



Notes from the World Ayahuasca Conference 2014

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Introduction

Here are my notes from the World Ayahuasca Conference 2014, held on 25-27 September on Ibiza. In the weeks after the conference I spoke with many who are interested in this medicinal plant and its application, but who were not able to join the conference, so I decided to make my notes publicly available. In these notes I will try to give you an overview of the presentations that I have visited, and indicate what I perceived as the highlights, and the sporadic lowlight. It is good to realize that although I do my best to give you a balanced view on the presentations, I do have some strong opinions about certain topics; opinions which are mainly driven by my own work with this medicinal plant. Here and there I have searched for interesting links to more information about the speakers and their topics so that you can continue your research in them.

Welcome Session

The conference was opened by *Benjamin de Loenen (Ben)*, founder and executive director of ICEERS. ICEERS is the International Center for Ethnobotanical Education, Research & Service, and host of the conference. For those that have never heard of ICEERS: it is a non-profit organization whose mission is “the integration of Ayahuasca, Iboga and other traditional plants as therapeutic tools in modern society, and the preservation of the indigenous cultures that have been using these plant species since antiquity on, their habitat and botanical resources.” Next to the usual opening formalities, Ben pointed out that although this conference is held in Spain it does not mean that Spain’s stance on Ayahuasca is favorable: in the past three years there have been about forty Ayahuasca-related arrests in this country. My ears pricked up when Ben announced that ICEERS is busy with an ethical code for those who work with this medicine and that a draft version was available in the conference information package. This topic was of prime interest to me as at the beginning of the year I stopped my support for an indigenous Shuar shaman that severely trespassed the healer-patient boundary with several female patients, both with and without consent of these women; one of these women is still daily struggling with the trauma as a result from his behavior. I find such practices absolutely unacceptable and was keen to strengthen my own views on this topic.

The opening was continued by *Bia Labate*, dr. in anthropology and an academic voice that is well known within the Ayahuasca community because of her enormous productivity, resulting in many papers and books that are a great help in getting the therapeutic use of this plant out of the shadow and into the light. She emphasized the broadness of the subject, something that is reflected in the wide range of speakers and topics. She apologized that not every speaker’s proposal could be honored; and announced that there would be several indigenous speakers as well. Bia pointed out that the conference was about the use of the plant as a medicine, and not so much about the state itself that it induces, to get the experts on the plant together, and to place its application and use within international drug policy.

Leon de Souza Lobo continued. He is a Brazilian psychiatrist with a PhD in Public Health; but most importantly, he is the director of drug policy coordination at the National Secretariat on Drug Policy (SENAD) from the Brazilian

Ministry of Justice; this organization's efforts have in 2000 led to the legal status in Brazil for the ritual use of Ayahuasca. To have a government actually send someone like Leon to this conference is a huge statement towards other governments, some of which are still ignorantly fighting the (therapeutic) use of the brew that contains this plant, simply because one of the components of the brew in 1971 suddenly found itself on a controlled substances list of the UN. Leon made regular references to the current Marihuana legalization efforts in various countries; though personally I would not mention Ayahuasca and Marihuana in one go. I regard Marihuana as a harmful plant when smoked, as opposed to using its oil to relax muscles: especially given the number of people that I get into my practice with sometimes severe Marihuana addiction problems and consequently gravely affected mental centers. But I do see that these legalization efforts for Marihuana help to pave the way for legalizing Ayahuasca.

Next was Amanda Feilding, the founder and director of the Beckley Foundation; an organization that does pioneering research in the fields of human consciousness and which was one of the main sponsors of the conference. She pointed out the obviously dysfunctional drug policies that come crumbling down in many countries; policies that have not only caused a lot of personal misery but also blocks scientific research on psychotropic plants. She emphasizes that (important, important!) Ayahuasca cannot be used recreationally. Amanda argues that a more subtle approach to drug policy is necessary: one which helps to reduce harm, but for which taboos need to be overcome. She voiced an in my perception broadly supported conclusion that at the moment these policies do more harm than the drugs itself; where I would like to add that except for a few well-known contra-indications, there is in general not a single harm in Ayahuasca itself.

