

A Modern-Day Shamanistic Healer in the Peruvian Amazon: Pharmacopoeia and Trance

MARLENE DOBKIN DE RIOS, PH.D.*

The functions and successes of shamanistic healers are addressed in the context of psychoneuroimmunology, which allows a description of how therapeutic success is achieved via the symbolic manipulation of biological processes. These perspectives reinforce the continued importance of traditional shamanistic healers in the contemporary world. This is illustrated by the activities of a Peruvian healer who utilizes both psychoactive plant substances and a syncretic combination of modern and traditional symbolic therapies. The reliance on a wide range of psychoactive plants, including both psychoactive substances and nonhallucinogenic plants, is shown to be empirically effective in the treatment of disease. This demonstrates the pragmatic and adaptive approaches of these traditional healers and their positive functions in treating a variety of illnesses in today's world.

Shamanic healers throughout the world use psychoactive drugs and other psychotechnologies in order to create trances in their clients, as powerful tools to alter emotional, psychosocial, and physiological functioning. In recent years, many scientists have examined aspects of the actual healing process associated with what has been called the immunocompetence of the individual (e.g., Ley & Freeman 1984). Many studies are appearing in the context of what Sanford Cohen at the National Institute on Mental Health has titled the "biology of hope." Research questions focus mainly on how affective states (e.g., hopelessness, helplessness, and despair) can be viewed as risks for the individual in contracting somatotypic illnesses (often called psychosomatic disorders). These affective states, which may respond to sociocultural stress factors, can cause clinical depression and even death.

What is of great interest here are not the metaphors of illness used by healer and patient in particular cultural contexts, but rather the biological phenomenon of transduction (often referred to as somatization). In other words,

researchers must ask how is it that the social, cognitive or affective experience of the individual can affect the cellular events that are called illness.

Tomb (1984) has argued that stress, especially when chronic and perceived by the individual as overwhelming, is likely to cause the individual to develop physical illness. From a cognitive perspective, the human cerebral cortex recognizes the condition and mediates the stress via the limbic system. Under conditions of chronic stress, the hypothalamus and vegetative centers in the brain stem are stimulated. This stimulus, in turn, activates the autonomic nervous system and involves the neuroendocrine system, which releases hormones from the hypothalamus. The hormones travel through the pituitary portal system to the anterior pituitary and cause the release of trophic hormones that act directly or else release other hormones from endocrine glands, such as cortisol. These produce a variety of changes in structure throughout the body. For example, cortisol has a central role as a primary mediator of the body's stress response, and if released too chronically damages various organs, thus resulting in psychosomatic disorders. Thus, stress and somatization are intricately related.

*Department of Anthropology, California State University, Fullerton, California 92634.

Medical anthropologists in field situations often find themselves studying healing milieus where psychosomatic disorders represent a major category of illness with which clients present. The anthropologist can contribute to the process of understanding how healing occurs cross-culturally by demonstrating how folk healers in Third World societies, within the cultural environment in which they function, can counteract the effects of helplessness, hopelessness, and despair of their patients, and by so doing, enhance the immunological system of each client they treat. Anthropologists are beginning to better understand the role of folk healers in treating illnesses through the utilization of cultural resources, such as psychoactive plants, psychocultural strategies, and their expected ability to access spiritual entities to help patients change affective states, and in this manner to treat the illnesses that their patients suffer.

As research shows, the immunological system is key in understanding how human beings respond to illness. The immunological competency of an individual is influenced and even conditioned by the use of symbols and emotional states that a folk healer can manipulate in favor of his/her clients. Neurochemical evidence shows that when an individual experiences depressive disorders or desperation, this produces change in the function of cortisol and gives rise to the diminution of catecholamine biochemicals that evoke corticosteroids. This process ends by suppressing the immunological function, and leaves the individual vulnerable to opportunistic infections (Ley & Freeman 1984).

This new data is forcing anthropologists, including the present author, to reassess the complex activities of traditional shamanistic healers in order to better understand their healing successes and failures. In the present article, only one aspect of a modern-day shamanistic healer's work will be examined; namely, the plant pharmacopoeia of hallucinogenic and nondrug plants that don Hilde uses to treat a variety of disorders in the Peruvian Amazon city of Pucallpa. Other publications based on field research in 1979 and 1977 have addressed his psychological and spiritual approaches to disorders, ranging from diseases of childhood and weaning distress of infants to magical and psychological disorders (Dobkin de Rios 1984, 1981a, 1981b). It is important to comprehend the nature of the pharmacopoeia of potent substances that healers, such as don Hilde, are wont to utilize as well as other techniques mentioned above in order to understand the type of healing that is available to as many as 75 percent of the world's peoples in urban and rural areas who are not able to access high-technology medicine.

