

From the Rubber Boom to *Ayawaskha*¹ Tourism

Shamanic Initiation Narratives and the Commodification of Amazonia

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Tú no has venido desde Lima solamente para que te sane tu cuerpo material.

—*Las tres mitades de Ino Moxo y otros brujos de la Amazonía*

Ayahuasca Shaman Dreading Another Week of Guiding Tech CEOs to Spiritual Oneness

—Headline from *The Onion*

¹ *Ayawaskha* (also known as *oni xuma*, *yagé*, *natem*, *caapi*, *nisbi*, and numerous other names) is a Quechua word meaning “liana of the soul” or “liana of the dead,” given the polyvalence of the word “aya.” Its more common, Hispanicized spelling is “ayahuasca.” I choose the Quechua orthography to emphasize the word’s colonial etymology, most likely due to the spread of *ayawaskha* shamanism in Jesuit missions, where Quechua was *lingua franca*. *Ayawaskha* names both a vine and the drinkable plant-based mixture made from it, sometimes called “tea,” prepared by Amazonian healers for curative purposes. The vine itself, *Banisteriopsis caapi*, contains a monoamine oxidase (MAO) inhibitor, and is mixed with another plant that contains the active substance *N-Dimethyltryptamine* (DMT), usually *chacrana* (*Psychotria viridis*) in the Iquitos area.

In northwest Amazonia, Iquitos, the former center of the Peruvian rubber economy has become an ayawaska Mecca for spiritual cleansing. Since the 1990s, the loud, sprawling, industrial entrepôt nestled between the Amazon and Nanay Rivers has served as a hub from which numerous international tourists depart for week-long retreats in the forest to drink the entheogenic brew in hopes of personal revelation. Decades before foreign travelers began venturing off to take ayawaska at retreat centers nestled deep in the forest, rubber tappers brought Amerindian plant medicine from the forest to the city. After the decline of the rubber boom (1880-1910),² men considered racially and culturally *mestizo*, began practicing plant medicine in urban areas of Amazonia for the first time, and such urban shamans told stories of their shamanic initiation under the tutelage of Amerindians as a way of “authenticating” their newly acquired knowledge.³ The kidnapping of renowned Iquitos *vegetalista*⁴ Manuel Córdova Ríos (18??-1978)⁵ is one of the most dramatic and well-known examples of what I call shamanic initiation narratives. In this article, I reconstruct Córdova’s story from a variety of sources—a Peruvian memoir, English-language biographies published in the U.S., and local Iquitos profiles—to expose the centrality of such initiation narratives in Iquitos’s transition from a place of corruption to a place of purification. The way such narratives conceal the connections between the dark past of Iquitos’s extractive industries and its enlightened present in the global tourism economy becomes clear and provides new insight into continuities in the commodification of Amazonia from the late nineteenth century to the present.

The Shaman’s Skill and Its Source

Manuel Córdova’s scintillating tale of kidnapping and apprenticeship with an Amerindian community deep in the forest came to international attention with the 1971 publication of U.S. forester Frank Bruce Lamb’s *Wizard of the Upper Amazon: The*

² The dates correspond to José Flores Marín’s economic analysis of the rubber boom in Peru in *La explotación del caucho en el Perú* (Lima: U Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, 1977).

³ Though the term “shaman” is of Siberian origin, in a globalized context where traveling Westerners have promoted the idea of a broad category of non-Western healing, a cultural phenomenon called “shamanism” in which the meaning, significance, and cost of a shamanic experience are negotiated bidirectionally between tourist and shaman can now be said to exist.

⁴ “Vegetalista” is the most common autonym for shamans in the Upper Amazon according to Luis Eduardo Luna’s fieldwork in *Vegetalismo: Shamanism among the Mestizo Population of the Peruvian Amazon*. (Stockholm, Sweden: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1986), 14. The term emphasizes the plant (vegetal) as the source of the vegetalista’s knowledge.

⁵ Conflicting records place Córdova’s birthdate sometime between 1885 and 1892.

Story of Manuel Córdova-Ríos. A year later, a feature article in an Iquitos magazine showed the shaman in contemplative portraits surrounded by his plants and praised his knowledge of “medicina selvática” (20). Though titled “El hombre que aprendió de los Amahuacas el secreto de las plantas,” the piece casts doubt on the story told in *Wizard* (20). The anonymous author of the article calls the tale “sospechosamente literario,” hinting at town gossip that “es otra la historia” and that “esta nueva promoción de Don Manuel es algo fabricado para el consumo de los yanquis y gringos de todo el mundo” (20). These brief introductory comments, rife with the language of export capitalism, capture the relationship of Córdova’s initiation to potential economic exchanges: there is something literary about the manufactured (fabricado) tale that hides another lesser-known version of events.

However literary the narratives of Córdova’s initiation, they make explicit appeals to the factuality of the events presented to validate his seemingly exceptional skill as a result of his time in the forest. Readers of Latin American *testimonio* will be familiar with the discursive conventions employed by Lamb. The American met Córdova in Iquitos in the 1960s while working for the U.S. Plywood corporation, and immediately impressed with Córdova’s reputation and skill, became interested in writing the biography of such “a remarkable healer, a true creator of miracles” (Lamb, *Río Tigre* 164). Each of his three books on Córdova tells the “wizard’s” life in first-person and emphasizes the need to “perpetuate the use of his exotic knowledge” (Lamb, *Wizard* xix). *Wizard* recounts his life from the time of his kidnapping to the time of his escape, and according to Lamb, Córdova’s only role was to approve a Spanish translation of the text after it was written and before it was published in English. Following Córdova’s death in 1978, Lamb published two more first-person accounts: *Río Tigre and Beyond: The Amazon Jungle Medicine of Manuel Cordova* (1985) briefly summarizes *Wizard* and then recounts the events of Córdova’s life after his return to Iquitos from the forest. His final book about Córdova, *Kidnapped in the Amazon Jungle* (1994) is a young adult version of *Wizard*. Together, Lamb’s work provides the most expansive record of Córdova’s life, including his youth, work-related travels along the northwestern Amazonian rivers, and retirement.