Last of the opening panel was Claudio Naranjo, a Chilean psychiatrist probably best known for his forty years of work in creating the Enneagram Personality types and his world renowned work on Gestalt therapy. Claudio was a panel member in several tracks during the three days of conference and acted as some sort of *pater familias* for the crowd; mostly drawing from his own experiences with the medicine. His stories were a welcome alternation for the interesting but sometimes very serious and factual presentations of some of the other presenters. My applause was for his statement that it is important to train serious healers that work with this medicine, given the dangers that may arise with applying the plant; with schools possibly popping up in the future. However, despite his expert status there was something that I strongly disagreed with; which was that the plant leads itself when applied: I find that only partially true. Those who provide this plant to others are in my opinion not only facilitators but also act as a representative of the plant to do healing work with the patient; an energetic guiding structure for this work, which is for instance reflected in the indigenous rituals relating to this plant, is in my opinion essential to guide the energies that are excreted by the participants. During the conference I found out that many therapists, predictable perhaps, do not agree with that view.



Ethnobotany (Thursday 12:30)

The Ethnobotany track started with a bit of an incoherent presentation of psychologist/ethnobotanist *Juan Gonzalez Simonneau*. He started excellent with saying that the psychotropic plants enables one to better observe duality, but the following slides on linking such thing to plant forms was a bit too far sought for me. I definitely agreed with him when he later said that the chemical structure of a plant is important, but that's its essence is about something deeper; personally I feel that reducing this plant to a chemical structure is pretty much as ignorant as defining a human being by its body parts, a practice that produces meaningless books such as 'DMT: The Spirit Molecule'.

Glenn Shepard was next. He is an ethnobotanist that had a very interesting presentation on his study of the Matsigenka people in Peru. Most of those that work with this plant medicine are familiar with the Shipibo or Shuar types of using the medicine; so by showing how the Matsigenka use it provided an interesting comparison. Ayahuasca is called 'Kamarampi' by them; which translates as 'vomiting medicine'. Traditionally they do not add DMT-containing plants to it; they use a whole bunch of other plants. This is coherent with my own experiences that the tea cooked from the vine only works perfectly fine, though different, by itself; as is displayed in the traditional Shuar ritual of Natemamu. Another point of interest in his story was how Matsigenka see the painting of animal patterns on themselves: in this way these people invite those energies into themselves to ward off other energies ('spirits').

If there is anything to be said about the next speaker, *Jonathan Ott*, a US ethnobotanist who currently lives in Mexico, is that he really knows his plants. In one rapid artillery fire, probably fuelled by his constant intake of a 'snuff'-like substance, he displayed a deep knowledge of medicinal plants. I regret that his talk was not accompanied by slides, as with all those rapidly fired botanical names it was at times difficult to follow. One of the main 'take aways' for the crowd was the message that, in contrary to popular belief, Ayahuasca is not one brew but that there are many different additives. I am happy to see him publicly stating this as in the past few years I have identified at least fifteen of these additive plants within various Shuar sub-cultures and regions, and cook myself sometimes with up to seven different plants. He added that in Colombia there are tribes that (again) do not even add any leaves to the brew, and that sometimes even use coca leaves in the mixture. Another interesting point was that some tribes make a paste that contains Tobacco and Ayahuasca, which apparently can be put under the tongue. Anyway, many interesting leads to follow up. Where I did not agree with him was the part where he feels that the crystalized essence of the plant is the real spirit of the plant, for the reason mentioned earlier; and because the essence of anything is not physical.

Indigenous (Thursday 15:30)

The Indigenous track, with several indigenous shamans and leaders, started out very predictable. As usual when indigenous people do a speech, there were a lot of words on respect, on family line and tradition, on saving the rainforest; all broadly spoken with many generalities and little controversial position-taking. *Taita Juan Bautista Agreda* from Colombia made an important remark that his people have never used Ayahuasca for hallucinatory experiences; I could not agree more: it is a plant medicine to do deep energetic work, not suitable for some kind of hippy-trip experience. *Sia Kaxinawa* from Brazil emphasized that work with this plant should be



done in a serious way, and in the right way. Other interesting points that he emphasized was that he would not call the brew a medicine because it is also used for situations where there is no sickness, and that Western legislation makes it difficult for indigenous to export their knowledge to our parts of the world. He also did his best to emphasize that we are all part of one large continuum. The presentations of the indigenous leaders were closed with a song.