The recognition of the important role of folk healers in public health services of developing countries is hardly new. In 1978, the World Health Organization called for an integration of such healers into the international health

community. Many scholars have come to recognize that the new discoveries in the neurosciences have demonstrated that endogenous histochemical mechanisms, which involve a series of reparative agents, are an important component in the healing process. According to Dean, Plyler and Dean (1980: 1247), "exceptional emotional responses associated with faith, suggestion, prayer, and so-called placebo effects—as currently found in traditional Third World healing milieus—along with powerful plant potentiators, may greatly accelerate the speed and concentration of these natural reparative biochemicals in a way that is as yet unknown."

Although a former ayahuasca drug healer (who utilized various *Banisteriopsis* spp.), at the time of the present study don Hilde was a member of an urban mystical group called Septrionism of the Amazon. He is an accomplished herbalist and amateur pharmacist who combines an understanding of plant medicines and pharmaceutical preparations with a spiritual therapy of recent derivation. This article will document the potent effects of the plant pharmacopoeia of this prototypical urban healer who treats 0.4 percent of the population of Pucallpa, a city of more than 120,000 residents. In many ways don Hilde represents the contemporary Third World shamanistic healer whose roots and traditions are multiple—reflecting the complexities of modern urban life—and quite distinct from the shaman in prestate-level societies. Don Hilde's roots are both American Indian and Christian, and derive as well from medieval metaphysical beliefs that were brought to the New World by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century explorers and pioneers. Furthermore, the recent influence of a new mystical group, Septrionism (which began its work in 1968), has influenced don Hilde's activities and beliefs. One can argue that the combination of biologically potent resources represented in don Hilde's plant pharmacopoeia and his shamanistic-mystical, psychospiritual strategies create an imminently powerful healing milieu worthy of note.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE CITY OF PUCALLPA

Pucallpa was described previously by Dobkin de Rios (1981b) as follows:

Located on the banks of the Ucayali River in the Peruvian tropical rain forest, Pucallpa is connected to Lima by a 500 mile long highway which traverses the Andean highlands and foothills. Founded in 1883 as a small settlement, May-ushin, Pucallpa is the home of Shipibo and Cashibo Indians. Portuguese immigrants colonized the area during its earliest history and were followed by highland Quechua speakers, Mestizo colonizers and acculturated natives from the northern province of San Martín in a series of successive waves. The rubber boom of the late nineteenth century brought in outside influences especially from Europe and the United States.

Today Pucallpa is a sprawling urban agglomerate of seasonally mud-baked or muddy streets, with only recent paving of the central city. The large majority of housing is substandard, of wood-slate construction, and calamine roofing. Pucallpa is fundamentally a commercial center linked to the national economy, with trade and barter still existing among the peasantry and acculturated native tribal peoples along the river banks. Numerous extractive industries are linked to Amazonian natural resources, such as lumber and oil, with the surrounding countryside and riverine hamlets composed of small-scale subsistence farmers who bring their surpluses to urban markets.

Modern health facilities include one large and poorly staffed hospital and several private clinics. Private medical care is available, but few specialists choose to work in Pucallpa. Men and women from the middle-income segments often travel to Lima for specialized treatment. Parasitic infections are common, especially among young children and infants. Lack of hygiene and latrine contamination of water sources are major public health problems.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON AMAZONIAN URBAN HEALING

During 1968 and 1969 the present author spent a year studying folk psychotherapy with ayahuasca in Iquitos, Peru. Here, as in many other areas of Peru, various plant hallucinogens have had a long history of use in healing. The ayahuasca drink is often mixed with other plant hallucinogens and given to Mestizo patients. Healers, called *ayahuasqueros*, work in the evening in isolated clearings in the rain forest and occasionally in wooden shacks in the city or its outskirts. Their treatment of illness is set within the matrix of magical beliefs concerning disease etiology held by both patients and healers alike. Many of the illnesses marking the urban populations of the rain forest can be classified as emotional or psychological in origin and respond to the ritual curing in a manner similar to the general success of folk healers worldwide in treating such disorders (Kiev 1964). These activities were described previously by Katz and Dobkin de Rios (1971) as follows:

