in the West is regarded as reason/rationality. Thus, nature and the land of Indigenous peoples is cast as a disorderly space that is in need of rational management or ‘development’— with development being the assimilating project of colonization (Plumwood, 58). The community held knowledge of psychedelic plant medicines by Indigenous peoples is perceived as a rational deficiency, as backwards spiritual wisdom, inviting colonial minds to reshape this wisdom and uses of the plants through rational management, or scientific and pharmaceutical development owned and protected through IPRs and patents. These practices of differentiation and assimilation are enacted when Western scientists and researchers come to the Sierra Mazateca and patronize Mazatec *chojta chijne* (wisdom bearers) that they incorrectly call their own mushrooms by the wrong name and are mistaken about the range of their local mushrooms (Gerber et. al, 576). Ayahuasca Maestra Vicky Corisepa comments on this experience, sharing that “[the foreigners] say things like, ‘*these native people are a bunch of ignorants, they know nothing,*’ without recognizing that we’re the first that mastered the medicine. They’ve taken the knowledge from us, the foreigners with their financial power,” (Kahpi.net). Science and medicalization can be seen as biotechnological development upon the primitive, spiritual use of plant medicines by Indigenous ‘shamans’. In this regard, science is

expressed as a pinnacle of progress, seen through the framework of the Natural Colonial Gaze as representing the process of taming, overcoming, and mastering the uncivilized, undeveloped, and deficient non/sub-human sphere by the rational, developed and civilized sphere of European culture and modernity (Mohr, 4; Plumwood, 52).

The colonial view of psychedelic plant medicines invalidates Indigenous knowledges by relegating Indigenous knowledges (and peoples) to the past. In *Red Nation Native Liberation: The Way Forward*, Nick Estes writes that “natives are thought to be a backwards people living in the past,” (2016). This is expressed routinely throughout discourse of psychedelic plants, from the time of the 60s cultural boom to the contemporary revival of psychedelic science and scholarship. Feinberg articulates this phenomenon in *The Devil’s Book of Culture* as he analyzes the interplay of cultural narratives behind the classic story of Maria Sabina, Gordon Wasson, and the Western world. He argues that conceptions of the “Mazatec World” that is invoked in contemporary discourse about the Sierra Mazateca configures associations of boundedness and enclosure, and constructs what Bakhtin called an “epic distance” between the past and the present (Feinberg, 145; Bakhtin, 182). These conceptions utilize mushrooms as a demarcation and representation of a past culture, with Maria Sabina a perfect symbol of this bounded “Mazatec World” because she, too, is already dead. In order to be considered a prominent figure worthy of studying, Maria Sabina must be of an “uncontaminated, separate world, like that of our ancestors,” (Feinberg, 428). Nevermind the fact that Sabina only died in 1985, less than 40 years ago, she is thought of as a representation of something and somewhere ancient and devoid of modernity. The difference between the primitive past and the progressive present is not time itself, but culture. In *Provincializing Europe*, Chakrabarty argues that Western scholarship treats intellectuals who have been dead for generations as contemporaries without contextualizing their

concepts and ideas within European and colonial worldviews, while scholarship from other cultural contexts are seen as ‘truly dead’, material from the distant past, useful only for historical or ethnographic research. Because of this, ways of knowing outside of the dominant worldview are seen as dead, bygone, and not existing as resources for critical thought or interaction today (Chakrabarty, 6). The subject of study—Maria Sabina—and her epistemological background, Indigenous knowledge of psychedelic plant medicines, are relegated to something dead, only to be studied through ethnographic encounter, never interacted or engaged with intellectual sincerity or taken seriously. Feinberg also observes that the genre of writing that is often employed in recounting the myth of Wasson’s travels and discoveries follows the hero’s journey archetype of a single man’s voyage to somewhere strange, unknown, isolated, and part of the distant past. In this narration, Dr. Gordon Wasson journeyed to the Sierra Mazateca in search for “the racial past, the survival of an ancient Asiatic religion, and his writings of this ecstatic primitive attracted hordes of first world pilgrims eager to consume the primitive in the form of Mexican indigenusness,” (Feinberg, 162-163). Notwithstanding the fact that Dr. Gordon Wasson was accompanied by an expert female ethnomycologist in most of his travels⁶—in the West, translating Indigenous community-held knowledge into validity must take the form of an individual man acting alone, deifying the exploits and achievements of an individual’s quest for knowledge over the compositions of a collective.