Then the audience could ask questions, and things finally spiced up. One of the first questions was what the gentlemen thought of the Santo Daime church, which uses Ayahuasca as a sacrament. The diplomatic answers were that the Santo Daime is for Christian people a way to revitalize and therefor OK; and that when such use helps



people it should be respected. Another one was about the many people that started to work with this medicine in the past years. There were various answers on this question: 'It is necessary to respect traditions' (which I interpreted as a strong dislike), 'If you use this medicine with others then you need to have a basic knowledge' and 'Why is everyone calling him or herself a shaman while a real one would never do something like that?'. These statements matched my definition, which is just as valid as anyone else's and which can be found in one of the chapters of my upcoming book. What also was asked is how the indigenous viewed the use of Ayahuasca by children. The answer was that it depended upon the family but that in most cultures an age of seven or eight is regarded as a good starting point for the use of the medicine. Kajuyali made an interesting statement on the 'bad use' of Ayahuasca, defined as in using it for personal gain and egotistical reasons: he saw such things come back as a boomerang somewhere later in life. Then there was more elaborating on the training to work with this medicine: that it could sometimes be a harsh experience, and that to learn to work with the medicine should be done with several different persons. From out the shamanic tradition it was accentuated that deep training is necessary to gain the energetic transmission of this medicine, something which from my own experiences I can attribute to; and that it is important in that training to understand the meaning of the Ayahuasca experience.

Clinical (Thursday 18:00)

I was really looking forward to the Clinical track of the conference. Although I feel that medical science helplessly blunders by, generally speaking, not accepting a model that allows for the existence of 'the human energy field' and the effect that the medicine has on it, I feel that although the energetic workings of the medicine are in such way disregarded, its end results can readily be studied by clinical research. In this way a wider opening can be made for the general acceptance of this plant medicine.

The first speaker was Gabor Mate, a medical doctor from Canada that joined with a prerecorded video. I liked his emphasis on the holistic approach with his medicine and not seeing the disease separate from a larger reality. Interesting was his remark that the plant shows you the pain that you are running away from; and where it helps you to look at that pain with adult consciousness. He was also one of the few that mentioned underlying energy and underlying energetic patterns; though I had of course hoped that he had elaborated more on that.

Psychiatrist Josep Maria Fábregas started by pointing out the contradictions between a UN statement in 2001 that was used in the court case of the Dutch Santo Daime which said that the tea made from Ayahuasca is not illegal, and the 2012 International Narcotics Control Board report which says that legal action should be taken against the use of Ayahuasca (and which outraged loads of sensible people). One 'Like' from me was for his statement that Ayahuasca is a personal medicine with a personal result; I also feel that this indeed makes it so different from other (chemical) medicines. Also interesting was his list on why it was so difficult to do clinical research on the medicine: it's not a purely pharmacology based medicine, in field tests there is no possibility for a placebo and since it cannot be patented there simply is little money available for research. He then drew a parallel between physical science and psychiatrics: in physical science they use entirely different tools than fifty years ago, but in psychiatry they will prescribe the same stuff as fifty years ago. He ended with saying that Ayahuasca is not some kind of magical potion that cures everything and that it is a safe substance in the hands of someone that knows what he or she is doing.

Anja Loizaga-Velder, dr. in Medical Psychology, is someone who in her work searches for new ways to cure psychological diseases. She tries to bridge the gap between traditional and Western medicine. She has a lot of experience with the use of psychotropic plants to cure addictions. Also she does not see Ayahuasca as some kind of a magic potion, nor as a panacea for every disease. Within her presentation she focused on reliving traumas from



earlier life stages using Ayahuasca, sometimes reliving them with the same intensity, and releasing the traumas. However, what I missed in the presentation, and also in most other scientific presentation, were simply the numbers. I would have expected that over time those that worked with a considerable number of patients would have enough material to compile at least some number sheets.

Rafael Sanchez, a medical doctor from Brazil, also has loads of experience with treating depression with Ayahuasca. After an extensive explanation of his method, he did come up with some numbers. The results of his trial with seventeen depressive people were very promising: there was a very strong decline in the symptoms of depression, a decline which was much stronger that could be expected from traditionally prescribed anti-depressants.

In the following discussion it became clear that there are a lot of promising results which come from the research of Ayahuasca but that its illegality in many countries makes it extremely difficult to do proper research; which is one more reason to change the irrationality of current legislation.

