



THROUGH THE LOOKING-GLASS: THE USE OF PSYCHOACTIVE PLANTS IN CATALONIA

Maja Kohek

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Through the Looking-Glass: The use of psychoactive plants in Catalonia

MAJA KOHEK



**DOCTORAL THESIS
2020**



MAJA KOHEK

**THROUGH THE LOOKING-GLASS:
THE USE OF PSYCHOACTIVE PLANTS IN CATALONIA**

DOCTORAL THESIS

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UNIVERSITAT
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FAIG CONSTAR que aquest treball, titulat "A Través del Mirall: L'us de plantes psicoactives a Catalunya", que presenta Maja Kohek per a l'obtenció del títol de Doctor, ha estat realitzat sota la meva direcció al Departament d'Antropologia, Filosofia i Treball Social d'aquesta universitat.

HAGO CONSTAR que el presente trabajo, titulado "A Través del Espejo: El uso de plantas psicoactivas en Cataluña", que presenta Maja Kohek para la obtención del título de Doctor, ha sido realizado bajo mi dirección en el Departamento de Antropología, Filosofía y Trabajo Social de esta universidad.

I STATE that the present study, entitled "Through the looking glass: The use of psychoactive plants in Catalonia", presented by Maja Kohek for the award of the degree of Doctor, has been carried out under my supervision at the Department of Anthropology, Philosophy and Social Work of this university.

Tarragona, 4.11.2020

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Rebri (Prem), Slovenia, October 2020

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*Human nature is not a machine
to be built after a model,
and set to do exactly the work prescribed for it,
but a tree,
which requires to grow and develop itself on all sides,
according to the tendency of the inward forces
which make it a living thing.*

– John Stuart Mill, *On liberty*

ABSTRACT / RESUMEN / RESUM

Through the Looking-Glass: The use of psychoactive plants in Catalonia

The thesis consists of six chapters related to the use of psychoactive plants in a community in Catalonia. The first chapter is introducing the community, the places where fieldwork has been conducted, and the key informants. The second chapter is presenting the aims of the study, the methodologies used for data collection and data analysis, discussing anthropological research methods, as well as explaining how the study came to the existence. The third chapter dives into the phenomenon of medicalisation in contemporary western society and its relations to drug use research and the discourse on drug policy. The fourth chapter discusses the worldview of the studied community, their way of life, gender roles, childrearing, and healthcare practices. The fifth chapter is the most extensive and discusses the use of psychoactive plants in the studied community. It touches on the issues of commercialisation and globalisation of psychoactive plants in contemporary society, argues for the differentiation of the community from other neoshamanic and New Age groups, and discusses the community in the context of *communitas*. Furthermore, a comparison between spiritual and habitual use is being made, and several rituals are presented that use cannabis (Santa María) as a sacrament. The effects of the rituals are discussed from the point of view of inhabitants and the researcher. The sixth chapter is the concluding chapter and discusses the observations and results of the study from the point of view of drug policy and offers considerations for designing future public policies.

A Través del Espejo: El uso de plantas psicoactivas en Cataluña

Esta tesis consiste en 6 capítulos que versan sobre el uso de plantas psicoactivas en una comunidad de Cataluña. El primer capítulo introduce la comunidad, los lugares donde se desarrolló el trabajo de campo y los/las informantes. En el segundo capítulo se describen los objetivos del estudio, la metodología utilizada para la recolección de datos y los subsiguientes análisis. También se discuten las metodologías de investigación antropológica, así como los orígenes de dicho trabajo. El tercer capítulo explora el fenómeno de la medicalización de la sociedad occidental contemporánea y su relación con la investigación de drogas y el discurso en materia de política de drogas. En el cuarto capítulo se despliega la discusión sobre la cosmovisión de la comunidad sobre la que se ha trabajado, su estilo de vida, roles de género, estilos educativos o prácticas de autocuidado. El quinto capítulo es el más extenso y en el que se discute el uso de plantas psicoactivas en dicha comunidad, complementándolo con fenómenos como la comercialización y globalización de estas plantas en la sociedad contemporánea. También se propone la diferenciación de la comunidad estudiada con respecto a otros grupos neochamánicos o “New Age”, y se contextualiza dentro del contexto de *communitas*. Además, se comparan los usos espirituales y cotidianos y se describen un gran número de rituales en los que se utiliza la planta de cannabis (Santa María) como un sacramento. Los efectos

de los rituales en los que se utilizan plantas psicoactivas se presentan bajo la perspectiva tanto de los individuos de la comunidad como de la autora. El sexto y último capítulo presenta las observaciones y resultados del estudio desde un punto de vista de políticas de drogas y ofrece algunas consideraciones sobre el diseño de futuras políticas públicas.

A Través del Mirall: L'ús de plantes psicoactives a Catalunya

Aquesta tesi consisteix en 6 capítols que versen sobre l'ús de plantes psicoactives en una comunitat de Catalunya. El primer capítol introdueix la comunitat, els llocs on es va desenvolupar el treball de camp i els/les informants. En el segon capítol es descriuen els objectius de l'estudi, la metodologia emprada per a la recollida de dades i els subsegüents anàlisis. També es discuteixen les metodologies d'investigació antropològica, així com els orígens d'aquest treball. El tercer capítol explora el fenomen de la medicalització de la societat occidental contemporània i la seva relació amb la investigació amb drogues i el discurs en matèria de política de drogues. En el quart capítol es desplega la discussió sobre la cosmovisió de la comunitat sobre la qual s'ha treballat, el seu estil de vida, rols de gènere, estils educatius o pràctiques d'autocura. El cinquè capítol és el més extens i en el qual es discuteix l'ús de plantes psicoactives en aquesta comunitat, complementant-lo amb fenòmens com la comercialització i globalització d'aquestes plantes en la societat contemporània. També es proposa la diferenciació de la comunitat estudiada respecte a altres grups neoxamànics o "New Age", i es contextualitza dins del context de *communitas*. A més, es comparen els usos espirituals i quotidians i es descriuen un gran nombre de rituals en què s'utilitza la planta de cànnabis (Santa María) com un sagrament. Els efectes dels rituals en què s'utilitzen plantes psicoactives es presenten sota la perspectiva tant dels individus de la comunitat com de l'autora. El sisè i últim capítol presenta les observacions i resultats de l'estudi des d'un punt de vista de polítiques de drogues i ofereix algunes consideracions sobre el disseny de futures polítiques públiques.