An even more stylized version of Córdova’s initiation narrative appears in *Las tres mitades de Ino Moxo y otros brujos de la Amazonía* (1981), written by Peruvian poet César Calvo Soriano, who, like Lamb, insists on the story’s faithfulness to true events. The memoir—“memoria” in the author’s words—describes the ayawaskha visions dictated to young César by Córdova in Iquitos in 1977 and includes an abbreviated

glimpse into Córdova's life (22). Often reported as direct discourse, Córdova's biographic details, interspersed throughout the text, focus on his time in the forest with Amerindians where he earned the epithet "Ino Moxo," apparently meaning "black panther" in Amawaka. Exposing an ayawaskha aesthetics, the fragmented, non-linear narrative shows César jumping across space and time, bringing Peru's "three halves" (coast, mountains, and jungle) in dialogue while he simultaneously searches for Ino Moxo in the forest.⁶ The prologue alludes to cassette tape recordings that can corroborate the narration, and a closing chapter of photographs provides visual evidence for the people and scenes encountered in César's ayawaskha dreams ("sueños"). With these documentary strategies, Calvo anticipates his readers' skepticism, and like Lamb, attempts to substantiate his writing.

In both Lamb and Calvo, Córdova's shamanic initiation makes use of toponyms and careful accounts of the passage of time to ground extraordinary details in the rational world. The story tells that as an adolescent working in a rubber camp near Iquitos, Córdova was taken by an Amerindian community, variously called Amawaka or Huni Kuin, to a place called Xanadá located between "the headwaters of the Jurua [Yurúa], Purus, Madre de Dios, Michagua, and Inuya Rivers" (Lamb, *Wizard* 170).⁷ There, he lived for seven years, was initiated into ayawaskha shamanism by the "chief" of the "tribe," married, and eventually took over leadership of the community when his mentor died.⁸ In exchange, Córdova taught the community how to prepare rubber for sale, and he then traded it downriver in Brazil for weapons and other goods so that the community could defend themselves against rubber barons and their allies. Eventually, when mounting tensions in the community began to make his life difficult, the story tells that Córdova escaped and returned to Iquitos at age twenty-one.

⁶ Lesley Wylie has theorized an "aesthetics of yagé" common across national, cultural, and linguistic traditions in *Colombia's Forgotten Frontier: A Literary Geography of the Putumayo*, (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2013), 185.

⁷ "Huni Kuin" and "Amawaka" are eventually used interchangeably in Lamb's accounts, a strategy to account for what appeared to be inaccurate ethnographic details about the Amawaka in *Wizard*. I will elaborate on that controversy in this article. Huni Kuin and Amawaka are different communities of the Panoan linguistic group, both living in eastern Peru and western Brazil. For more, see Gertrudis Dole, "Los Amahuaca" and Kenneth Kensinger, "Los Cashinaua" in Fernando Santos-Granero and Frederica Barclay, eds., *Guía etnográfica de la Alta Amazonía*, vol. 3 (Quito, Ecuador: Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute and Instituto Francés de Estudios Andinos & Abya-Yala, 2000), 1-124; 125-273.

⁸ The words belong to Lamb. Calvo uses similar designations like "jefe" and "tribu."

Throughout Latin America, such narratives were making their way to more populated areas where travelers came into contact with them. The *iquiteño* shaman's fame came in the wake of William S. Burroughs's publication of his Putumayo drug experiences in *The Yage Letters* (1963) and Carlos Castaneda's widely read and polemicized anthropology of a Mexican shaman in *The Teachings of Don Juan* (1968). Just as those authors encountered shamanism in small urban settings—Burroughs in Putumayo towns and Castaneda at a Greyhound bus stop in Arizona—Lamb met Córdova because of his urban connections. Córdova's employer at the time, an Iquitos subsidiary of the Manhattan-based Astoria Importing and Manufacturing Company (AIMCO), had taken interest in his plant knowledge, employing him to collect and document medicinal plants. Lamb was key in garnering international interest in Córdova's knowledge of botanical medicine. Following Lamb, Córdova's tale captured the imagination of U.S. poet W. S. Merwin, who in 1993 penned a nineteen-page narrative poem entitled "The Real World of Manuel Córdova."⁹ All of this notoriety came as a result of Córdova's contact with city, which facilitated his interaction with visitors and allowed him to share what he knew with the world beyond Iquitos.

The increased attention came at the cost of heightened scrutiny that threatened to undermine Córdova's practice. American anthropologist Robert L. Carneiro and Lamb engaged in a public debate after Carneiro responded to the publication of *Wizard* with his article, "Chimera of the Upper Amazon," included in *The Don Juan Papers* (1980), a collection of essays aimed at discrediting Carlos Castaneda as a charlatan. Carneiro picked apart the ethnographic details of Córdova's story including his description of Amawaka hierarchy, dress, ritualistic practices, hunting practices, and cosmology. Though Lamb insisted in his response that *Wizard* "was not intended to be a scientific study," he dedicated two articles in prominent anthropological journals to corroborating the information reported by Córdova by selectively citing ethnographic studies ("*Wizard*" 577).¹⁰ What began with *Wizard* in 1971 as an "enthraling tale of high drama that reads like an adventure-fantasy scenario," a decade later had become a bailiwick defended with personal attacks and public defamation (qtd. in Lamb, *Wizard* 168). Though Lamb was an academic with book publications in forestry, his desire for Córdova's story to be true seems to have

⁹ See William Stanley Merwin, *Travels: Poems* (New York: Knopf, 1993).