Illness is often believed to be caused by the capricious whim of offended spirits of nature, or else attributed to the evil of people, who for motives of envy, revenge or plain meanness, pay a witch to cause horrendous damage to another person. The main purpose of the powerful plant hallucinogen, ayahuasca, when used in healing, is diagnostic and revelatory. During the course of the therapeutic session, a patient is given a drink to induce visions which will permit him to see just what force or individual is deemed responsible for evil-doing. It is only then that the evil magic that causes illness is believed to be deflectable or neutralizable by the healer and returned to its perpetrator.

Thus the trance state induced by a plant hallucinogen is put to work, so to speak, in aiding both healer and patient

in attributing evil outward to significant others in the environment. In periods prior to European contact, these attributions were more likely to have been cast on the heavens and spirit forces. With the growing urbanization and modernization in Third World countries like Peru, interpersonal strife and discord seem to be the cause of such projections of evil, reflecting the difficult interpersonal environments in which people compete in what is basically a very fast-changing milieu.

Hamlets, such as Pucallpa, which only fifty years ago were small and interactive, have fast become modern cities with sprawling slums and uncounted thousands. Crime, juvenile delinquency, drug abuse, prostitution, and theft have linked cities like Pucallpa to other urban centers worldwide. Traditional healing centers, such as don Hilde's clinic, survive because of people's beliefs that power resides personally with the healer, whose techniques and strategies, while perhaps not well understood or even questioned, provide the extra help and succor nowhere else available. The powerful plant hallucinogens and the ensuing trance states they provide the client create a vivid phenomenological reality that reinforces the magical beliefs that persist in the face of modernization and cultural change.

Even the casual visitor to Pucallpa cannot be unaware of the importance of the moral order, as coded by men and women of the community, especially in terms of the persistence and ubiquity of beliefs in magical disorders: witchcraft-related illnesses caused by regnant, evil men and women in the community who pay witches to harm others. Western medicine, in its current form in the community, is powerless in countering the effects of this evil; only an omnipotent and powerful shamanistic healer, with access to supernatural realms and spirit forces convincingly experienced by clients in hallucinogenic trance states, seems to have success. The common culture-specific disorder, *sala-dera*, which is a disorder of misfortune treated by such healers as don Hilde with magical baths and herbal treatments, has been described elsewhere (Dobkin de Rios 1981a). It is an excellent symbol for the despair and hopelessness that most patients bring with them to the healing setting.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON DON HILDE

In February 1979, with the full cooperation of the healer, the present author gathered data on don Hilde's healing activities and patients by interviewing the total population of patients who visited the healer's clinic day and night for treatment. In the course of the month, ninety-five patients visited him and each one averaged three visits. Children under the age of seven comprised 53 percent of his client population. The presenting illnesses of the adult

patients included somatic disorders, illnesses attributed to witchcraft, and overt psychological problems. A profile of the social, economic, and ideological characteristics of the ninety-five patients has been discussed elsewhere (Dobkin de Rios 1981b), but it is important to reiterate that the particular beliefs to which don Hilde adheres are part of a mystical tradition emanating from tropical rain forest shamanism, along with more recent admixtures.

Don Hilde differs from the ten other healers with whom the present author worked in Iquitos in 1968 and 1969 in one major aspect: His roots are much more directly Christian and Western in nature, with the traditional belief in spirit forces overlaid by his Septrionic system of accessing a spiritual guide given to him when he joined the mystical order as well as other supernatural entities. In addition, don Hilde entertains personal visionary experiences (generally not perceived by others around him) from his adolescent years on, and would probably be closer to a seer than an *ayahuasquero* found in surrounding rain forest communities.

A 63-year-old Mestizo at the time of the study, don Hilde was born in a small hamlet near Pucallpa and obtained only a few years of primary education in the city. He served in the Peruvian Army in the mid-1930's, and also worked as a construction hand in building the Basadre Highway that connects Pucallpa with the Andean highlands and the industrial coastal region. He married and settled down in Pucallpa, had three children, and worked as a carpenter. As the result of a series of visions of Christian saints that began in his adolescence, he realized his abilities to heal and began to receive a few patients in his home while he simultaneously maintained his carpentry shop.