INTRODUCTION

Psychoactive plants and altered states of consciousness have been an essential part of human society for centuries, if not millennia. In the 21st century these ancient traditions, that have been almost completely lost, are gaining popularity, particularly the ritual use of ayahuasca. People seeking healing are travelling to the jungle of South America for the experience, and traditional healers are travelling the world bringing the sacred medicine to the western countries. Due to the globalisation of the psychoactive plants, we have an unprecedented opportunity to research unique phenomenon that has never before been possible, and learn about the ritual uses in western settings, as well as the interaction between the traditional and western worldview.

I was conducting fieldwork in a unique community in Catalonia that is using psychoactive plants regularly in a ritual setting. The community and their ritual practices have never been documented before. Anthropology has a long tradition of studying drug use and the importance of this work is in documenting novel and unique ritual uses of psychoactive plants in contemporary cultures that are not strictly religious. Moreover, this work offers a different perspective to the almost exclusively toxicological approaches in studying drug use in other disciplines such as epidemiology, pharmacology, neuroscience, addiction studies, sociology, and criminology, which consider drug use as inherently bad for the individual's health and destructive for the whole society. Non-problematic use of psychoactive substances is an important aspect of drug research that has been enjoying solid development for quite some years. Studies on user communities, particularly in the case of psychedelics, have a rich history. Disciplines such as ethnobotany and anthropology are those with the most continuity in the study of psychoactive plants and the present study situates itself among them with utilising classical ethnography to explore life philosophies, childrearing strategies, gender notions, and healthcare practices. I intend to join a growing number of people who are defending the need to explore psychoactive plants, its uses, and its effects not only on a political, economical, medical, and personal level but on a societal, spiritual and environmental level. These perspectives can contribute to a fuller image of the social reality and should be part of public policies as those have an impact on all of us, user or not. My work also gives an insight into the new forms and contexts of non-problematic use (such as ritual or ceremonial use) that are being developed in these networks and are gaining popularity in the globalised world. Besides that, it contributes to the normalisation of the discourse on drug use by understanding drug use as a social phenomenon in its particular cultural context, as a cultural identity, and as a practice of self-care. The objective of my work was therefore to document the use of psychoactive plants in the Catalan community with everything that this implies in terms of coexistence and community, world-views, conceptions about health, children's education, social relationships, etc. I was not only interested in the practices of use, but in the people itself. The life stories of the people. Who are they? Why do they use the plants? Which plants do they use? How do they use them? How did these practices of

use develop? What subjective effects do these plants have? What role do psychoactive plants have in the lives of the people?

The principal method for data collection in the present study is participant observation or rather observational participation in people's everyday life and the ceremonies. Field notes and a diary have been used to record daily activities and personal thoughts. Besides that, I was conducting in-depth interviews with twenty-two individuals and audio recorded a few ceremonies. A social network map has been created to show the structure and extensiveness of the community. The principal method for analysis of the interviews was thematic analysis, a generic and flexible method for identifying and analysing patterned meaning within data. Anthropology always tells a story, therefore, reflexivity and auto-ethnography form part of the analysis and enrich the narrative. Both the emic and the etic approach are needed to deliver a balanced interpretation of the studied phenomenon. Moreover, incorporating the researchers own experiences and background creates a relational approach that transforms and dehierarchises the relationship between the researcher and the researched and convert the ethnographic practice into a "weaving technology" in which the researcher is knitting broad nets of engaged knowledge producers.

My findings suggest that the use of psychoactive plants, which is incorporated into society, has several benefits for the individual as well as society. It not only decreases stigma, but also the harms these substances could potentially cause if used in secrecy and without proper knowledge. The rituals ensure safety and control regarding quality, dose, as well as the set and setting. The facilitators of the ceremonies are role models. They are teachers, guides, and therapists. All in one. The members of the community reported diverse subjective effects and several benefits such as a more positive outlook on life, disengagement in addictive behaviour, healing from trauma, establishing more meaningful relationships, having a healthier lifestyle, gaining more awareness about one's actions, enhancing pro-environmental sentiments, introducing spirituality in their lives, changing their priorities and values in life, and other.

Throughout this work, I slowly uncover the people, the practices, the values, the stories, and unravel their journey as we move through different topics and chapters. Layer by layer. Like an onion. After all, life is not dichotomous, it is an assemblage of elements that are all relevant and form part of the bigger picture. Therefore, I invite the reader to think about the use of psychoactive plants in this Catalan community as no different than coffee rituals in Ethiopia or tea ceremonies in Japan. In these rituals, the substance has the central role, but the ritual itself has the role of creating strong bonds between the people and generating feelings of generosity and sharing. It is creating a community, a family. In western society, where we feel increasingly alienated from nature, the others and even ourselves, such rituals might help us to face some of the challenges of modern society.



Photo 1: Upon return to the Stone House in February 2020 I saw the “Wonderland” sign at the parking place. It was a present Estela received from an old friend of hers.