The medicalization of psychedelic plant medicines, operating from a dominant worldview, can be examined as a way of making psychedelic plant medicines legitimate through a colonial process of rational management, fragmentation and control. Tehseen Noorani aptly

⁶ There is, today, an increased acknowledgement of Dr. Valentina Pavlovna Wasson’s role in the works and spotlight typically given solely to her husband, Dr. Gordon Wasson. In reality, it is likely that Valentina herself was the one more knowledgeable and initially more interested in mushrooms than he (Williams, 2021).

writes that “psychedelics are already medicines for many,” asserting that the issue of psychedelic medicalization “more accurately concerns turning them into *medications*—what regulators term “drug products”—to be sold by pharmaceutical companies,” (Noorani, 4). Medicalization in this regard operates as a mechanism of what Schenberg refers to in his work with ayahuasca as *epistemic injustice*, which is defined by Fricker as an injustice in which a group is determined to be incapable of “rendering their own experiences intelligible or even meaningful,” (Schenberg, 11; Fricker, 2007). A parallel to this process can be seen with the ideologies held by the Mexican scientific and medical community upon discovering Indigenous and folk healing uses of peyote in the early 1900s. The Huichol people during this time were cast as the noble savage, knowledgeable about peyote as a plant but lacking in ‘proper’ understanding of the drug, as a result of their separateness from Western civilization and modernity. The Instituto Medical Nacional (IMN) in Mexico took great interest in researching the potential therapeutic properties of peyote, believing that it had real power and effect. As Dawson writes, that power simply needed to be “harnessed properly, in a way that discarded the delusions and superstitions of the Indians for a modern, scientific approach to the cactus,” (Dawson, 28-29). The same colonial mindset of epistemic injustices occurring in the early 1900s is being reproduced a century later within the discourse of Western psychedelic science and therapeutic applications.

The Natural Colonial Gaze framework offers a method of highlighting the pervasive role colonialism has played in shaping dominant epistemologies and narratives of legitimacy, safety, effectiveness, and proper use within the scientific and medical paradigm of psychedelic therapies. Colonialism centered modern scientific knowledge over folk knowledge, favoring centralized, institutionalized ways of knowing nature over localized, informal ways of relating to it (Adams, 42). In the dualistic split between civilized humans and the savage natural world,

‘legitimate’ engagement with nature has become regulated by bureaucratic and paternalistic control and measured by the success of science and development. Scientific knowledge was harnessed to the needs of production and the wants of industry. As Adams writes, colonial nature was “conquered, made productive despite itself,” (Adams, 42). Nature, and Indigenous customs and knowledge about nature became a resource to be extracted, conquered, and made productive despite itself. The creation of pharmaceutical medications out of psychedelic plants is the process by which these plant medicines, stewarded by Indigenous peoples, are being made productive despite themselves.

Extracting Spirit: Spiritual Abuse, Desacralization, and Sacred Reciprocity

“Before Wasson, I felt that the 'saint children' elevated me. I don't feel like that anymore. Their force has diminished. If Cayetano had not brought the foreigners ...the 'saint children' would have kept their powers. From the moment the foreigners arrived, the 'saint children' lost their purity. They lost their force; the foreigners spoiled them. From now on they won't be any good. There is no remedy for it.”