As his reputation spread over the years, he devoted more time to his practice, occasionally using the plant hallucinogen ayahuasca, as did many other curers in the region. At this time, he also began to read about hypnosis and to induce trancelike states in himself. In 1974, he gained contact with members of the mystical order Septrionism of the Amazon in Pucallpa and was accepted as a member. In 1976 he moved his clinic to the outskirts of Pucallpa, and a large sign on the front of his house announced his relationship with the mystical organization.

As he became integrated into Septrionism, he began to draw more and more on the help of the spirit guide under whose protection he was placed when he accepted membership in the group and resorted less and less to the use of ayahuasca in his healing. By means of exercises, including Hatha Yoga-like breathing and the displacement of energies that he learned from his Septrionic colleagues, he practices spiritualist healing. The order defines itself as mystical organization and acknowledges the existence of a Father Creator, conceived of as a conjoint of energies. The group sees its mission as serving humankind.

Since 1984 don Hilde has returned to more frequent

use of ayahuasca, after he left the mystical group due to differences he had with some members in Pucallpa. Both then and now he *pulses* his patients when he first interviews them: He does not question them about their symptoms, but uses intense concentration as he passes his hand over the patient's head to read their electromagnetic energies. This enables him to ascertain whether the illness is natural or related to witchcraft. He spontaneously enters into an altered state of consciousness and supplements his diagnostic intuitions by visions during the meditation ceremonies he holds every Tuesday. Further diagnostic insights come from the ayahuasca sessions he conducts three or four times a month, and more regularly in recent years.

Don Hilde holds in common with other Third World shamanic healers a special skill and interest in both pharmaceutical and plant medicines. Don Hilde grows a number of medicinal plants in his garden and he instructs patients to purchase medicines from city pharmacies to bring with them on subsequent visits to the clinic. He generally prepares his medicines in accordance with the demands of each case, picking the plants from his garden or on occasion gathering herbs on the outskirts of Pucallpa. He boils or seeps the herbs in his kitchen, while patients wait in the clinic to be medicated. He does not charge additionally for the plant medicines he uses. On occasion, a difficult or chronic case may require inpatient care and several small rooms are available in his clinic for this purpose. He refers his cases to the hospital when he thinks that surgery is indicated and he maintains a cordial relationship with several medical doctors in the city.

Like many traditional urban healers in Third World countries, don Hilde sees patients who also have access to modern medical facilities, including hospitals and physicians. This dual-use system has been noted by Press (1969) in Latin America, and reflects problems of Western medicine in meeting the spiritual and psychological needs of patients as well as their physical concerns. Healers, such as don Hilde, use plant brews in an astute and reasonable way in response to the milieu in which they function. Not only are their plants effective and inexpensive, but they have fewer iatrogenic effects and noxious side effects than pharmaceutical preparations have among a sizable minority of any patient group taking such medications. Don Hilde's patients benefit from the inherent nontoxicity of such plants compared to the chemical synthetics of Western pharmaceuticals. While physicians rely on highly refined concentrated derivatives of plants, folk healers' patients benefit from plant drugs that have low levels of concentrations of active materials and by nature are diluted with inert material. Weil (1981) has argued that the action of plant drugs on the patient may be slower than with more potent amounts of chemical synthetics, but are longer lasting. In addition, patients are much less likely to suffer from iatrogenic effects as are seen in urban medical set-