Personal Development (Friday 9:30)

Claudio Naranjo started Friday morning with a talk on how we live in a patriarchal mind state, as if we live on an island in our brain: trying to dominate nature and proud of that while in a state of disconnection with our animal nature. In his view we need to recover our animal health and Ayahuasca helps in that process. He stated that in a world of survival the medicine helps us to listen to our inside voice.

Luis Eduardo Luna, dr. in Comparative Religion, clearly had many experiences with the medicine, and he was not shy to talk about them. He stated that the real first worldwide conference on Ayahuasca was actually in 1985. His presentation contained a long list of interesting books and I hope that his presentation becomes available so that they can be checked out.

Manuel Villaescusa, a psychologist from Spain, became acquainted with Ayahuasca through the Santo Daime church. At one moment he asked the audience who of them have had the experience which is called 'The Death of Ayahuasca': it is a state where you literally die with the plant without physically dying, an (always in retrospect) exhilarating experience which I have also had several times; many raised their hands. His view on this experience is that it shows just how separate we are from everything, that the experience helps to heal that. He had an interesting view on vomiting: it is there to vomit out the fears so that the traumas can get out.

What I liked about the presentation of *Danae Saenz*, a clinical psychologist from Chile, was that she described the Ayahuasca experience as a process in order to go into a state where you can enjoy your life. Another interesting remark was that "The knowledge of God is self-knowledge, or to know what we have inside of us".

Most philosophical and most provocative was the presentation of *Josep Maria Fábregas*. He warned, like several others before him, not to simplify Ayahuasca as one brew: he himself has collected about four-hundred different recipes for cooking it; there simply is not one Ayahuasca. He had an interesting comparison where he said that many (contemporary) shamans are like *Don Quichotte*, full of illusions, and that those who visit such people are full of illusions too and therefore travel with a crazy man. I liked his practical and realistic approach to the medicine: it is not about sitting in a lotus position but it's about drinking the Ayahuasca and get healed by harvesting one's inner world while asking questions; although there are no answers to these questions. Very provocative was his remark that it is useless to talk about one's experiences with the medicine as one's own experiences with the medicine are just as



valid as of any other. He said that just after his fellow panel members talked a lot about their own experiences.

The discussion and interaction with the audience after the presentations were also interesting. A lot of time went into talking about what the Ayahuasca experience in itself brings. It was emphasized that “It is not only about the road towards the experience but also about the road back from it. Many drink this medicine but nothing changes; that is because an effort is necessary to transform the experience into something useful for your life. In other words: the experience gives you homework. The experiences that one has had with the medicine are in itself worth nothing if nothing is done with it.” But there was more on this integration: “A ‘handbook’ is needed to help with that integration; in the past this was religion.” And on change: “In essence the only things that you really need to do is to accept the change that you need to make; we are perfect as we are but there is always room for improvement.”

This track was primarily interesting because of the provocativeness of Fábregas. I mean: to tell a room full of Ayahuasca-lovers that it is pretty much nonsense to call Ayahuasca a master plant but to better see it as a tool, is pretty daring. Not that I agree with him, as I do experience the energy of the plant as an intelligence in itself, but I do appreciate his *cojones*. So when hardly anyone in the room clapped, he got a big applause from me for that.

Religion (Friday 12:00)

Before the conference started I feared that it would be hijacked by speakers from Santo Daime because many of those within the conference organizing bodies have links to this church; and that the amount of talk on Santo Daime would be disproportional to its importance in this field. Thus I was not too inclined to visit this track, as apparently weren't many others as the conference room was only filled for about a quarter (people apparently vote with their feet). I was pleasantly surprised by its content after I decided to give it a chance.

Andrew Dawson, dr. in Religion, started. Nice was his analysis of the upcoming of Ayahuasca-induced religions such as the Santo Daime and how it extra challenges society beyond just using the Ayahuasca in itself. Besides that it challenges legal structures, it challenges the traditional understanding of religion, challenges the view on drinking Ayahuasca in itself and challenges prevailing cultural systems. It was food for thought to see that the Santo Daime church thus even has more challenges than the medicine circles of shamanic origin, although the church will have a larger opportunity to claim freedom of religion when legal troubles arise.