-Maria Sabina

Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s work conceptualizes extraction as operating through the conversion of *Indigeneity* into exchange value. Indigeneity, encompassing all areas of Indigenous natural, intellectual and spiritual resources, is stolen from Indigenous populations to “produce new forms of colonial currency,” (Gómez-Barris, 10; Smith, 1999). This work has expressed how Indigenous natural and intellectual resources undergo extraction in a colonial paradigm, but an oft-forgotten, yet deeply impactful arena of extraction exists in the conversion of Indigenous spiritual resources into colonial currency.

Anna Lutkajtis examines the impacts of the West’s psilocybin discovery and popularity on the Mazatec community, arguing that the misappropriation of Indigenous sacred practices have resulted in the desacralization of psilocybin mushrooms constituting a form of spiritual abuse that has had extensive and lasting harmful consequences (Lutkajtis, 128). Desacralization

is defined as the “reverse of sacralization, and occurs when a formerly dedicated sacred object is used for another purpose outside of the particular religious setting which dedicated it for a sacred purpose, hence rendering the object desacralized,” (Lutjakis, 124; Gray, LaBore, Carter, 5).

Pointing to the aftermath of the West’s initial encounter with psilocybin mushrooms, including a hippie frenzy in Huautla that resulted in a long-term police presence, the negative consequences impacting Maria Sabina in her later life, and the ultimate form of desacralization (the worldwide classification of *the little saints* as illicit drugs), Lutjakis maintains that the spiritual power of psilocybin mushrooms has been contaminated, thereby stripped from those who have practiced with them for centuries. Commercialization of the mushroom velada has also contributed to the desacralization of the velada as well as the reputation of Huauteco healers and healing practices—all of which contribute to the desacralization of the mushroom velada as spiritual abuse. Apolonio Teran, a Mazatec healer contemporary of Maria Sabina, claimed in an interview with Alvaro Estrada that:

"the divine mushroom no longer belongs to us. It's sacred language has been profaned. The language has been spoiled and it is indecipherable for us ...The mushrooms have a divine spirit: They always had it for us, but the foreigners arrived and frightened it away" (Duke, 119)

The diminished force, or spiritual integrity of the mushrooms due to commercialization, contamination, appropriation, and outlaw point to the classification of spiritual abuse. Gray, LaBore, and Carter define spiritual abuse as actions that damage a person or a community’s subjective experience and practice of the sacred, creating a “severe disconnection with a higher power or other spiritual sources of meaning and resulting in harm to one’s spiritual integrity, lack of access to spiritual resources to cope, and/or an inability to pursue spiritual growth” (Gray, LaBore and Carter, 4; Lutjakis, 124). These experiences have created lasting harm to the community of Huautla de Jimenez on a deeply spiritual and emotional level. Duke and Faudree’s

work on the Huautla community denotes a sense of distress and loss due to the cultural degradation of the mushroom velada, while Flores explains from a Mazatec perspective the essential need for acknowledgement of the legacy of violence that has characterized the experiences of the Mazatec community post-Wasson (Lujatkis, 137; Duke, 269; Faudree, 2015; Flores, 2018).

Framing the history of psilocybin mushrooms in a colonial context and highlighting not only the intellectual and material harms, but also spiritual abuses impacting the Mazatec community creates a basis for recognizing the immense importance and centrality of the spiritual domain within Indigenous ways of life. Sharon Venne writes that Indigenous concepts of sovereignty are inextricable to spirituality, in which sovereignty is “woven through a fabric that encompasses our spirituality and responsibility,” and related to connections of the earth (Venne, 23). In this regard, the spiritual abuse and desacralization appraised by Lutkajtis must be seen as *real* abuse and must be taken seriously within an analysis of colonialism and psychedelics (Lutkajtis, 125). Connecting the desacralization and theft of Indigenous spiritual resources as another form of colonial extraction, Tink Tinker asks the non-indigenous, “if your individual health is so much more important than the health of whole, organic communities that live close to that plant, that relative...that you can bulldoze your way in and capture it with the monetary power of northerners over against the southern hemisphere...at the cost of changing that people forever, and changing their relationship with that plant,”(Chacrana Web Event, 2021). It is important to emphasize that these relationships have been forever altered because of the spiritual abuse, extraction, and cultural degradation. While Western peoples are able to enjoy the emotional, spiritual, and mystical benefits of plant medicines because of Indigenous peoples, Indigenous peoples’ relationships to these communal resources are continually diminished. It is