¹⁰ The articles appeared in *Current Anthropology* and *American Anthropologist*.

blinded him to how far outside his area of expertise he was venturing in order to make it so.

At issue was the relationship between the validity of Córdova's plant knowledge and the factuality of the manner in which he acquired it. *Vegetalismo* expert Luis Eduardo Luna believes that a distinction must be made “between the knowledge a vegetalista possesses, and the way he claims to have acquired it” (22). The bidirectional process by which shamans craft an image that satisfies the expectation of those who seek him is an issue raised in Michael Taussig's seminal study on shamanism and colonialism in the Putumayo.¹¹ Córdova's Iquitos profile would suggest that there was something sexy to gringo audiences (“fabricado para el consumo de los yanquis y gringos de todo el mundo”) about the possibility that an outsider could learn the secrets of Amerindian plant healing. The preface to *Rio Tigre* frames those secrets as lost and Lamb's book as a way to “[re]connect with our common human heritage” (Johnson qtd. in Lamb i). Calvo is equally fascinated with uncovering hidden truths in his search for “la verdadera identidad de Ino Moxo” (37). Because Córdova's initiation narrative caters to such a fascination with recuperating lost wisdom, the story seems invented, and perhaps, by extension, the shaman a fake.

Despite the dubious qualities of Córdova's tale, numerous anthropologists and ayawaskha experts have endorsed the literary descriptions of Córdova's practice as reliable sources of Upper Amazonian plant medicine. Nearly a decade before the Lamb and Carneiro controversy, an American anthropologist called *Wizard* “totally original and empirical,” including its ethnographic accounts of Amerindian peoples as well as “mestizo drug healing” (Dobkin de Rios, “*Wizard*” 1423). Likewise, Richard Evans Schultes, an American biologist and the first to examine ayawaskha scientifically, published a review stating that any doubts raised regarding the veracity of the text “are not meaningful” (Schultes 197). Ethnographic studies also frequently cite *Las tres mitades* as an accurate source on Peruvian Amazonian plant medicine.¹² Regardless of the way Córdova acquired his knowledge, these appraisals establish that the Iquitos vegetalista was not a charlatan, but rather, a healer with a strong empirical knowledge base.

¹¹ See *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1989).

¹² For examples, see Beyer, *Singing*; Luna, *Vegetalismo*; and Dobkin de Rios and Rumrill, *A Hallucinogenic Tea*.

Local opinion also supports the idea that Córdova possessed and practiced plant medicine effectively and according to a recognized northwestern Amazonian tradition. His expertise caught the attention of AIMCO and earned him employment as a taxonomist, and as mentioned, the local feature story on Córdova affirmed those skills. Iquitos-born writer Roger Rumrill interviewed Córdova on several occasions and reported that his visits were frequently interrupted by ailing people seeking help.¹³ Another Iquitos intellectual, Martín Reátegui Barta, recounts having met Córdova as a child and affirms that he was a very good practitioner of plant medicine despite what he considers the invented story of his training. In other words, ample evidence suggests that local accounts validated the academic literature's positive valuations of Córdova's knowledge.

The Rubber Boom and Ayawaskha's Sleight of Hand

The relationship between the rubber boom and urban shamanism in Amazonia is well documented.¹⁴ Though the Tukanoan (Tupi) people were most likely the first to use the ayawaskha brew in healing ritual, it spread to other communities first during the Jesuit missions and then more widely upriver during the rubber boom. The labor practices of the rubber economy forced Amerindian communities and rubber tappers together, creating new contact zones where knowledge could be exchanged. Rubber tappers working in remote areas of the forest were sometimes compelled to rely on Amerindian healers in times of medical necessity, and in some cases "curious mestizos actually learned directly from Indian sources" (Luna 31). After the rubber boom, forms of ayawaskha healing have spread from the forests of Amazonia to Iquitos, Rio de Janeiro, and beyond, and its use throughout the Upper Amazon has become relatively uniform.¹⁵ Rather than an endogenous practice of secluded Amerindian communities, as Córdova's story would suggest, ayawaskha shamanism became a pan-Amazonian practice taught and revised

¹³ See Dobkin de Rios and Rumrill, *A Hallucinogenic*.

¹⁴ See for example Bernd Brabec de Mori, "Tracing Hallucinations: Contributing to a Critical Ethnohistory of Ayahuasca Usage in the Peruvian Amazon," in Beatriz Labate and Henrik Jungaberle, eds., *The Internationalization of Ayahuasca* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2011); Peter Gow, "River People: Shamanism and History in Western Amazonia," in Nicholas Thomas and Caroline Humphrey, eds., *Shamanism, History, and the State* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1994); Luna, *Vegetalismo*; and Beatriz Labate, Clancy Cavnar, and Françoise Barbira Freedman, *Ayahuasca Shamanism in the Amazon and Beyond* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014).

¹⁵ Gow affirms that at the time of his study (1994), not only was their remarkable uniformity in practice of ayawaskha shamanism throughout the Upper Amazon, but it did not exist in areas where people had remained isolated from missionary work and extractive economies. See "River People."

across hierarchical zones of cultural contact. The trafficking of rubber during the rubber extraction cycle was central to its dissemination, adaptation, and eventual migration to cities.