Wahid Azal, a specialist in Sufism, had one of the most interesting presentations of the whole conference. It was not just the quality of the presentation but about it being different. His presentation was largely about him asking Iranian Grand Ayatollah Rohani if Ayahuasca is halal or not. This triggered an eighteen months research by the clergy, in which many technical questions were asked and a lot of information was exchanged. The end result was an official decree ('fatwa') that Ayahuasca is indeed halal, provided that there is qualified guidance when taken. The same was then done in Libanon, where the clergy came to a similar conclusion. It is not difficult to see that such decrees are great building blocks to free the medicine from the current grip of law. Other interesting parts of his presentation included a comparison with psychotropic plants that originate in the Middle-East.

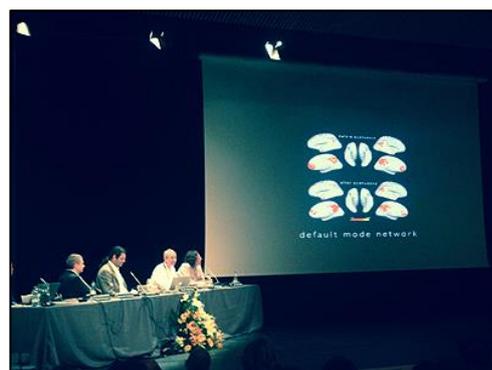
Rosa Virginia Melo, dr. in Social Anthropology, talked about the comparison between trance states within different cultures. An interesting point that she raised was that originally the plant based religions such as Santo Daime were primarily supported by poor farmers, while nowadays it is the middle-upper class in urban areas which drives its growth. There clearly is some irony in that.

Rini Hartman was one of the Dutch presenters on the conference. He started an offspring of the Santo Daime in Holland, in which he began to do ceremonies in his own way. In essence: he created his own church. It was not a problem-free process: at one moment he got arrested because of the medicine, but fortunately the accusations were dropped. Interestingly enough he got a lot of critique from the Ayahuasca-community: which is strange as you would suppose that Ayahuasca drinkers are better in thinking out-of-the-box. What I liked about Rini and his story was that he simply had the guts to do his own thing, despite all the crosswinds, and to do it differently than what was done before. I also liked the rejuvenation that is brought what he accomplished, although I have to be honest that in general I am not a big fan of organised religion, even if it has a plant at its basis.

The next presentation was by Juan Carlos de la Cal, a Spanish journalist who is heavily involved in the Spanish Santo Daime church. Although it felt a little bit like a 20-minute promo for the church, in which I found him quite defensive, he did say some interesting things about it. He pointed out that in our society many have an antipathy for religion or for church; and that does not help the Santo Daime, which in itself differs from a traditional church as it has no moral code and does not use any intermediary between its practioners and a higher power.

Scientific Research (Friday 15:30)

Jordi Riba, dr. in Pharmacology, was the first in this track. He had an extremely interesting presentation: it did not only contain some eye-openers but was backed up by a lot of research material, including loads of interesting brain images. According to him one of the problems in the field of research on Ayahuasca is that the knowledge about it is very incomplete and that a lot of researchers investigate the plant from a different perception. In itself that is not bad, but his observation is that somehow it is difficult to get all the information together to get one integrative view. Here I had to chuckle, as I see the adoption of a new paradigm as the solution for 'the missing link'; but before science is ready to accept a reality in which everything is driven by energy fields (energy fields which I and many others perceive in normal operating consciousness, thus even without drinking the medicine) we are probably twenty or thirty years down the road. Anyhow, Dr Riba did a great job in explaining what actually happens in the brain during an Ayahuasca experience. He could tell us that Ayahuasca modifies the way we expect the world to be, so that therefor we are given an opportunity to see the world as new. A structural difference that he saw between the brains of experienced users and non-users was the increase in what brain experts call the "Self Transcendence" center.



I was a bit lost at the presentation of José Carlos Bouso, dr. in Pharmacology. Most of his presentation was about how to build up a good research on Ayahuasca. Probably his presentation is great input for other scientists. Unfortunately, I did not see any numbers here and personally I think that research results are the most valuable thing that the scientific community can help us forward with.

Draulio Barros de Araujo, dr. in Medical Physics, had an interesting presentation in which one of the main conclusions was that brain-technically speaking the Ayahuasca experience could largely be compared with the experience of daydreaming, but that there was one big difference: with Ayahuasca one was more aware of this process of mind-wandering. I could relate his presentation to the way I enter my patient's energy systems to investigate and remove energies during ceremonies, and how I move through information networks while doing energy readings; so I found this presentation a great explanation for my own empirical experience.