especially and painfully ironic that now even biomedical research with psychedelics has increasingly dialed into the value of spiritual or mystical experiences as a key factor in growth, healing, meaning-making, and a reduction of symptoms of emotional distress (Griffiths et. al., 2006). It is important to note that these were precisely the aspects of Indigenous psychedelic shamanism that were so often cast to the side as primitive, un-scientific superstitious beliefs, again enacting the cycle of *epistemic injustices* highlighted by Schenberg (Schenberg, 7).

Reciprocity is a common buzzword heard within the Western psychedelics community when referring to Indigenous peoples and cultures. There is a growing interest in cultivating reciprocity with the Indigenous communities that paved the way for Western use of psychedelic plant medicines today, making it important to become clear about what reciprocity with Indigenous peoples means situated within the broader context of a psychedelic ‘renaissance’ deeply rooted in colonial ideologies and extractive practices. What does sacred reciprocity mean in a greater ‘set and setting’ of material, intellectual, and spiritual extraction and abuse? Where does sacred reciprocity come into play with substances that have been desacralized for the original users of these plants? While sentiments supportive of Indigenous sacred reciprocity are common to find within this space, in reality there is a severe lack of profit-making or corporate bodies seeking benefit-sharing relationships with Indigenous communities, and very few initiatives building towards Indigenous reciprocity. When it comes to psilocybin mushrooms and compounds, this is especially true—since the spread of Mazatec mushroom ceremonies in 1957, no one has sought any fair or earnest efforts for reciprocity with Mazatec communities, despite large amounts of money earned from psilocybin patents and biotech endeavors in the last 5 years (Gerber et. al., 2020). This discrepancy between sentiment circulated on social media and within conference spaces and a severe lack of genuine action for benefit-sharing within the psychedelics

community necessitates contemplation on the meaning of reciprocity in Western and Indigenous contexts.

Dostilio et. al., provide an examination of differing conceptualizations of reciprocity within the field of service-learning and community engagement that can be applied to further explore disparities in conceptions of reciprocity between Western cultures and Indigenous contexts. In this article, titled “Reciprocity: Saying What We Mean and Meaning What We Say,” the authors describe three distinct yet related orientations of reciprocity: exchange-oriented reciprocity, influence-oriented reciprocity, and generativity-oriented reciprocity.

Exchange-oriented reciprocity refers to the “interchange (or giving and receiving) of benefits, resources, or actions,” (Dostilio et. al., 22). This reciprocity orientation is the most similar to Western notions of reciprocity as a transactional relationship of benefit sharing, that can serve to further maintain and uphold imbalances of power through “giving back” to a community that has been the source of exploitation and extraction. Indigenous perspectives of reciprocity more closely resemble influence and generativity-oriented reciprocity, which are marked by themes of relationality, interconnectedness, and the iterative nature of generative transformation. Within the influence-orientation, reciprocity is understood and expressed as a “relational connection that is informed by personal, social, and environmental contexts,” (19). A generativity-oriented reciprocity—which can be found not only in Indigenous and non-Western epistemes but also within disciplines of ecology, systems thinking, quantum physics, and chaos theory—goes beyond the normative sense of relationality into a deeper understanding of a world in which all beings and all knowledges exist within networks of relationship. Generativity-oriented reciprocity reflects a paradigm shift away from Newtonian models of fragmentation and Cartesian approaches to thinking about the world and its’ inhabitants, challenging the separation

between subject (knower) and object (known) and moving towards new schemas of ecological thinking which reveal that reality is a web-like network of relations (25). This orientation includes an active and deliberate analysis of power, privilege, and oppression, which creates a reciprocity orientation well suited to transformation and change within engaged parties, systems, and paradigms (26). This conception of reciprocity leverages transformational synergies emerging from deep, relational, conscious assemblages of reciprocity to impact and shape not only what entities do, but how entities are.