The collection and extraction of rubber from trees of the *castilla* genus indelibly changed the shape of the northwestern Amazonia and the way people related to the forest.¹⁶ Workers cut paths through the forest in search of new specimens—the sparsely scattered trees had to be destroyed to extract rubber. Upriver movements of labor forces brought large populations to rural areas in a short period of time. For example, the Tapiche River, a small tributary at the border of Peru and Brazil where Córdova once worked, saw an influx of 5000 workers between 1894 and 1904.¹⁷ The movement of people through unmarked territories also sparked territorial conflicts between Peru and all bordering Amazonian nations: Ecuador, Colombia, Brazil, and Bolivia. The most drastic upheaval, though, occurred in the lives of those Amerindian people who suddenly found themselves in the center of an aggressive export economy. They were targeted for slave labor, coerced into debt peonage through *habilitación* or *enganche*, rounded up in *correrías*, and displaced through a system of *traspaso de cuentas*, which a sub-prefect of the province of Bajo Amazonas equated to “tráfico de carne humana” (qtd. in Flores Marín 61-62). Still others left their homes to escape these ends. In a short period, rubber had penetrated the forest and changed the course of people’s lives.

By staging Córdova’s kidnapping during his childhood years, the shaman’s initiation story conveniently plucked him from the rubber economy before he could knowingly participate in any of its violence. In *Wizard*, Córdova was a curious youth, taken when left behind to cook while rubber tappers were working in the forest. Calvo displaces colonial guilt onto Córdova’s father, fashioning him as the rubber tapper and Córdova as a boy victimized by a rubber economy that left an Amerindian community in need of arms to defend themselves. In each case, the rubber boom exists at the periphery of Córdova’s shamanic initiation, as a moving obstacle dodged by the community where Córdova lived and learned. Córdova was not part of that economy but outside of it. Lamb and Calvo’s retellings suggest that the shaman either

¹⁶ *Castilla ulei* and *castilla elástica* were more common in the Upper Amazon though Fernando Santos-Granero and Frederica Barclay insist that *hevea brasiliensis*, which could be continuously tapped for rubber, was also available. See *Tamed Frontiers: Economy, Society, and Civil Rights in Upper Amazonia* (Boulder, CO: Westview P, 2000).

¹⁷ For this and other accounts of populations increases in the Loreto department of Peru during the Rubber Boom see Santos-Granero and Barclay, *Tamed Frontiers*.

did not understand his place in the socioeconomic workings of the rubber boom or that he did and, therefore, deliberately positioned himself outside of them.

Due to multiple contradictory versions of events, piecing together the other story alluded to in “El hombre que aprendió de los Amahuaca” proves difficult.¹⁸ According to the anonymous 1938 book *Hombres del Amazonas*, published in Iquitos when Córdova was in his fifties and decades after his supposed escape from the Amerindian community where he lived, he was yet unknown as a healer in Iquitos. He does earn a page in local history, though, as a notable “agricultor” in *Hombres*. According to the text, Córdova’s mother was from Moyobamba and his father from Arequipa. He did not finish primary school, preferring instead to “‘correr por el mundo’ por nuestra Amazonía, por cuenta y riesgo suyo” (“Manuel Córdova Ríos” 194). The young adventurer’s first documented employment was as a store attendant aboard notorious rubber baron Julio C. Arana’s steamboat, *Cosmopolita*—a fact omitted from both Calvo’s and Lamb’s accounts due perhaps to an omission of Córdova’s. Aboard the *Cosmopolita*, he traveled upriver as far as Puerto Pizarro, Colombia on the Caquetá. He also worked along the Ucayali, Tapiche, Yaquerana, and Blanco Rivers in Peru as a rubber day laborer. In 1915 he was hired by Jorge Borda y Compañía as a *matero* or rubber tree locator and as an overseer for forty rubber tappers in the Alto Tapiche district of Requena, Loreto, Peru. *Hombres* reports that after the collapse of the rubber economy, Córdova worked as a farmer, married, had ten children, and moved to Iquitos to educate them. There, he worked selling pork and operating a cockfighting establishment. Curiously, in what appears an afterthought, *Hombres* mentions that “[c]abe notar” the fact that Córdova lived for seven years among the Capanahuas, Mayos, Remos, and Marubos—Amerindian groups unaffiliated with either the Amawaka or Huni Kuin—from whom he learned a great deal of plant medicinal knowledge (“Manuel Córdova Ríos” 195). This final fact not only belies the details of Córdova’s account in which he lived intimately with only

¹⁸ In presenting an alternative version of events, I am suggesting that Córdova’s initiation story is incomplete but not false. His kidnapping and apprenticeship may very well have been experiences from the non-ordinary reality of an *ayawaskha* session. Françoise Barbira Freedman suggest that the such stories are typically composed of both real and imagined trips. See “Shamans’ Networks in Western Amazonia: The Iquitos-Nauta Road,” in Beatriz Labate and Clancy Cavnar, eds., *Ayahuasca Shamanism in the Amazon and Beyond* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014), 130-58. For more on non-ordinary reality, see Michael Harner, *The Way of the Shaman* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990).

one community, it further suggests that although his plant knowledge was mentionable, it was, at the time, extraneous to his life story.

What seems central to Córdova's life in *Hombres* are his years working in the rubber economy, a more likely setting for his contact with Amerindians. As a rubber overseer and matero, Córdova would have been in an advantageous position to move through the forest and acquire and spread healing knowledge among a diverse group of people. During the Peruvian rubber boom as well as in several of the extractive cycles that followed in its wake—cotton (1920-1930s), barbasco (1930s-1940s), rosewood (1950-1955), fine wood (1910s to present)—national and international companies alike relied on the expertise of local people familiar with Amazonian space to navigate the forest and locate and identify a variety of plants for raw materials.¹⁹ Córdova's search for trees allowed him to interact independently with numerous Amerindian communities. *Río Tigre* does not mention by name all of the people that Córdova met during his time as a matero and later a pharmaceutical taxonomist, but it does include encounters with people of the Jivaroan, Arawakan, Tukanoan, and Panoan linguistic groups. Córdova's movement through space links these communities as he shares and most likely also learns plant medicinal knowledge from each. Though portrayed as a traveling master shaman and teacher to Amerindians in Lamb, a more nuanced read would indicate that his employment actually enabled his knowledge acquisition, further expanding his awareness of numerous communities' medicinal practices. Only certain people had access to this ease of mobility within the spatial practice of extraction, and Córdova was one of the privileged few.