The Role of Women in the World of Ayahuasca (Saturday 9:30)

The only part of this track that I have visited were the speech of Carmen Vicente, a *curandera* from Ecuador, and part of the Q&A at the end of the session, in which Clancy Cavnar, dr. in Clinical Psychology, talked a bit more about her dissertation on gay people and Ayahuasca.

Interesting about Carmen is that she does not call Ayahuasca a medicine, even as healer. Her reasoning is that you only take a medicine when you are sick, and in many cases Ayahuasca is not used to cure sickness but to solve imbalances. I do see her point here, though for hair-splitting preventing sake I would still call it a medicine. Carmen sees a clear distinction between the perception and relationship with the plant that women have and that men have.



Clancy had some interesting things to say about her topic. Through her research she learned that Ayahuasca had helped many gays to reflect on their nature, to give them insights in their being and to understand parts of themselves. Some of those she interviewed came out of the closet after the Ayahuasca experience because it gave them enough trust to talk with their families about it. During the Q&A she pointed out the anti-gay stance of the UDV (União de Vegetal), an Ayahuasca based religion that originates in Brazil.

Community Track IV (Saturday 9:30)

During the morning I switched rooms to visit the Community Track IV program: a smaller room in which presentations were done in a personal way with the public close. I was there primarily to see Arno Adelaars' presentation on Ayahuasca and fear. With several books and contributions to books about ethnobotanics on his name, and regular appearances in the media, Arno is one of the figureheads for the Dutch ethnobotanical scene, and I was interested in his story. Unfortunately, he was not there. Stage fright, maybe? ;-)

I came in during the presentation of Dario Giuffrida. Now, Dario is a really nice guy, but from the part that I saw, I observed the presentation as one long commercial for the Vision Quest program of the Camino Rojo, one of the organisations that work with ethnobotanics. Personally I feel that the selection committee of ICEERS should ban such presentations: a conference is to spread one's knowledge and insights, not for self-promotion or promotion of one's programs.

Lucille Villaseñor-Caron, student in social work, had a moving story on how she lives with multiple-sclerosis (MS) and uses Ayahuasca to help her with her disease. She told us that the medicine has helped her to become more aware of the link between emotional distress and MS and the mind-body connection that is affected by the disease. Ayahuasca also enables her to better deal with the disease, which does not heal it on a physical level but on the emotional and mental level. After the presentation one other participant with MS commented that by putting himself on the Paleo-diet he eliminated most of the effects of the disease, and he used Ayahuasca to move the residuals out of his system.

Halvard Hårklau, biochemist, had the vaguest presentation of the whole conference. It might have been because his



English was not understandable (ever heard that Swedish chef from the Muppets talk?) or that he had to skip several of his unfathomable slides, but even after his presentation I had absolutely no clue what he was talking about: none whatsoever.

Ethics and Safety (Saturday 12:00)

This track was specifically to my interest, for the reasons mentioned earlier. Since I feel that ethics are important in any kind of healing work I joined this track so see if the speakers could give me some new insights on the topic.

Jéronimo Mazarrasa, film maker and researcher, said something interesting when he said that “the attention of all is on the trees that fall, and unfortunately not on the trees that grow silently”. I have to agree here: whenever something undesirable happens with the use of Ayahuasca, then there is so much emphasis of the media on that case that one almost forgets that there are so many more cases in which people have great benefit from this plant in changing their lives to the better.

Raquel Reygraube, medical doctor, said that “there are traffickers of drugs, traffickers of organs but also traffickers of hope”. I could not agree more with her: I have a strong dislike for those who position Ayahuasca as some kind of panacea for curing all disease. From my experience such is usually done by indigenous shamans that are ready to separate the hopeful sick as fast as possible from their cash, or by non-indigenous who are stuck in some kind of a ‘spiritual illusion’. Ayahuasca can help in many cases, in my view primarily because it works on an energetic level of which science has barely started to investigate its fundamentals, but it is not a ‘magical cure’ for everything.

Rafael Guimaraes Dos Santos, dr. in Pharmacology, had an interesting presentation on the toxicity of various Ethnobotanicals. He gave a long list of plants and pointed out where the dangers are. I hope his presentation becomes publicly available; apparently he also published an article about this topic in the *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs* 2013-44 (68-78). He mentioned that it is very difficult to analyze deaths that occurred after the intake of Ayahuasca; what he found in his research was that in this one of the most important factors was the preceding health condition of the person. Another message was, again, that Ayahuasca contains so many different components that it results in many different varieties.