Jameson, Clayton, and Jaeger (2011) conceptualize these differences as ‘thin’ versus ‘thick’ reciprocity, in which thin reciprocity is associated with a transactional, mutually beneficial relationship, and thick reciprocity is associated with mutual transformation. Thin reciprocity stems from a “minimalist” conception of reciprocity, a bare minimum of reciprocity that does not take into account power, transformation, and collaboration (Jameson, Clayton, Jaeger, 263; Dostilio, 21). In the psychedelics community, popular notions of sacred reciprocity extending to donations, monetary retribution, and profit-based benefit sharing lack imaginative capacity and analyses of power. This corresponds to an exchange-oriented, thin concept of reciprocity that, *at best*, approaches the minimum form of reciprocity within Indigenous epistemes. At worst, this orientation of sacred reciprocity more closely resembles performative charity stemming from a white saviorism perspective. Thick reciprocity centers a perspective that values and respects Indigenous voices, is grounded in the context of power dynamics, and creates opportunities for collaboration and open sharing of knowledge, encouraging all parties to grow and support one another’s growth (Jameson, Clayton, Jaeger, 264). In this regard, thick reciprocity coming from a generativity-oriented perspective is relational, collaborative, and can be a transformative force for all parties involved.

Thick, or generativity-oriented reciprocity are Western conceptions most closely related to Indigenous perspectives of reciprocity. Harris and Wasilewski (2004) describe four core values commonly found within North American indigenous tribes that traverse “generation, geography and tribe...Relationship, Responsibility, Reciprocity, and Redistribution” (492). Reciprocity in this perspective is understood as the *cyclical obligation*, referring to Indigenous notions of time, relationships, and nature as circular instead of linear. Harris and Wasilewski write that “the indigenous idea of reciprocity is based on very long relational dynamics in which we are all seen as ‘kin’ to each other,” (493). Reciprocity goes hand in hand with redistribution, the *sharing obligation*, which works to balance and rebalance uneven dynamics. Redistribution refers not only to material wealth but also to information, knowledge, resources, and energy (Harris & Wasilewski, 493). Sacred reciprocity within the psychedelic ecosystem should align more closely with these paradigms of reciprocity in which systems of power and oppression are considered and reciprocity takes the form of a greater sense of giving and receiving within an engaged relational and transformative perspective. In its current form, sacred reciprocity is limited in that it runs the risk of reinforcing imbalances of power under a white saviorism, philanthropic oriented mindset. Harris and Wasilewski caution against this, writing that Indigenous conceptions of reciprocity “should never, ever, even have a hint of superiority or imposition...‘Charity’ creates a status difference between giver and receiver, with the giver in the higher position. Creating such a status difference devaluates the gift,” (Harris & Wasilewski, 493). Given the wider climate of extraction, exclusion, abuse on all levels, and the delegitimization and devaluation of Indigenous knowledges within the psychedelic space, it is important to question intentions that lay behind efforts for sacred reciprocity and discern genuine efforts from consolation prizes. It is an imperative that sacred reciprocity comes from a place of

genuine understanding and acknowledgement of harms, seeking repair before seeking reciprocity. As Schenberg considers, “neither the type of financial compensation provided by a benefit-sharing contract, nor a research project approved by indigenous peoples, can address the harm done by epistemic injustices and unfair regulatory models that do not contemplate traditional medicine,” (Schenberg, 16). Reciprocity with this in mind cannot simply seek to give back, but must spring forth from a sense of responsibility to initiate relationships of repair and give these communities their fair due in a way that is fitting and appropriate for them, on their terms.