Córdova may have been more complicit with some of the violent practices of rubber extraction than he would have wished to reveal to his patients and gringo interlocutors. At the opening of Calvo's memoir, Córdova explains how he taught the Amawaka how to collect rubber while living among them so that he could then acquire manufactured goods for the community. This story has all the trappings of the system of *habilitación* used to "recruit" Amerindian rubber tappers by providing them with goods to initiate a debt that they could never collect enough rubber to repay. Calvo tells the story in reverse, giving it a non-exploitative perspective and crafting Córdova as a sort of white *savoir*. Lamb's books also flip the perspective; in *Kidnapped* the chapter on teaching rubber is called "How I Gained Power over My Future" as if those who managed Amerindian laborers were not already in positions of power.

¹⁹ The dates are taken from Santos-Granero and Barclay, *Tamed Frontiers*.

Although a speculative suggestion, a relationship of *habilitación* seems a more plausible scenario for Córdova to have established a long-term interaction with Amerindians and acquired medicinal plant knowledge. But the story of an accomplished *vegetalista* who began his career aboard a steamship transporting rubber for one of the most infamously ruthless rubber barons—Arana was responsible for an estimated 30,000 Huitoto and Bora deaths according to Lagos—and who then exploited Amerindian laborers bound to debt peonage, establishes a problematic point of departure for the romanticized narrative of an adolescent-cum-shaman who constructed himself as a caretaker of Amerindian medicine and ways of life (11).²⁰

Instead, Córdova's initiation narrative skips over the rubber boom as any kind of turning point and seamlessly connects a harmonious cohabitation with Amerindian teachers in the forest to Córdova's urban practice in Iquitos. According to *Río Tigre*, Córdova returned from the forest during World War I, which caused a temporary increase in rubber demand worldwide. At that point, he began working as a *matero*, a seemingly innocuous position within the rubber economy that consisted of mere tree identification. As retold by Lamb, the job required Córdova to travel from Peru's northeastern border with Colombia to the high jungle towns of Tarapoto and San José de Sisa in Peru to Cruzeiro do Sul in Brazil at the eastern border with Peru. Córdova reportedly began practicing as an itinerant shaman during this period. *Río Tigre* reports that he was accused of practicing medicine without a license and forced to flee to Brazil to escape legal repercussions in Peru (Lamb 88-89). While in Manaus, he attracted the attention of Douglas Allen, president of AIMCO, who hired him to locate and catalogue medicinal plants for sale to pharmaceutical companies in the United States. With the protection of AIMCO, Córdova returned to Iquitos where he met Lamb and once again practiced in Peru. Calvo's abbreviated version of events likewise presents plant medicine as the unifying thread in Córdova's shamanic biography: "Sé que Don Manuel Córdova llegó a Iquitos en 1917 y desde entonces empezó a aplicar sus conocimientos sobre las propiedades medicinales de las plantas" (Calvo 271).

²⁰ Estimated deaths are reported in Ovidio Lagos's biography, *Arana, rey del caucho: Terror y atrocidades en el Alto Amazonas* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2005).

Such continuity of apprenticeship and practice writes compromising positions of power out of Córdova's biography, and in *Las tres mitades*, an analogous cleansing of the colonial conscience is granted to César through the ayawaskha session. César's visions show him the violence enacted on Amazonia by outsiders, like him, over 400 years of history. Mistreatment of such outsiders, whom Ino Moxo calls "virakocha" emphasizing their colonialist past, continues in their misuse of ayawaskha. The shaman explains, "Ayawaskha, que para nosotros no es placer fugitivo, ventura o aventura sin semilla, como para los virakocha. El ayawaskha es puerta, sí, pero no para huir sino para eternar, para entrar a esos mundos" (Calvo 235). With this explanation, Ino Moxo differentiates between ayawaskha consumers who use the substance to escape and "nosotros"—that "we" includes César—who use it to go deeper. When César becomes an Amerindian during the session, he is able to shed his "prejuicio virakocha," described as the inability to perceive fully due to thinking in one-to-one correspondences of meaning between epistemological categories (235). *Las tres mitades's* dichotomy of good Amazonians and bad outsiders (virakocha) suggests Calvo's awareness of the way Western epistemology has enacted colonial violence. Ayawaskha liberates César from thinking like a virakocha, giving him the gift of the insider knowledge that Córdova acquired in the forest. This transformation happens literally during one of the ayawaskha visions when César's skin is browned after his time in the Amazon, finally matching his brother's skin color and earning his acceptance: "¡Ahora sí eres mi hermano!" (97).²¹ Despite *Las tres mitades's* gestures toward moving beyond colonial binaries, the text relies on them in order to position both mestizos and whites—used interchangeably by Calvo—outside the logic of exploitation. Ayawaskha is the means of doing so, in fact becoming a gateway (puerta) to flee (huir) from the discomfort of "modern" subjectivities.