WELCOME TO WONDERLAND

*Dear, dear! How queer everything is today!
And yesterday things went on just as usual.
I wonder if I've been changed in the night?
Let me think: was I the same when I got up this morning?
I almost think I can remember feeling a little different.
But if I'm not the same, the next question is, Who in the world am I?
Ah, that's the great puzzle!*

– Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*

Alice had to go down the rabbit hole or go through the mirror to arrive in Wonderland, I had to ascend a snake-like road, called Anaconda by some of the inhabitants, to the top of a mountain where I found an old stone house and a little chapel. I am keeping the name of the place confidential to protect the place and its people, but I am using the name the people themselves use to refer to the place, they call it Wonderland [*País de las Maravillas*], with their permission:

We use the name Wonderland because it really is a land of wonder. We live in the countryside, a high mountain surrounded by rivers and volcanoes. When you wake up in the morning, it is beautiful to see all this. You realize that Wonderland is real, that our planet is wonderful. We just stop too rarely to observe it, to see where we are really living. We are lucky because we live as we want to live. We decided to let everything behind, and we came to live here. Let's see if we can be autonomous, if we can plant potatoes, make our clothes, and help friends to repair a roof on a house. ESTELA

Approximately one month after I started the fieldwork Estela, my key informant, had a presentation in a library of a small town organised by one inhabitant of Wonderland. I used the opportunity to accompany her to the event. Around twenty people were in the audience and Estela talked about Wonderland and what it represents. On this occasion, she did not mention the use of psychoactive plants. I arranged an audio recording of the event from which parts of it are translated into English and used in this chapter. It describes the *Weltanschauung* of Wonderland, a worldview with specific cultural themes, ritualised habits and expressed belief systems since each group or “cultural configuration develops a differentiated *paideia* that is thought of as a more or less unique experience, and each configuration can be differentiated into an articulated *ethos* and *eidōs*” (Menéndez, 2010: 245).

Wonderland is a response to the pressures and directives of contemporary western society. It is like a safety valve for people to release excessive pressure and prevent collapse. It is a nation without an army, but they do have some weapons of defence. One is a palm leaf to welcome everyone who comes and the other is a bouquet of roses that forces into surrender any power that might come against with the most beautiful thing there is – its perfume. Essential in Wonderland is that each person acts out of self-responsibility. The word

obligation is taken out of Wonderland's dictionary. No one is obligated to do anything they do not want to do. No obligation means that everyone in Wonderland participates voluntarily without coercion. They do what they do because they want to do it, not because they are obligated to do so. The word obligation is replaced by self-initiative and devotion. In Wonderland, people acquire knowledge and skills for basic living and learn how to live differently from the comforts of western society. It is said that to become part of Wonderland, like Alice, you must go through the looking-glass. To go through the looking-glass means to look at yourself, accept yourself and go forward. Leave behind the blame and everything that one has done wrong, all those things that weigh on us.

We should not keep on feeling guilty and punish ourselves because that is what really makes us sick. Feeling guilty makes sick. We have to eliminate the word guilty from our vocabulary and instead say 'I was wrong, and I will correct it'. That's it. Without punishment.

To live in Wonderland, Estela repeated often, you just have to want it. Wonderland is a place where a state of permanent happiness is declared:

We live well, we understand each other, we try to share, and have healthy relationships. This is quite difficult, because our heads are full of things, judgments, and anger. To be able to live differently, we try that these things do not occupy our mind too much. The most important thing is to recognize that we are living on a beautiful planet and that we already have everything what we really need. We don't even have to work, because the forest gives us everything: to eat, to drink, to heal. Everything.

Wonderland stands for a way of living in the world, a way of taking care of ourselves and everything around us. For that reason, it intends to re-invent traditions that have been lost in Europe and psychoactive plants play an important role in this re-vitalisation process. Investigating the Wonderland community ultimately leads us to examine and question the relationships between the individual – community – society and how these three levels articulate and interact.

The Stone House and the Water House

During fieldwork, I was staying in two community places. These are isolated rural houses (*fincas*), where only a few people live on a permanent basis. The house I stayed at for the longest time (in total eleven months) I will refer to as the Stone House. The other one, where I stayed for a shorter period (in total about six weeks), I will refer to as the Water House. I chose these names because they reflect the main element of the area where the house is positioned. The Stone House is on a top of a mountain with a breath-taking view of the valley and the Pyrenees in the distance and the Water House is situated in a valley surrounded by creeks and a water spring.

In the Stone House, I met Carlos and Lucia. They met each other in the Stone House and they both agreed it was love at first sight. Carlos was living in the Stone House at that point and wanted Lucia to join

him there, but she did not want to live on the mountain. Eventually, they found the sanctuary in the area, where they both feel comfortable living in. Even if Lucia did not want to live in the Stone House, she feels strongly connected to it and considers herself part of the community. She explained her understanding of community as follows:

On the spiritual level, I feel lucky to be able to be part although I have never lived there. I did not want to live there, but I feel very much part of it. I feel a spiritual community there. [...] To be part of the group is not that we are all one. No. Each one is part of that group and together we make the group, but without forgetting that one. For me these communities have also been, not only an anchor, but salvation, a very big pillar of my life, although I'm not involved in these communities on a daily basis. I'm part of that community, and the community is part of me.

Isabela is 47 years old and was never living in the Stone House but is visiting the place to take part in some of the activities or ceremonies. In her view, the Stone House is a place of healing, but the use of psychoactive plants is not the most important element of the healing. The place itself has an effect that many identify as healing:

I see it as a portal. I see it as an energetically sustained place for our evolution, a connection with our nature and our authentic reality. It is like a catalyst that accelerates processes. You arrive with your issues and, [the Stone House] is like the [Bach] flower essences, it increases your vibration and unblocks your blocks, your issues. Because it is a catalyst, you can experience crises there. I see it as a medicine place. A place for us to wake up, to reconnect. There is much more there, it's not just because of the [psychoactive] plants.