TABLE I
THE PHARMACOPOEIA OF DON HILDE:
PLANTS USED TO TREAT PATIENTS' ILLNESSES

Plant	Disorder
Arrowroot	Rhizome used for digestive disorders
Avocado	Tea made from seed, used for amoebic dysentery
Camphor	Used with <i>barbasco</i> leaf and other herbal plants in salve for skin disorders Used in cataplasms with cane alcohol, garlic, liquid onion, <i>verbane</i> , and <i>paico</i> for arthritis and rheumatism Drink made from camphor and garlic mixed in cane alcohol for common colds and bronchitis Mixed with garlic and cane alcohol for earaches Drink made from camphor and cane alcohol for lung disease and tuberculosis Mixed with scented water, accompanied by herbal baths for <i>pusanga</i> witchcraft illness
Cane alcohol	Base of drink with garlic, mixed with white onion for <i>danō</i> and witchcraft illnesses
Celery	Tea used for diabetes, digestive disorders, nervous disorders
<i>Chiricsanango</i>	Tea used for adult fevers, arthritis and rheumatism, back pain, common colds and bronchitis, lung disease and tuberculosis, snakebites Enema used for kidney disorders and ulcers
<i>Chuchiwasi</i>	Cutting of tree, in cane alcohol, used for menstrual disorders (amenorrhea, dysmenorrhea)
Coriander	Tea made with rue for cardiovascular disorders and palpitations
Cotton	Tea from leaves, with oregano, for weakness, debility, low blood pressure Tea from leaves used for helminthic disorders
Cumin	Tea from seed used for childhood fevers and diarrhea, adult kidney disorders, menstrual disorders (amenorrhea, dysmenorrhea)
<i>Floripondio</i>	Drink mixed with onion, garlic, and scented water for witchcraft-derived illness
Garlic	Cataplasms made with liquid onion, <i>verbane</i> , <i>paico</i> , camphor, and cane alcohol for arthritis and rheumatism Drink made with camphor for common colds and bronchitis Drink made with wild garlic plant, mixed with white onion in an alcohol base for <i>danō</i> witchcraft illness Mixed with cane alcohol and camphor for lung disease and tuberculosis, and placed in ear for earaches Mixed with emetic plants, or <i>floripondio</i> , onion, and scented water, used in herbal baths against <i>pusanga</i> witchcraft illness
Ginger	Root mixed with one teaspoon of honey for abdominal dysfunction, hemorrhages
<i>Icoja</i>	Infusion of tree cutting for common colds and bronchitis
<i>Ishanga</i>	Infusion with rue and orange leaves for childbirth infections, hemorrhages, pains and prevention of spontaneous abortion
<i>Izula</i>	Ant and other insect steeped in cane alcohol (for two weeks) for arthritis and rheumatism
Lemon	Juice from steeped peel used for adult fevers and diabetes Enema with <i>malva</i> , human urine, <i>maravilla</i> , aspirin, vinegar, and antacid for childhood fevers and diarrhea
<i>Malva</i>	Enema with lemon juice, human urine, <i>maravilla</i> , aspirin, vinegar, and antacid for childhood fevers and diarrhea
<i>Mucura</i>	Used as part of herbal bath with <i>verbane</i> , piñon nut, and <i>shimipanpana</i> against <i>saladera</i> witchcraft
<i>Nucnucpichana</i>	Roots steeped and juice of leaves used together for adult fevers

Onion	Cataplasm made from liquid onion, garlic, <i>verbane</i> , <i>paico</i> , camphor, and cane alcohol for arthritis and rheumatism Drink made from onions, water, and sugar (left 12 hours) for common colds and bronchitis Drink of white onion in alcohol base mixed with wild garlic for <i>daño</i> witchcraft illness Liquid preparation from white onion for earaches
Orange	Infusion of <i>ishanga</i> , rue, and orange leaves for childbirth infections, hemorrhages, pains and prevention of spontaneous abortion
Oregano	Tea of leaves, resin of piñon nut, cumin seed, and <i>manzanilla</i> for childhood fevers and diarrhea
Paico	Cataplasm made from camphor, garlic, liquid onion, <i>verbane</i> , and cane alcohol for arthritis and rheumatism Ground-up pods and seeds mixed with juice of onion for helminthic diseases Salve made of ground plant and onion juice for hemorrhoids
Piñon nut	Resin mixed in tea of cumin seed, <i>manzanilla</i> , and oregano leaves for childhood fevers and diarrhea
Renacquillo	Resin of trees used in drink for hernias or ruptures
Rue	Infusion for asthma Infusion mixed with coriander for cardiovascular disorders and palpitations Infusion of rue, orange leaves, and <i>ishanga</i> for childbirth infections, hemorrhages, pains and prevention of spontaneous abortion Infusion for helminthic diseases, menstrual disorders (amenorrhea, dysmenorrhea), sinusitis, and hay fever Tea with coriander for digestive disorders, weakness, debility, and low blood pressure
Sangre de Grado	Resin of tree mixed with honey for hemorrhages Resin for skin disorders
Sinchipichana	Tea for abdominal dysfunction
Toé	Used to evoke visionary states
Verbane	Cataplasm made with garlic, liquid onion, <i>paico</i> , camphor, and cane alcohol (left two weeks) for arthritis and rheumatism Tea mixed with <i>nucnucpichana</i> for asthma Tea mixed with burned salt for typhoid fever Tea used for childhood fevers and diarrhea, as well as common colds and bronchitis, liver disorder, and ulcers