Perhaps enticed by this possibility, the critical literature has perplexingly accepted and assumed these binaries in order to suggest ayawaskha aesthetics as a way out of "modern" epistemology. Several critics, as if from a time before Cornejo Polar's groundbreaking work on the heterogeneity of Latin American, and

²¹ Calvo seemed to wrestle with not belonging to Amazonia during his life as well. His friends report that he frequently claimed to have been born in Iquitos, like his father. See Arturo Corcuera, "Uso de la palabra: César Calvo y su corazón ardiendo bajo tierra," *Peru21*. 17 Aug 2005. Likewise, his mother claims that he would try to convince her that she had simply forgotten that she took a plane from Lima to Iquitos on the day of his birth because he wanted to be *loretano* like his father. See the documentary on Calvo's life by Nora de Izcue, *Responso para un abrazo: Tras las huellas de un poeta* (Naella Producciones S.A.C., 2013).

particularly, Peruvian literature, have affirmed Calvo's access to an Other perspective, variously called indigenous, autochthonous, and subordinated, via *ayawaskha* visions.²² Rumrill goes so far as to assert that *Las tres mitades* is "la realidad amazónica vista desde adentro" ("César Calvo la Leyenda"). Such critical reactions reveal an underlying belief in the existence of a key to unlock the indigenous world where authenticity will finally be found, suggesting that the seduction of Córdova's initiation narrative captivates academic minds with the hope of liberation.

When construed as a point of entry, though, *ayawaskha* also necessarily partitions, for there must be something utterly Other on the other side of the anthropological gaze that can be experienced through *ayawaskha*, something that only "traditional" subjects can know and modern subjects desire to know. Traditional subjects never appear, though; they are only imagined. The "otros brujos" of *Las tres mitades*'s title are Amerindian shaman who speak to César through his *ayawaskha* visions, in an act of ventriloquism. At the end of the text, we learn that César has been in Iquitos with Córdova the whole time. Other Amerindian voices speak through César during the session. Only through *ayawaskha* does he gain access to these otherwise inaccessible voices. In Lamb, Córdova interacts with numerous Amerindians, but they are portrayed as having forgotten their "traditional" medicine, which Córdova reteaches them; they are no longer subjects but objects of knowledge. What Calvo calls "natives," Lamb "Indians," and literary critics "Other" are all categories that fix "true" Amerindian-ness in an unreachable space and time conceived of as the destination of the *ayawaskha* journey.

The utility of the shamanic initiation narrative is its ability to perpetuate such a gaze to maintain the illusion of the *ayawaskha* gateway. This is why the shaman's initiation must happen deep in the forest: the source of his knowledge must be distant and abstract in order to imagine it in a place untouched by modernity. Such a dehistoricization of *ayawaskha* shamanism then fixes the gaze on the properties of the plants that escape Westerners' understanding. Because Córdova offers a way out for his interlocutors, he removes any motivation to look deeper into his story, for if

²² José Santiago refers to "lo ancestral autoctono," in "Crónica de una alucinación," *Cuadernos hispanoamericanos* (487): 111-14. Ricardo Badini calls Calvo's perspective "la cultural indígena desde dentro [sic]" in "Ayahuasca y resistencia indígena en la Amazonía peruana," in Martin Lienhard, ed., *Discursos sobre (l)a pobreza: América Latina y/e países luso-africanos* (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2006), 159-67. Luis Chávez Rodríguez claims that Calvo elevates "la voz del otro subordinado" his doctoral dissertation, "Testimony and nature in *Las tres mitades de Ino Moxo y otros brujos de la Amazonía* by César Calvo," (Boston U, 2011).

Córdova's initiation occurred within the wake of modern capitalism, the whole fantasy of an untouched Other falls apart. But Córdova is able to reinvent himself as a shaman because of his ability to earn employment outside of the binds of debt peonage in the rubber economy. Had it not been for the spaces opened up by extraction, Córdova would have gone down in history as a farmer, as he did in *Hombres del Amazonas*. He, and most likely other urban shamans of his era, profited from the exploitative logic that Calvo and Lamb fashion as antithetical to his shamanic persona. Their writing of his initiation story, like the magician's sleight of hand, diverts attention from the way urban ayawaskha consumption was made possible by the ravaged spaces of the rubber boom.

Commodifying Plants, Selling Visions

The rubber boom marked the beginning of extractive cycles that subjected Amazonia's biodiversity to export capitalism, rendering the forest legible as raw materials for goods to satisfy bourgeois demand abroad.²³ By the 1920s, several corporations had seized upon rubber's near-obsolete infrastructure to export other Amazonian resources. Córdova's employer, AIMCO, described locally as "monopólica y abusiva," profited primarily from the post-rubber industries of cedar and mahogany extraction, deforesting huge tracts of forest (República del Perú 10-11).²⁴ As the story is told in Lamb and Calvo, AIMCO saw in Córdova the potential for another source of expansion in the export of medicinal plants for use by U.S. pharmaceutical companies. Córdova's work to catalogue and classify plants for AIMCO laid the groundwork for the commodification of Amazonian flora as part of a new potential industry. He commodifies Amazonia twice: he translates plants into cures to be packaged and sold by U.S. corporations, and his story symbolically reconfigures Amazonia as a landscape full of magical plant experiences for visitors from afar.

²³ The phrasing of rendering the forest legible belongs to James Scott who in *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Conditions Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1998) uses it to describe how states attempt to order nature in order to make it safe and usable.

²⁴ The felling of mahogany trees required not only downing the massive trees but also clearing a path to roll the logs down to the nearest stream. Because mahogany is a canopy tree, they can be found far from waterways, and each cycle of extraction would cause loggers to move further inland. Lamb recounts these processes in his book, *Mahogany in Tropical America: Its Ecology and Management* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1966).