Julia, an old friend of Estela, is 59 years old and lives with her son in a *finca* in the area. They live on the edge of the forest and keep a few horses. She is working as a cook in an elementary school. When she was in her early 20s, she used or tried all psychoactive substances that were possible to get at that time. Now she only feels comfortable to use them in the Stone House with Estela. For Julia, the Stone House represents a space where she can experiment with psychoactive plants in a safe environment:

What [the Stone House] has given me is this faith and trust, to know that I will be taken care of. So, if I go somewhere to do experiments at the psychoactive level, I go to [the Stone House]. Why? Because there is a lot of experience, it is a place that is very well prepared and the person who runs the site is a person who is super consistent with what she [Estela] is doing. She knows perfectly well how the people who go there have to function and is able to set the limits. Because people can get carried away. They can start to freak out. And well, it's OK to explode and cry, but you don't freak out because you can go crazy, if the euphoria catches you. Of course, one thing is to let off steam and there are people crying, that's why they sing, but there must be a person who controls the process. This is why I go to [the Stone House].

Paloma is 49 years old and knows Estela for decades. She knew Estela before she started to live in the Stone House. Paloma herself was born in Barcelona, where she lived most of her life, but spent a few years also in a house in Montserrat. Paloma is one of the kindest, shy, sweet and positive person I have met in the field. In a group of people, she would not stand out, on the contrary, she would be somewhere in the background. Only at the end of my fieldwork, just before I left, I set up a meeting with her in Barcelona to do an interview. She was very genuine and open in the interview and, in the end, admitted sharing more

personal details with me than she intended. When I asked her what she thinks about the Stone House, how she experiences it, she excitedly laughed and said:

It's so beautiful, it's THE place in the world, it's the most... it's something that I'm infinitely grateful for. It's the right thing... truly a wonderland... it's beautiful! Long live iaia¹ [Estela]! God exists! Without [the Stone House] I would have lost myself. There are no hidden intentions there. It's a wonder. I don't know how to say.

Susana is 53 years old and lives in a nearby town. She is a registered member of Santo Daime for many years and likes to come to the Stone House every once in a while, for a day or two, but never lived there for a longer time. In the interview, she pointed out that from her own experience, it's a place of healing, but can also be challenging for people:

I love going there. I have great appreciation, recognition and much gratitude for it. It's a place with very powerful energies and, depending on the state of mind of the people, a very fat bug can come out, in the sense that it's a place where you will open up, and you have to let it out, if not you can't be there. So, of course, for certain people the place is challenging. In my opinion, it's like an astral hospital concealed in an old house, but in reality, it's a bright place. [The Stone House] is the doorman of the gates of heaven. That's what it is.

When I arrived at the Stone House, Manuel lived there for one year and four months. He was living in cities his whole life, studied social work and was working with young people in poor neighbourhoods of Barcelona and Girona. He told me that when he came to live in the Stone House, he did not know anything about gardening, working in the forest or anything similar. For him it was all new:

I see life here in [the Stone House] as true. It's being alive, in contact with nature. For me it has been a very powerful evolution, without even realizing it.

The Stone House is a place of healing, a place of experimenting, a place of learning about yourself and others, a place of spiritual development, a place of recovery, self-reflection and regeneration, a place of vision, a place of joy, a community place that, as Estela says:

It's a place of transformation. It makes us change our beliefs, makes us realize that we can live in another way.

Only Estela lives permanently in the Stone House, maintaining the place and regularly carrying out the rituals, while others come and go. People are staying in the house temporarily, for some weeks, months, or years. Individuals go there, generally, when they are facing challenges in life and need to separate themselves from their usual social obligations and environments. To borrow Turner's words, the Stone House has a characteristic of liminality, as space "betwixt and between" (Turner, 1991). It represents a transition to a new phase in life, where people spend time together as equal participants and deep bonds are developed between them, as they are stripped of previous social positions or obligations. This time of separation from the usual social obligations is, in Turner's view, crucial for human beings to be able to process and adjust to changes in life. Leila, who is 44 years old and lived in the Stone House for several months in her 30s, explained:

1 Catalan for grandma.

This place will always be a site of passage. She [Estela] has always said that it was a place of transition. It has always been lived like this. People came and stayed for a while. To regenerate, I guess. [The Stone House] has this movement. So, if you don't accept this, you'll have a bad time. But if you accept it, you will be very grateful. Because you also come out of your shell and face other realities.

The Stone House and the Water House are places where the community comes together for a specific ceremony, but they also offer shelter to those who need to take a break from their everyday life. Several community members lived there at some point in their lives and people from all over the world are coming there. Carlos pointed out the advantage of living in a place where the world comes together by saying:

I was lucky that I didn't have to travel the world to be able to meet with all these traditions. [The Stone House] is where I learned [and] this path helped me to recover my own roots.

Recovering roots and reviving the spiritual memory of Europe is at the foreground in Wonderland (Ginzburg, 1991). It is not about replicating foreign traditions, but to remember the European history and tradition and re-establish it with the help of psychoactive plants. As I argue later, cannabis plays a central role in it, as I explain further on.

The guardians of Wonderland

I will begin the story with Estela, my key informant and the “guardian”² of the Stone House and Wonderland, who was born in Barcelona in the 1950s and is the initiator of this community, network, tribe, whatever you want to call it. As a child she was growing up in Barcelona and did not even know that there is soil under the asphalt and the concrete, she repeated many times while talking about her life. She was growing up on the streets of a city. As a young adult, she identified with the hippie movement and went to live in rural Catalonia. Together with her husband they were resurrecting and rebuilding old *fincas* in abandoned villages together with other like-minded people. Later on, they moved to yet another ruin, which they renovated bit by bit, and called it home for themselves and their five sons. In her 40s, Estela needed a change in her life. Her husband found an escape in alcohol, and she could not cope with it anymore. She filed for divorce and went to live in an apartment in a nearby village. Since the mid-1990s she is, *fardada*, a registered member of the Santo Daime church. The Santo Daime doctrine was brought to Spain in the early 1990s. Paloma, who was in her 20s at that time, remembered the time when Daime arrived in Catalonia:

It united diverse people who would never come together otherwise. People from the super hippie mountains, like Estela, and people who had money. People that would never get together otherwise, people with very opposite lifestyles.