Sacred reciprocity built on the foundation of creating transformative relationships of care and supporting Indigenous communities on their own terms can illuminate the path forward in a time of mainstreaming psychedelic plant medicines. This idea follows traditional conceptions of the ayahuasca journey within Huni Kui cosmology, in which the *Nixi Pae* drinker participates in the “continuous metamorphosis which relates to the transformation principle, the primordial creation,” (Schenberg, 2021). We transform our deeper systems and are transformed ourselves by *walking with* one another on this journey together, in ways that support and value one another and our multiplicity (Sundberg, 40). For Indigenous peoples that have faced dispossession, extraction, biopiracy, epistemic injustices, cultural destruction, and desacralization in the face of the proliferation and widening acceptance of psychedelics in the West, supporting and valuing them demands a reverence and accompaniment in efforts for decolonization, sovereignty, and autonomy. Indigenous healers are currently organizing towards these goals in the Amazon, as Shipibo Healers Union has released two statements in recent years on the issues of spiritual extraction and the globalization of Ayahuasca, titled the Yarinacocha Declaration (2018) and the Pronouncement of the Shipibo-Konibo-Xetebo Nation On the Globalization of Ayahuasca

(2019). In the Yarinacocha Declaration, the Shipibo Healers Union declared that Shipibo-Konibo-Xetebo healing and expertise in medicinal plants are fundamentally “*anti-colonialist forms of practice and knowledge, able to resist, transform and reconfigure with every difficulty and threat,*” emphasizing that “*the work of healing and the struggle towards self-determination are not separable. They must move forward on the same path,*” (Shipibo Conibo Center of New York, 2018). Reciprocity with Indigenous plant medicine communities should heed these words and explicitly work in solidarity with Indigenous self-determination and derive from anti-colonial frameworks. In the 2019 Pronouncement of the Shipibo-Konibo-Xetebo Nation On the Globalization of Ayahuasca, the Shipibo Healers Union acknowledged “rampant abuse by outsiders of our sacred plants and of the ancestral knowledge of Amazonian Peoples,” stating that they are “*tired of seeing our knowledge and ancestral practices appropriated by a cannibalistic Western system,*” (Shipibo Conibo Center of New York, 2019). The Healers’ Union reminds us of the great risk that regulation, mainstreaming and medicalization can lead to the bolstering of legitimacy in Western biomedical contexts and the further exclusion of indigenous healing practices, knowledges, and communities.

Conclusion

It is clear that the healing potential of psychedelic plant medicines alone will not be enough to repair the deep harm that has occurred against Indigenous stewards, nor enough to transform systems of oppression that influence the way Westerners relate to Indigenous communities, traditions, knowledge systems, *cosmovisiones*, and more-than-human kin. Moving forward in this context and continuing to profit off of a reductionist biomedical approach with these sacred compounds without acknowledging, addressing, and attempting to repair these harms only furthers the colonial project of extraction and ethnocide against Indigenous

communities. As settlers and Westerners in the psychedelic landscape, it is of utmost importance to acknowledge in a meaningful, large-scale way that dominant ideas of progress, innovation, and ‘renaissance’ itself are inherently colonial in nature. Western bearers of knowledge must take into account that it is *the Westerners* who are the novices of this subject and are just now catching up, pushing back against a lineage of racialized and criminalized misunderstandings of these substances. What Indigenous cultures have known for generations, Western cultures are just beginning to fully understand: psychedelic plant medicines are powerful substances that carry the potential for mystical experiences, therapeutic healing, and personal transformation. Nick Estes writes that “you cannot heal from a system that continues to violate and kill the land and our relatives unless you dismantle that system...the healing of our wounds can only happen if we annihilate profit-making and colonial enterprises,” (Red Nation, 2016). It is fiercely apparent that the path for healing calls for wholehearted engagement in the work to transform oppressive systems of colonial violence by *walking with* Indigenous communities, assisting in efforts towards self-determination, and practicing deep, generative reciprocity in which we can make change and be changed ourselves.

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