Ellen Percival, researcher, talked about the project that she and her team are busy with: to write a health guide for the safe use of Ayahuasca. Although she realizes that she cannot write something that everyone 100% agrees with, she is aiming to write something that will fit most of the plant’s use. It is possible to practically contribute to this cause, by commenting on the document via www.ayahuascahealthguide.com.

Duncan Autrey, consultant, is within ICEERS working on an ethical guide for the work with Ayahuasca, a sort of a Hippocratic Oath. It is going to be a document that can be used as a guideline for those that organize ceremonies. And given the numerous reports that I received myself in the past two years of participants of circles, who have been subject to sexual or other misconduct of shamans, I feel that such a document is very welcome. Not that such document would stop that kind of people, but at least the participants can get some understanding of what they can expect from a healer with integrity. So I, and with me several others, decided to lend him a hand on the document in a later session. Duncan is realistic about the document and he used the analogy of a Mandelbrot to make his point: every moment you fixate one ‘rule of conduct’, new stuff comes up which goes beyond what you have set up. Therefor it is impossible to cover every future situation, but he will do his best to cover as much as possible.

Within the panel discussion several of the 'Ayahuasca-deaths' of the last years were talked about. It was the general conclusion that the media transforms these cases in sensation cases. One remark was that in many cases it is not the Ayahuasca that is the problem, but the effect of the particular circumstances in which it was taken. I asked the panel whether an additional code of conduct for those that administer the medicine is really necessary, given that in most countries there are already adequate laws that govern healer-patient relationships. Interestingly enough one remark was that not everyone who administers Ayahuasca is in that healer-patient relationship. I do not agree with that: even if it this medicine is used in a religious context, the character of the relationship is in my opinion still that of a healer-patient. For the same reason I advocate that sexual abuse from out the Catholic, or whatever, church should be punished by normal law and not by church law. I liked that J ronimo mentioned 'that care before, care during and care after a session' are each just as important, and that dietary requirements are safety guidelines and not contra-indications: given the sometimes long lists of 'forbidden foods' that some circles entertain, I feel that a bit more realistic approach is necessary, which is why I wrote a chapter on the 'Ayahuasca'-diet in my upcoming book.

Break Out: ICEERS Ethical Code of Conduct document (Saturday 15:00)

After the Ethics and Safety session I participated in the workgroup that continued the work that was already done on the document on the Ethical Code of Conduct document; partly this was driven by my experiences with that Shuar shaman that could not keep his hands and other body parts to himself, and this felt like one way to do something about it. Unfortunately I had to miss the 'Challenges of the Globalization: Sustainability' track that also featured Dennis McKenna. On the other hand, it was a great pleasure to cooperate together with several others that professionally work with this medicine. There were many others who also look with dismay at the amateurs that go into the rainforest for a few months, come back with a bottle of Ayahuasca and start to distribute it to anyone; not understanding even just a bit of the energetic dynamics that drive this kind of work and the years and years of deep training that is necessary to be able to adequately work with this medicine. Many were just as disgusted as I am about the many indigenous shamans that come to Europe and who severely trespass the healer-patient boundary. Besides working on the various sections of the document, we also exchanged a lot of viewpoints, ideas and stories. And although there were different points of view, I was quite surprised that there was so much agreement on the ethics around working with this plant medicine. Hopefully this will lead to a new draft document in the coming weeks.

Philosophical Aspects of the Experience (Saturday 18:00)

This track was the most eye-opening for me; but it was not because of its content. Imagine this: a panel consisting out of several fifty-plus men whose testosterone levels were clearly going through the roof, continuously smoking and sniffing substances and (almost) all sharing the same small plastic cup with in there probably some other kind of substance. If there was one moment at this whole conference where I did not at all felt represented by a panel, then this was the moment: as someone professionally working with this medicine I do in no way associate myself with those who are clearly stuck in an era were Timothy Leary and an unlimited use of substances was still fashionable. Personally, and with me quite some others in the audience, I found it a dishonorable end to an otherwise magnificent conference.

Fernando S nchez Drag , writer, talked a long time in bullet-train speed about his own experiences with Ayahuasca. Nice was his rephrasing of Leary's famous quote, that he turned into 'turn on, tune in, drop in'.