The Daime or ayahuasca, a concoction of two plants from the Amazon that has a psychoactive effect, plays an important role in Estela's life and choices she is taking. She is also a user of cannabis, and in Santo

2 Guardian is the term she uses to describe her role.

Daime she learned how to use it ritually. In one of the *trabalhos* (Brazilian Portuguese for "works") or ceremonies of Santo Daime, Padrinho Sebastião (Godfather Sebastião), one of the direct disciples of Mestre Irineu the founder of Santo Daime in Brazil, came to her in a vision and told her to drink Daime alone in the forest by night. She discussed it with the leader of the church and asked for his permission. He gave her a bottle of Daime, which he got from Padrinho Sebastião and kept it for special occasions, under the condition that she lets him know when and where she is going to drink it. In December she walked up the mountain where the Stone House was. She knew the place since she was living in a nearby village, about an hour walk from the house. When there were still people living in the house she would sometimes pass by and stop for a coffee and a chat. At that point, however, the house was abandoned for several years and slowly deteriorating. When I asked her why she chose this place to drink the Daime, she replied that it was Padrinho Sebastião who brought her there:

He told me about everything that's going to happen here. I really didn't want to come because I had already worked in many places, building houses and, at that time, I was just recently divorced and was living in a very comfortable house. I had a washing machine to wash my children's clothes. I have five sons. It was an easy house. I had a school next door. Coming here was like... I asked Padrinho to bring someone else who has more faith, and he would say 'this place is for the end of time. Many people will come here. It's like Mapiá. You can do this because you have lived in places where there is nothing'. There is no water, you must cut wood, you know... of course, everything that comes with the living of the land.

It took her a while to give in to the call and decide to move to the ruin with her two youngest sons. One was five and the other was seven years old at that time. In one of our conversations Estela was remembering:

When I arrived in this place, I arrived with the instruction that it was a healing place, a place to heal. I'm neither a nurse nor a therapist, it's not my quality to be in the world of healing and all these things. But then the Daime told me: 'You don't have to do anything, you just make people feel this stone and look at it, sometimes you will go on a walk with people in the forest, go to the top of the mountain. The place does the rest.' The place itself is doing healing and the chapel too.

Estela sees herself rather as a guardian of the Stone House than a shaman or *curandera*. If anything, she identifies with being a grandmother [*abuela*] to her grandchildren and a grandmother or an elder to the members of the community. Generally any member of a community, in various traditions, can become a shaman or a *curandera*, however, those who do, undergo a hard training full of abstentions, tests and sacrifices and are "chosen" by plants or spirits (Porrás Carrillo, 2003: 11), as it happened also in the case of Estela, yet, she prefers to be seen as someone who is accompanying rather than healing.

At the beginning of her journey, it was not easy for Estela. She had to deal with accusations and non-acceptance not only by the local population but also by her friends. She was describing an occasion where all her friends distanced themselves from her at a local celebration, which made her felt isolated and alone. She had to deal with the accusation of being a witch, doing black magic, or belonging to a sect. In that time Santo Daime just arrived in Spain and the church strived to establish itself as a legal entity. The path of acceptance

and recognition of Santo Daime as a religious group in Spain was long and difficult, however, at the start of the new millennia, the court gave it a green light (López-Pavillard and De las Casas, 2011). In October 2019 I had the opportunity to talk with one of the leaders of this movement, who brought Santo Daime to Spain in the 90s and who had to fight for the right to practice their religion in the court. He explained that the difference between a sect and Santo Daime is quite simple: “a sect is easy to join and difficult to get out and Santo Daime is difficult to join and easy to get out”.

Estela did not live alone in the house. She invited other women she knew to join her. Soon four more women with four children joined her. In the beginning there were only women living in the house. After a few years Estela decided to go on a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, the famous Catholic pilgrimage route:

I was in the chapel when got a call ‘go to Santiago’. One of the messages that I received [while on the pilgrimage] was that men are coming to the Stone House. I came back from Santiago with six of them. Later they fell in love with the women they met here and they all left [laughter]. There have always been more women in the house. Men come one by one, like Manuel, who comes and stays here and during the time he is here, he will first learn everything feminine from the women who pass by here.

In the beginning, Estela was mainly sleeping outside in a tent because the house was too crowded. There were only a few rooms in a somewhat functional state, the rest needed to be rebuilt. The reconstruction of the house is still in process, only recently, after I finished my fieldwork, a rainwater container was built and running water installed in the kitchen. In the first six years, the roof was repaired, the kitchen has been done, and few small solar panels installed with batteries to have light in the house. Before Estela went to Santiago de Compostela the women were alone for all the work:

Only with the Land Rover could you drive up the mountain at the beginning, because the road was all stone... like boom boom. It took us one hour to ascend. No car went up here. Only us because we were crazy. We took all the children every Saturday and we went with the Land Rover to collect firewood in the forest. Every Saturday we collected wood for the week with a handsaw because we didn’t have and didn’t want a chainsaw. All considerably basic. We started with nothing.