TABLE II
LESSER-KNOWN PLANTS USED BY DON HILDE*

Vernacular Name	Probable Botanical Name
Ayahuasca	<i>Banisteriopsis</i> spp.
Chiricsanango	<i>Brunfelsia grandiflora</i>
Chuchiwasi	<i>Heisteria pallida</i> (?)
Floripondio	<i>Brugmansia suaveolens</i>
Mucura	<i>Petiveria alliacea</i>
Nucnucpichana	<i>Scoparia dulcis</i> (Scopulariaceae)
Paico	<i>Chenopodium ambrosioides</i> L.
Sangre de Grado	<i>Croton lechleri</i> (Euphorbiaceae)
Sinchipichana	<i>Banisteriopsis rusbyana</i> (?)
Toé	<i>Brugmansia</i> spp.
Verbane	<i>Verbena horalis</i>

*Botanical identification is not available for the plants in this list but may conform to identifications by Plowman (1982). See also Luna (1984) and Kliks (1983).

tings. In fact, in the many hundreds of thousands iatrogenic illnesses recorded throughout the U.S., Weil stated that a leading type is adverse drug reactions.

Traditional healers, such as don Hilde, are empirically oriented. They find and use plants in their environment as people before them have done for millennia. However, unlike some healers who learn their trade as apprentices from others specialized in plant use, don Hilde claims no special training or preparation. Rather, his own curiosity, experimentation, and ability to perceive plant effects in different parts of his body is the mainstay of his knowledge. It may be that trial and error are involved, but don Hilde certainly is careful as he measures and administers his medications. As do many healers throughout the world, he claims divine inspiration for many of his remedies. This is especially interesting because nonetheless he subjects numerous plants to complex processing, including seeping, boiling, filtering, and grinding, in order to assemble his preparations. This is a far cry from a world of simple teas, massages, and enemas.

Like many Latin American herbalists, don Hilde is a keen amateur pharmacist and a man who is knowledgeable about plant drugs and herbs. He is quick to mix and match plants and pharmaceuticals when he thinks that some benefit would be derived from doing so. When he decided to devote himself to ayahuasca healing, he experimented personally with numerous plants after carefully fasting and observing their effects on his body. Through a sympathetic bond established in this manner, he was able to predict the effects of a given plant or pharmaceutical product on his patients as well.

His visions instruct him in the use and preparation of his medicines, including some complex mixtures and salves that he prepares for skin disorders. Often, in the midst of speaking to someone, he will enter a trance in the middle of a sentence. Other visions come to him during the crucial meditation meeting on Tuesdays, when he asks his spirit guide for help in treating particular clients that he has interviewed the preceding week.

After don Hilde has examined a patient, he uses his special visionary powers to ascertain if he is able to use a particular medicine for the witchcraft harm that is affecting that person. He varies dosages carefully, observing the appropriate amount in accordance with a patient's body weight and general state of health. Meticulous about his medicines, much as a well-trained physician might be, he is careful that toxic effects of medications are avoided whenever possible. Similar to urban physicians, don Hilde pays attention to the compliance of his patients in the taking of medicine. In fact, many patients do not pay attention to his directions, and on occasion patients will return to complain about the effect of a certain plant, and learn that indeed don Hilde was not joking when he told them to take just so many drops so many times a day. Often, uneducated

patients will decide that forces and entities, which were bestowed on don Hilde when he joined the Seprtrionic Order, will be marshaled to confront the power of the witch. In terms of the biology of hope mentioned earlier, don Hilde presents the client with a treatment plan that is very convincing, and if reinforced by the personal experience of the plant hallucinogen ayahuasca, adds to the healer's power and omnipotence.

Don Hilde is not a confrontive shamanistic healer. His policy is to reveal the reading he obtains from patients, either from a vision or from his pulsing activity. He prefers to avoid confrontations and conflicts that would cause a patient shame and impede the cure. Rather, he talks in general terms about moral issues. He believes that people must be told about the origin of their illness, especially when it results from interpersonal conflicts. When illness derives from witchcraft, it advances quickly. One must muster a major force against it and one cannot simply treat the symptoms.