Córdova's work for AIMCO involved an unavoidable tension between portraying plant medicine as beyond Western understanding and aspiring to translate it for those unfamiliar with Amazonia. On the one hand, Calvo's *Ino Moxo* insists on the importance of the shamanic context in plant healing because, "[l]os vegetales no son nada si no se hallan insertos dentro de su total" (Calvo 250). On the other hand, in a dialogue between Córdova and young César, the shaman claims to have categorized over 2,000 plant species for AIMCO, some of which "ellos hicieron después remedios de frasquito, con su etiqueta, que ahora venden en farmacias" (Calvo 273). Similarly, the last page of *Río Tigre* contains the warning that "*To use these plant extracts without full knowledge and understanding of their effect,*" that is, without the care of a shaman, "*can be dangerous*" (Lamb 172, original italics). Nevertheless, the facing page of the same text begins a catalogue, apparently compiled by Córdova, of eighty-one plants with instructions for their preparation and application, some with only three to four-sentence descriptions. *Ayawaskha*, portrayed as inherently polysemous in *Las tres mitades*—"Según cómo y para qué se diga, según la hora y el sitio en que se diga, oni xuma [ayawaskha] puede decir lo mismo, o decir otra cosa, o decir su contrario"—can nevertheless be reduced to a one-to-one correspondence in Córdova's catalogue in Lamb: "This material, possibly to be considered a narcotic, can provide great assistance to medical science when and if it is tested by trained physicians or scientists" (Calvo 234; Lamb, *Río* 178). The knowledge whose source is located in a world utterly separate from modern rationality and that requires a shaman to mediate, can nevertheless be briefly explained in scientific discourse.

In *Las tres mitades*, pharmacological determinism even seeps into the narration of the *ayawaskha* session, limiting the integrative practice of plant medicine to the chemical properties of individual plants. *Ino Moxo* begins the *ayawaskha* session by calling forth the sounds of the jungle. After several pages, though, he is no longer tuning the patient's ear to the ecosystem's auditory multiplicity, but rather itemizing plants for commodification: "y la *wankawisacha* cura para siempre a los alcohólicos [...] la *zarzaparrilla* sana de la sífilis, y la *papaya* verde elimina la sarna y la parasitosis" (Calvo 28). Córdova maps the Upper Amazon for consumption even in the midst of guiding César through his *ayawaskha* visions. Several pages of sentence fragments list Amazonian plants identified as italicized words that most readers will need to consult in the text's appended glossary. The passage that serves to introduce readers to the strange world of *ayawaskha* visions also begins to assign newly encountered plants to utilitarian ends. In the same way that the *castilla ulei*, *castilla elastica*, and *bevea brasilienses*

come to signify rubber boots and tires, and cedar and mahogany trees indicate pianos and furniture in the rough, plants and plant parts are marked as pills for middle class medicine cabinets, “natural” cures for “modern” living.

The shamanic session passes through a similar process of utilitarian commodification to become a consumable escape from the dis-eases of “modern” life. Before “virakocha” began taking an interest in ayawaskha, shamans exclusively ingested the plant as a diagnostic teacher for use in ritual healing. Young César’s experience with ayawaskha is indicative of the shift in allowing others to take ayawaskha to cure spiritual maladies. As Ino Moxo insists, “Tú no has venido desde Lima solamente para que te sane tu cuerpo material” (Calvo 281). Ayawaskha consumption is also a prescription for healing the spirit, and Calvo depicts Ino Moxo as encouraging others to follow in young César’s footsteps: “Acaso alguien [que] está por ahí sin remedio, víctima de una enfermedad que los médicos diplomados creen incurable, alcance a leer lo que tú escribas y venga donde nosotros y recupere acaso los contenidos de su existencia (22). Lamb normalizes the “modern” subject’s use of the shaman in listing high statesmen who have sought Córdova’s help: “Generals, Admirals, Judges, an Ambassador, a former Peruvian President” (*Rio Tigre* 163). Though César’s experiences are deeply personal, he nevertheless sits down to write about them for publication in his Iquitos apartment once the effects of ayawaskha have worn off. With an audience as large as anyone who feels like a lost cause (sin remedio), Calvo’s memoir transforms a unique and intimate journey into a replicable remedy for others’ consumption.

The threat of lost knowledge with Córdova’s impending death justifies its broader use by interested consumers. In both Lamb and Calvo, Córdova’s words convey urgency. He claims that his work for AIMCO “would lead to understanding and perpetuation of the knowledge I had accumulated at such risk from a source which probably no longer exists” (Lamb 94). Amerindian knowledge is once again located in the past, no longer accessible, except through the urban shaman, making such ayawaskha consumption an act of rescue and resuscitation. Likewise, in *Las tres mitades*, Córdova, at the end of his life, laments that he has no one to pass his knowledge on to: “Lo único que ahora es pena para mí, bastante pena, es no haber podido hallar a alguien para dejarle todo lo que aprendí en los bosques. [...] Seguramente no podré dejar discípulo” (Calvo 275). Córdova is ninety-five years old when he makes this statement in the text, and he frequently reminds César that he has to go soon, an allusion to his imminent death. He would pass away one year after the

events described by Calvo, and his late life regrets about a lack of disciples, spoken to a white interlocutor from Lima, imply a need for more people like César to come to experience and potentially learn plant medicinal knowledge depicted as underappreciated locally. Even though Córdova was no longer alive when *Las tres mitades* was published, the text's title reminds that there are "otros brujos de la Amazonía." With hints to a future of ayawaskha tourism, *Las tres mitades* validates the commodification of the shamanic experience as a means of saving Amerindian knowledge from being lost to history.