Wonderland began as an idea that grew and developed with time. It was presented the first time in the Circle of Wise Grandmothers and Grandfathers of the Planet [El Círculo de Abuelas y Abuelos Sabios del Planeta], a meeting of elders that was initiated in 2006 and inspired by the Inca Grandfather Qenqo Harawi Qespeq from Peru to bring together elders or representatives of various traditional cultures that share their knowledge, their vision of the world, and in that way preserve the wisdom. The movement expanded from Peru to other countries, such as Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Brazil, Mexico to include original traditions from those countries. In 2013 the meeting was held in Montserrat³ close to Barcelona as an

3 Montserrat is an outstanding and breath-taking multi-peaked mountain range in Catalonia. Locally and internationally the site is known as the Benedictine monastery and the sanctuary of the Santa María de Montserrat, a black Virgin Mary (Moreneta). There are many legends and stories about Montserrat still alive today. It represents a sacred place, a place with high energetic power and a place that unites not only Catholics but the Catalan people, tourists, hikers, everyone. It is therefore considered (by the inhabitants of Wonderland) a place in Catalonia where

act of reconciliation and unity between the cultures of America and Europe to heal the planet. At this meeting, Estela was invited and decided not to represent Spain, but a recently born nation, the nation of Wonderland. Wonderland has a transparent flag so that no one can get angry or offended and is in use only as a transition flag until the need for flags in the world completely disappears.

Estela's idea comes close to what Kant referred to as "worldwide citizenship". Zygmunt Bauman is writing about a little, not well known, book by Kant on the peaceful coexistence of humankind and worldwide hospitality that was most probably read by very few archivists or historians, if at all. We live on a finite planet where soon no space will be left and, according to Bauman, Kant saw the "citizenship-style unification of the human species [as] the destination that Nature itself has chosen for us – the ultimate horizon of our universal history" (2008: 226). Therefore, it will be unavoidable to embrace "hospitality as the supreme precept [...] as we must seek an end and a resolution to the long chain of trials and errors, the catastrophes our errors have caused, and the ruin left in the wake of those catastrophes" (2008: 226). Estela never read Kant, but Daime told her to always welcome everyone who comes to the Stone House and never reject anyone who expresses the wish to stay there.

Over time genuine relationships developed among the people coming from all over the world. A community developed, a large family [*familia*] as they refer to themselves, that is well connected with individuals ready to help when someone is in need. These are the "new families", the "new tribes", according to Estela, people living in a small nucleus, connected to other small nucleus and taking care of each other. Several elders in the community are considered grandmothers and grandfathers (*abuelas* and *abuelos*), the carriers of knowledge and the "go-to persons" when one is seeking advice or direction. Estela is a grandmother in all its signifiers. Her sons have families themselves and she has a couple of grandchildren, but she is also a grandmother to the offspring of Wonderland. Estela is well respected in the community because of her qualities. Some people say she is a nun praying for the world, for peace and humanity. Her role as a guardian and caretaker of the Stone House and the Wonderland community as such is deeply appreciated. Paloma said:

To know that she exists, that she is there, well, that is very valuable in my life, something that I appreciate. She is always there [in the Stone House] as a guardian.

Alma, who was growing up in the Santo Daime village Céu do Mapiá in Brazil and is living in Catalonia for the past 15 years where she established a church, told me that:

Grandma [Estela] is a person that I like to work with because she knows a lot but is humble. She is one of the people who know how to listen to you, she has the humility to ask for advice despite her age. A 66-year-old person came to ask for direction, some advice from a 43-year-old like me. It is a very beautiful act.

Emma, a 36 years old Catalan woman, emphasised the most important characteristics of a person who works with psychoactive plants as humble and "down-to-earth". As I will discuss later, people who guide

change is possible.

ceremonies get a reputation or get famous in the spiritual circles. Hence, it is also important what they do with this power.

Grandma [Estela] is recognized in various circles. People know her and she carries it with humility. In other words, she is humble, very natural.

Ivan Illich writes, in his book *Tools of Conviviality* (1975 [1973]), about the importance of learning-by-doing as an essential element of a convivial society, where learning has nothing to do education. Estela didn't study or go to university. What she knows and what she does, she learned by experience, by doing it. Julia explained:

[Estela] is as a person with an enormous experience. Everything she knows she has lived, from her own life experience. She knows a lot. [...] I see how she manages people in a crisis or what she organizes there [in the Stone House]. She is a wise person. She does what she knows and, moreover, she also does it with joy and with a lot of positivity.

Estela's experience, her work, and her way of being are what makes her the Grandmother, the leader of the community. Even if she can be, in her own words, difficult to live with, she is like a magnet that people feel attracted to and she will continue to be the guardian of the Stone House until she moves to the next place. Although she travelled in North and South America, she says that everything she knows she learned in Spain in the Stone House. In the past 20 years, there has been plenty of activity where people from all parts of the world came to the mountaintop and brought with them their culture and traditions. The Stone House is like a melting pot where all these elements meet, interact, and bring new practices into existence. Everything that happens in the Stone House, in the "family", is as normal as any other activity done by anyone else, Estela said to me once. She is creating a community that is reconciling the use of psychoactive plants, and particularly cannabis, in modern society to improve our everyday life, our life on the planet and the relationship with the environment.

Many people passed through the Stone House and learned about spirituality, the ritual use of psychoactive plants and alternative ways of living. Some of them created new community places. Sofia, a 43-year-old woman who is a manufacturer of natural cosmetics and a phyto-therapist, was one of them. She considers herself as a daughter of Estela and the Stone House and is the caretaker of the Water House for more than 15 years. In her adolescence, she was struggling with bulimia and anorexia and had a difficult relationship with her immediate family. She moved out of her parents' house when she was 18 years old and went to live on her own in Barcelona. She was working as a waitress and was experimenting with psychoactive substances until she started her spiritual journey because she grew increasingly dissatisfied with her life and wanted a change. In her 20s she had a dream where she saw a house. She did not pay much attention to it, but she decided to go to Brazil and travelled the country for a couple of months. At some point, she found herself in a difficult position, without money and without a place to stay. She was wandering around and it was getting dark when she saw a house with the lights on in the distance and a path leading to it. Desperate as she was, she walked to the house and saw a woman that was standing in front of it. 'I have

been waiting for you,' she said. Sofia was surprised by the reaction of the old woman but went to her and asked if she can stay with her since she has nowhere else to go. There was a stone oven in the house, so Sofia started to bake snacks and sell them on a beach to earn some money and be able to return home. Later, she realised that the house she was staying at with the old woman, was the house she was dreaming about before she left Barcelona. Upon her return, she felt reluctant to go back to the city. A friend of hers told her about the Water House and, after talking to the owners, she decided to move in and slowly re-build the house and build a community there. She moved in with a couple of friends and since there was a stone oven in the house, she started baking again. As part of her spiritual quest, she joined Santo Daime in Catalonia where she met Estela. As part of her recovery, she went to the Stone House regularly and helped Estela, while she was also slowly developing the Water House. She never thought the place would develop into what it is today. Her idea was to live in the countryside and be as self-sustainable as possible. A kind of hippie community.