Unlike other healers who blow tobacco smoke over people to cure them of evil spirits (*mal aires*), don Hilde prefers to use spiritual power and to extend that help to his patients by calling on his spirit guide. In the past, he claims that he was not averse to using nefarious perfumes to bewitch or hex. Now all he does is in the service of good. He believes that should he follow an evil path, he would lose his power to heal. In the last few years, with the help of Seprtrionic training and protection, he has reaffirmed this devotion to following the path of good.

HALLUCINOGENIC PLANT USE

In the Amazon it is often difficult to obtain plants that originate in other regions. Sometimes a plant will have a different name, especially if it grows in the Andean highlands where the Indian language Quechua is spoken. Although don Hilde is an avid reader and has a small library in Spanish on herbal lore, he prefers to prescribe plant medicines and concoctions derived from his visions rather than from his reading. Visualizations of numerous plants appear to him with frequency. When asked, however, don Hilde is slow to enumerate the many plants he uses. Many new ones come into his mind all the time, especially during his walks or in his visions when he sees unknown plants that he later looks for by their appearance. It is indeed difficult to systematize his plant knowledge due to this intuitive and subjective relationship he has with nature.

Table I details both the hallucinogenic and nonhallucinogenic plants used by don Hilde. It does not focus specifically on ayahuasca, one of the major plant hallucinogens in this region commonly used by don Hilde on the average of two to three times a week in recent years. This woody vine is prepared in a drink and taken by healers and patients alike. Visions obtained during the several hours of

intoxication are utilized by the healer in diagnosing the etiology of illness before any intervention is decided on. For the healer, the trance state is his/her major diagnostic tool, not unlike a series of laboratory tests and PET/CAT scans in Western medicine. It is in the use of this plant hallucinogen that the strongest links to shamanic Indian beliefs can be seen to continue over time despite the ubiquitous changes in the culture due to Westernization and modernization. Other publications have detailed the culture of ayahuasca use (e.g., Dobkin de Rios 1972).

Table I, which provides a list of don Hilde's plant inventory, is self-explanatory, and indicates the mode of preparation and the specific disorders for which particular substances are used. This section will focus particularly on trance-inducing hallucinogenic plants and the shamanic- and nonshamanic-type uses to which they are put by don Hilde. Similar to North American Indian plant users, don Hilde is comfortable utilizing hallucinogenic plants merely for their curative properties, as opposed to their trance-inducing properties, on those occasions when he believes that the plant may be helpful. A group of hallucinogenic plants common to this area that fall into this category are the *sanangos*. One in particular, *chiricsanango*, which don Hilde grows in his garden, is used to treat abdominal pain even though it is a hallucinogen. In Quechua, the plant name means cold medicine because it creates a sensation of chills when the root or bark is ingested. Besides its purgative effects, similar to many other Amazonian hallucinogens, the plant anesthetizes the mouth. One variety is useful in treating rheumatic pains. Don Hilde uses this plant as an enema to treat ulcers, colds, kidney disease, and weakness in the lungs as well as fevers, snakebites, and severe back pain. He gives only a small amount of the uncooked plant to the patient. The plant is becoming rare, as native peoples become acculturated and lose ties with their tribal lore.

Don Hilde has also used a beanlike plant, *camalonga*, mixed with *chiricsanango*. Since he became a member of Septerionism, he prefers not to use this plant any longer. He says that other ayahuasca healers use this plant with camphor mixed in a solution of water to cause dizziness and intoxication, mostly to provoke visions in their clients. It is not as strong as other hallucinogens, such as ayahuasca or *toé*, but is used by *ayahuasqueros* to evoke the negative forces of witchcraft. A man don Hilde knows obtains the plant from Shipibo Indians in various indigenous communities along the Ucayali River.

The *toé* plant is another powerful hallucinogen that causes alterations of consciousness. Don Hilde uses it on himself to obtain visions. Another hallucinogenic plant that don Hilde uses is called *chacrana*, which he takes with ayahuasca because he believes that without its addition to the mixture there would be no visionary effects. In fact, he argues that the vision varies according to the quantity of the *chacrana* plant included in the mix.