Jonathan Ott, ethnobotanist, rattled at the same speed as the previous speaker on his topic: the physics of reality.



Interesting was his remark that ethnobotanics help in perceiving reality as it is. That is also how I see it, with an additional remark that the true value of an ethnobotanical experience lies in looking at oneself using that induced higher consciousness.

Antonio Escotado, philosopher, had a talk in which especially LSD played a large role. Though Ayahuasca and LSD are two completely different things, there were a few things that he said on ethnobotanics that matched. He called LSD the anti-hallucinate; I agree with him as I also see how ethnobotanics can help one to overcome the illusions of one's life, resulting primarily from conditioning. I believe that there is not such a thing as 'hallucinations': my view is that ethnobotanics can be used to perceive the vast energetic reality beyond the physical, which is also there without using the plants, and which is much difficult to perceive without ethnobotanics as one is captured by the object reality coming from our physical senses. Most people take this energetic reality for 'hallucinations'. However, those who can actually perceive this reality without the use of the plants know better. Antonio said that the ethnobotanics give more self-control and more self-awareness. When he said that he sees Ayahuasca as 'a weak LSD' there were clearly many in the audience who did not agree and found it a lame analogy.

The resulting discussion with the audience focused on drug policies. The general feeling was that over the last years a lot has changed and that the senseless 'war on drugs' has ended; and that we are now in a process of legalization, though it was also said that it is not legalization that is desired but a situation before the Harrison act of 1914 where there is simply freedom of use. Thought-provoking remarks that were made during the discussion with regard to this topic included "Freedom lives one minute more than its enemies" and "The apple has eaten the snake".

An interesting discussion unfolded when someone in the audience suspected disregard for Ayahuasca and asked about it. Part of this discussion was about the ceremonial setting of the use of Ayahuasca. In the panel's opinion such a setting was useful but not necessary.

Then the discussion went back to prohibition and how the third world bears the burden of prohibition. Personally I found not necessary to link the plant medicine of Ayahuasca to drugs, since it is actually a plant that can be used to help overcome narcotic addictions.

Closing (Saturday 19:30)

After some great sitar music, Ben took the microphone again to thank everyone that contributed to making this conference possible. What was also mentioned is that there is a UN conference in 2016 in which there is a review of global drugs policies: that is of course a great opportunity to make sure that that which is clearly no drugs, such as Ayahuasca, is finally taken off the prohibition lists.

What do I think about it?

The best thing about the World Ayahuasca Conference was the atmosphere: it was simply excellent. There were a lot of interesting people at the conference, both among the speakers and among the participants. The general feeling was that after years of legal problems with Ayahuasca in many countries, we are finally getting to a stage where more sense is applied by governments and more research on this plant medicine becomes available. What I also liked is that the conference was not some slick business-like event, but truly an effort of those with a love for Ayahuasca and its professional application to put a stake in the ground. Not that there are no points of improvement, though. For next time I feel that certainly more time could be spend to make sure that speakers have a better set focus in their presentation so that viewpoints of different presenters can be better compared and that



the slides of some presentations are more professional by applying a guideline (ie have a presentation, not too much text, understandable, pictures, numbers). One thing that I missed in the main track was the view of Ayahuasca as a medicine that works on an energetic level, which is one of the topics of my upcoming book, whose absence created somewhat of a gap between the indigenous presentations and the presentations of the researchers; so for next time I will most surely create a speaker's proposal on that topic. However, these comments lessen in no way the great success that this conference was. A big two thumbs up for Ben and his team at ICEERS! And one up for all that sponsored the conference, including Maya Ethnobotanicals.

What did I get out of it?

Although I found the speaker's contributions to the conference of great value, with several new insights, the best thing that I got out of the conference was meeting a lot of like-minded people who also view that it is time for a step forward in the professional use of this medicinal plant. During the breaks and after the conference I met a lot of interesting new people to share views with, and I met again with some that I already met before. This meet and greet is certainly a driver for me to next time organize a lunch or dinner opportunity during the conference with the Dutch conference visiting crowd. If you are considering coming to the next conference: I am not sure if it would be very interesting to those that just have a slight interest in the plant and its effect, as opposed to those that professionally work with it or research it; but hopefully these notes will help you to decide for yourself.

Thank you!