I started a community project to work on the land and to work on a personal level because obviously, a place like this demands it, but I had no idea how it will develop to what it is today. Once a friend came and started to do *temazcals* and the vision quests here. Then another woman, an elder from Uruguay came and performed the first ayahuasca ceremony here in the house. We started with *temazcals*, then with peyote and ayahuasca. Before that, I was involved in two spiritual lines. With the Red Road (*Camino Rojo*) and the Santo Daime. I never thought I would be doing ayahuasca ceremonies. I never imagined it, I never thought about it. I was involved a lot in the Santo Daime. I went on a trip to the jungle in Colombia and there I met the *taitas* who have a more original way of working with the plant because Santo Daime is a relatively new doctrine, it is 125 years old. When I went there and took ayahuasca I realized that there is another way. It was like waking up and I was resonating much more with it. I spent eleven years in Santo Daime and then suddenly I stopped. How to continue? I was in a process of transition for one year. I couldn't give anything more and I couldn't receive anything more, that was it. I went to a ceremony with ayahuasca to figure out what my purpose is and how to continue. There the plant told me that I must continue carrying out ceremonies. This process took me one year. This half a meter from sitting in a ceremony as a participant and to move to the position of the guide totally changes everything. SOFIA

The ceremonies that are done in the Water house and the Stone House are guided by Sofia and her partner, by Estela or by visiting facilitators. These visiting guides are Wixárika elders (in case of peyote), *curanderos* or other persons of confidence, long-term friends of Estela or Sofia who have experience and come to Catalonia occasionally. Every guide assigns two or more trusted persons who assist in the ceremony by taking care of the fireplace, guard the entrance and any other help needed. Much attention is given to create a safe space where participants feel looked after.

It is important for me to be with someone who I feel confident with and who I really trust. Not because the person has a degree from or has taken a course with... or because the person has been in... No. I need a person I can open up with and trust. If it's not a really safe context I don't want to participate there. LUCIA

At the beginning of each ceremony, the guides introduce themselves and explain how the ceremony will be conducted. They are guiding the ceremony from beginning to the end including the circle of reflections done the next day, where each participant shares (or not) how they experienced the ceremony. The

monetary contribution of the participants is also being addressed and explained how the money is being spent.

The inhabitants of Wonderland

The inhabitants of Wonderland have a responsibility to take care and protect everything they see, from the smallest to the largest. There are four important pillars that Wonderland is based on. First one is to take responsibility for your actions and to be impeccable at your work. The second one is to have good communication without confrontations. To listen to each other, to respect different opinions and try not to enter a conflict, because this is the basis of wars. The third one is to let everyone tell their stories, their lives and not force yourself into anyone's life. The fourth one is to do the best you can in every moment, particularly in a moment of trouble.

There is no crisis if there is union. So, this is the way we try to live. We have our things, we fight, but everything is part of being able to live life and doing what we want to do in peace. The most important thing is responsibility. That each one of us is responsible for what we are doing. If each one does his or her job, no one must be overlooking whether or not one does the job right or wrong. If everyone does their job, everything works. The problem is when I want the other to do as I want. There was a couple that was separating, and they came to talk to me. Each one told me their perspective. She told me 'My partner does not love me,' and he said 'Of course I love you, but I love you as I know how to love, not as you want me to love you.' We are always asking the other to do as we wish. So, respect is particularly important. Let each other live their life. Everyone does their job and takes responsibility. ESTELA

The vision of Wonderland is to have a good life, good relationships, and create a world where everyone can live in peace. Each person should contribute as much as they can and do what makes them feel good in their everyday life. 'To live well we don't need much,' asserts Estela. The inhabitants of Wonderland have the task to strive for these values and create a world without enemies.

We were taught to live by one model of life, but there are other models, not just one. If we cannot get out of this one because we don't know any alternative, we will always be trapped. We must look for new models. There are places in the world where people right now are going through powerful wars and other places where people live amid beautiful nature and do not know what is happening in the world. Different moments and ways of living at the same moment and the same planet. We can choose how we want to live in. ESTELA

Wonderland is a state of mind, a way of life that implies a shift in everyday practices. The people belonging to the community of Wonderland do not live together in only one house or village but are spread out across Catalonia, Spain and the world (see Figure 2 on page 40). I have met many people, each one with a specific story, however, most of them were looking for a change in their life, for something else. I am using the term "inhabitant/s of Wonderland" or just "inhabitant/s" when referring to members of the community in general. I use a pseudonym when I am referring to a particular person that I have interviewed.

Luis, who is now 56 years old, reached a point in his life when he was in his early 30s where he could not go on. He just briefly mentioned during the interview that a part of the life he wanted to leave behind was also the use of cocaine on the weekends. He went on a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in the mid-1990s and when he returned, he went to live in the Stone House for one year:

The forest touched me deeply. It made me experience an internal sensation that I had not experienced before. A feeling of freedom, I could breathe. My job... the higher you are in a company the worse is the working environment, because there is envy, there are problems and being in [the Stone House] was like peace, walking barefoot, learning to observe nature. I remember at the beginning I didn't see, I now see. I had everything set up in my life, a good job, I had a woman, I had a son, a house, social environment, success at the professional level. In a way I had everything. And [the Stone House] stripped me and shook me and life has not been easy after that. A painful separation, being left with nothing, living with nothing. When my parents came to see me for the first time, they said 'my son has gone crazy.' [...] I was married with a newborn son. My situation was a little delicate. I decided to leave the company and bought land here in the area, a piece of forest. I started to work; I have never worked with my hands... I started to work with a chainsaw, I became a lumberjack, a carpenter, and I built my house.