CONCLUSION

In this thematic issue of the *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, which includes a consideration of trance and hallucinogens, the study of a contemporary urban healer, don Hilde, who utilizes powerful plant potentiators represents an excursion linking the past and present in shamanic studies. As the theme editors have pointed out in the introductory article, the term "shaman," like it or not, has passed into popular use and frequently describes a variety of popular figures or traditional folk healers like don Hilde. However, in the ethnographic case presented in this article, the influence of traditional shamanic roots in the region is seen, reinterpreted, and integrated with new beliefs—no doubt a process that has occurred again and again throughout time. Most anthropologists hesitate to freeze images in time, and are most interested in the way in which social phenomena (e.g., shamanism) changes and evolves historically.

The example of don Hilde's shamanic use of plant hallucinogens presents a very unusual natural laboratory. He utilizes ayahuasca and other hallucinogens to obtain visions and inspiration in order to recognize healing plants, to contact spiritual entities that aid in healing his patients, and to access spiritual entities that intervene on his patients' behalf within a healing context.

Most nation-states of the world regulate both religion and medicine. Healers like don Hilde function differently in state-level societies than in the distant past. No longer are they arbiters of the social order, inasmuch as governmental structures preempt any political power they may have once held. They use trance for their own personal visionary experiences and may also access such consciousness states for their clients.

Healers, such as don Hilde, are pragmatists. They distill the knowledge of science, particularly pharmaceutical medicine, with the natural plants (which they gather in the forest) that they learn about in periods of apprenticeship. They use drug-induced trance for diagnostic purposes, which is in long keeping with shamanic traditions that stress the omnipotence of the spiritual representative of the community before the preternatural realm. Most interestingly, many of the plant hallucinogens are quite anxiolytic: They reduce feelings of anxiety that have direct responses to patients' negative affective states that were mentioned earlier in the present article.

The powerful effects of plant hallucinogens—both as medicines and as symbolic reinforcers of a shared worldview—can only help contemporary shamanistic practitioners, such as don Hilde, alleviate their clients' sufferings. With the lack of systematic research on hallucinogens in contemporary society, there is much to be learned about hallucinogenic healing from ayahuasca use in the Peruvian Amazon.

REFERENCES

- Dean, S.R.; Plyler, C.O. & Dean, M. 1980. Should psychic studies be included in psychiatric education? An opinion survey. *American Journal of Psychiatry* Vol. 137(10): 1247-1249.
- Dobkin de Rios, M. 1984. The *vidente* phenomenon in Third World traditional healing: An Amazonian example. *Medical Anthropology* Vol. 8(1): 160-170.
- Dobkin de Rios, M. 1981a. *Saladera*—a culture-bound misfortune syndrome in the Peruvian Amazon. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* Vol. 5: 193-213.
- Dobkin de Rios, M. 1981b. Socio-economic characteristics of an Amazon urban healer's clientele. *Social Science and Medicine* Vol. 15B: 51-63.
- Dobkin de Rios, M. 1972. *Visionary Vine: Psychedelic Healing in the Peruvian Amazon*. San Francisco: Chandler.
- Katz, F. & Dobkin de Rios, M. 1971. Hallucinogenic music: An analysis of the role of whistling in Peruvian ayahuasca healing sessions. *Journal of American Folklore* Vol. 84(333): 320-327.
- Kiev, A. 1964. *Magic, Faith and Healing: Studies in Primitive Psychiatry*. Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press.
- Kliks, M.M. 1983. Studies on the traditional herbal anthelmintic *Chenopodium ambrosioides* L.: Ethnopharmacological evaluation and clinical field trials. Presented at the International Health Conference of the National Council for International Health, Washington, D.C., June.
- Ley, R.G. & Freeman, R.J. 1984. Imagery, cerebral laterality and the healing process. In: Sheikh, A.A. (Ed.) *Imagination and Healing*. Farmingdale, New York: Baywood.
- Luna, L.E. 1984. The concept of plants as teachers among four Mestizo shamans of Iquitos, Northeastern Peru. *Journal of Ethnopharmacology* Vol. 11: 135-156.
- Plowman, T. 1982. Personal communication.
- Press, I. 1969. Urban illness: Physicians, curers and dual use in Bogota. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* Vol. 10: 269-273.
- Tomb, D.A. 1984. *Psychiatry & The House Officer*. 2nd ed. Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins.
- Weil, A.T. 1981. Botanical vs. chemical drugs: Pros and cons. In: Meyer, G.G.; Blum, K. & Cull, J.G. (Eds.) *Folk Medicine and Herbal Healing*. Springfield, Illinois: Charles C Thomas.