Ayawaskha tourism began to take off in Peru in the decade following the publication of *Las tres mitades* and in the wake of the Shining Path insurgency.²⁵ Today young César's ayawaskha session has become a purchasable package in the Iquitos area and beyond, with seven-day ayawaskha retreats costing upwards of USD \$2000. Spiritual centers entice "white, urban, relatively wealthy, well educated, and spiritually eclectic outsiders" to Iquitos in language eerily similar to Ino Moxo's (Labate, Cavnar, and Freedman 11; Beyer 353). English-language websites promise alleviation from the "drama, chaos, and confusion of modern life," which manifest as "a growing negativity in people's lives," and which "Western medicine [...] sometimes can't fix" ("Blue Morpho"). In 2010, tour operators estimated that twenty percent of Iquitos's approximately 50,000 annual visitors were drawn to the region by the healing promises of ayawaskha (Forero, "In the Amazon"). English conversations of spiritual revelation dominate a boardwalk now lined with touristic restaurants offering special ayawaskha diet menus.²⁶ Ayawaskha is also being exported now, too, to hipster havens like Bushwick, Brooklyn (Morris). The shamanic biographies that represent work like Córdova's as a dying practice paradoxically keeps it alive in the global market of the exotic.

The connections between shamanic initiation narratives and the popularity of ayawaskha tourism are more than merely speculative—both Lamb's books and *Las tres mitades* are listed as recommended reading on the websites of numerous retreat

²⁵ Evgenia Fotiou notes that access to ayawaskha tourism was inhibited by the perceived dangers of travel in Peru during the years of Shining Path. See "On the Uneasiness of Tourism: Considerations of Shamanic Tourism in Western Amazonia," in Beatriz Labate and Clancy Cavnar, eds. *Ayahuasca Shamanism in the Amazon and Beyond* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014), 130-58.

²⁶ "Dieta," recommended anywhere from forty-eight hours to weeks before consuming ayawaskha consists of food and other restrictions: "Beyond salt, sugar, and sex, most often prohibited is oil or fat." See Beyer, *Singing*, 55.

centers in the Iquitos area, serving as mediating texts in the ayawaskha experience. Carefully selected preparatory texts work to manufacture Iquitos and its environs as a special place for shamanic consumption where one can experience a magical encounter in a reified forest outside of history. For a time in 2012, one tourist agency even offered a four-day, three-night tour called “Ino Moxo nos revela los misterios de la ayahuasca,” for S/.1560.²⁷ Tourists, like César, can follow in Ino Moxo’s footsteps to find new meanings in the forest, and they can feel unencumbered in their search for personal growth and enlightenment through their access to altered states of consciousness. The way that touristic consumption of ayawaskha reenacts the logic of export capitalism is invisible through the lens of the shamanic initiation narrative, but once again select parts of the forest are isolated for their use value to those beyond the region.

Rubber Fever, Ayawaskha Cures

Shamanic initiation narratives made it possible to unsee the continuities between rubber fever (la fiebre del caucho, as it was called in Spanish) and ayawaskha cures. The analogy of export capitalism to New Age tourism extends beyond the symbolic level of tourists’ extraction of insight from Amazonian plants. Adverse local effects of the industry resemble those of previous economic cycles: depletion of the ayawaskha vine, *Banisteriopsis caapi* and the chacruna plant, and the isolation of Amerindian communities from plant medicine.²⁸ Just as Calvo and Lamb did not see how Córdova’s knowledge emerged as a result of rubber extraction, tourists moving along controlled routes from Iquitos to comfortable jungle lodges in search of wisdom like Córdova’s may not perceive the inadvertent effects of their pricey retreats. But if the shamanic initiation narrative emerged as a result of freedom of movement in labor hierarchies, the kind of tourism that it may have inadvertently promoted perpetuates the transit of a select few through the forest. With ayawaskha beginning to follow AIMCO’s old export routes from Iquitos to New York City, the

²⁷ The tour, found through a Google search, appears to be no longer available in Iquitos.

²⁸ David Hill reports problems in sourcing the ayawaskha vine in, “Peru’s Ayahuasca Industry Booms as Westerners Search for Alternative Healing,” *The Guardian* (7 June 2016) and Peter Gorman claims that there were issues in finding chacruna in some areas as early as the 1990s in *Ayahuasca in My Blood 25 Years of Medicine Dreaming*. (Gorman Bench Press, 2010). Brabec de Mori describes access to plant medicine with the rise of tourism in “Tracing.”

commodity moves farther away from its place of origin, making its connection to cycles of outside intervention in Amazonia even more invisible.

The end of the rubber boom's "economy of terror" in Amazonia came with the smuggling of rubber seeds to southeast Asia and the successful cultivation of plantations there.²⁹ The substance then migrated to laboratories where a synthetic form was produced, the most common source of rubber today. Some of Córdova's plants were also manufactured synthetically following his taxonomical work: *Rio Tigre* describes in detail his work to cultivate and export *curare*. The plant extract, typically used as a poison and hunting aid by Amerindians, became the base for a popular anesthetic and muscle relaxant in Europe and the United States until scientists synthesized the substance in the 1940s. DMT, the active substance in the ayawaskha brew, was synthesized in 1931, before it was known to be found in plants, and decades before Córdova's initiation narrative reached international presses and ayawaskha tourism took off. In the United States, where DMT is classified as a Schedule 1 drug, federal courts have recently made legal exceptions for the use of ayawaskha in religious ceremonies.³⁰ If ayawaskha follows the trajectory of rubber and other Amazonian plants, a future of synthetically-induced awakenings taking over the market may be possible. Or, is the shaman's initiation narrative, with its promise of contact with the source of healing and relief from the colonial guilt of modern living, seductive enough to continue drawing tourists into the forest?

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²⁹ The famous characterization of the rubber economy belongs to Taussig. See *Shamanism*.

³⁰ See *Gonzales v. O Centro Espirita Beneficente Uniao Vegetal*, 546 U.S. 418, Supreme Court of the United States (2006) and *Church of the Holy Light of the Queen v. Mukasey*, United States District Court of Oregon (2009).

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