When I met Luis and made an interview with him, he was still living in the house he has built. He is living with his partner and running a centre for natural medicine in the nearby town. He does not regret the choices he did in his life. The only psychoactive substance he is currently using is cannabis and only in a ritual setting.

In the Water House, I have met Olivia, a 27-year-old who lived in the house for almost half a year at the point of the interview. We were sitting in the kitchen with two other young men who came to the house as volunteers. We got along with each other very well, although we did not know each other, neither did we spent a lot of time together. At that point, I was staying in the house for about two weeks. Nonetheless, we connected, and she was open to sharing her difficult and emotional story with me. All of us listened to her story with eyes wide open, admiration and empathy. How could it be that such a young woman had to go through so many challenges in her life, but remains such a positive and good-spirited person?

For me, this is changing everything. Now I realize that everything that has happened in my life, and especially breaking up with my ex-partner and everything, has led me here. And here I'm realising that I'm still mourning for my mother. I see everything that I have generated because of the death of my mother, how I have punished myself for feeling guilty for her death, everything is coming out. Here I'm healing everything. Being here, the silence, working, to feel part of something, finding a family. This is super important for me.

Carlos is in his 40s and living with his partner and three children in an old sanctuary that they are taking care of. With his partner Lucia they are taking care of another *finca* in the area, which is their main source of income. Once, when I was driving him to drop off his daughter at his ex, we talked about his life. In a diary entry from the 3rd of March 2018 I'm writing about our conversation in the car:

On the way we were talking about his life, his view on living and working, children education and freedom. He was born in Barcelona and lived in a village on the outskirts of the city. When he was younger, he travelled around Spain, lived mostly in small towns or villages, and avoided

the city. When I asked what he was doing (working), he said, he was (and still is) living life. He would get occasional jobs here and there, only when he needed money. He tends to live his life differently. Not having a regular job, doesn't mean he's not working. Living in rural areas, in a house, means constant work in and around the house. Getting wood, growing food, taking care of the property and the animals. He has two donkeys who help him clear the forest surrounding the property. He tries to satisfy most of his and his family's needs by producing whatever they need. However, there are things you need money for. 'You cannot go to a gas station with a basket of salad and exchange it for gasoline, for this you need money', he said. He makes sure, he has a constant income of a little bit of money for things he cannot obtain otherwise. Currently he and his partner Lucia are taking care of a property that belongs to some people from England. Together they earn around 800 € per month. This is enough to support the family. Also, they don't pay rent and utilities in the building they are currently living, a former sanctuary with a church. It was abandoned for many years after the civil war and slowly deteriorating. He managed to obtain the property from the municipality with a contract for 10 years without having to pay rent or utilities in exchange for taking care of the place and getting it back into shape. He plans to reconstruct a part of the building and make an apartment for his family. The rest of the building will be intended for renting. He wants to recover the orchard with old varieties of fruit trees that still grow in the area and olive trees that are scattered around the property. Carlos' goal is to teach his children how to survive. He wants to spend as much time with them as possible while they are still young. Once they get older, his job is done, and they can go live their own lives as they please. However, if at a certain point they find themselves without anything – without a roof or a job – they will know how to survive in any difficult situation. He said that freedom is important for him, but freedom does not imply you can do as you please, without responsibility. On the contrary, freedom demands a great deal of responsibility, work, and discipline.

With Carlos and Lucia, I connected quickly and helped them on few occasions to take care of the property and the animals. I have visited the family several times and spent a night or two. On one of these occasions I made an interview with Carlos, where he was telling me about the reasons for his change of lifestyle:

I left conventional life many years ago. I had a complete life: house, car, work, all very stable, but I felt that I was not fulfilled. I always went to the mountains on the weekends, in the end, this is where I feel comfortable. One day I exploded and I said, 'I can't take this life anymore, I don't feel comfortable, I need to go live in the mountains.' I always wanted to live in the mountains. I was born in a village. At the end of the street where the village ended, the world began. When I was little, and people asked me what I wanted to do when I grow up, I replied 'I want to be a grandfather.' I wanted to be old and I always imagined myself with a beard, living in a forest in a little cabin. So, I went to the mountain, I found a house by the river and fixed it. I left everything. I took my backpack and my dog. I was 33 years old. A cousin of mine, who was also 33 years old, died and this profoundly affected me. It cannot be that I am going to die without having done what I wanted, without having lived as I wanted to live.

Throughout this work, I am uncovering bits and pieces from the lives of Wonderland's inhabitants. However, this represents only a small part of their lives, only what I managed to observe, record, and write about. I believe it is important to shed light on who the inhabitants are, how they live and what they think to understand their actions and choices they take in life. It also helps us understand the use of psychoactive plants in a broader perspective. Although my focus during fieldwork was on how the psychoactive plants are used, I realised that the context and the worldview of the inhabitants are crucial to explain and understand the use in a pertinent way. Like many other classic anthropological studies on similar topics, this one too looks at

drug use as just one component of people's lives. It does have an important role, but it is depended, related and in constant interaction with all other parts of people's lives such as health and well-being, relationships they have, situations they live in, problems they are subjected to, and needs and values they identify with. In this work, I intend to condense the gathered information by balancing the focus of my study with all the other components of human existence to finally present an ethnography on the ritual use of psychoactive plants in modern societies.

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I present the methods I have used to collect data including a list of events and ceremonies that I have participated in during fieldwork, a table with demographic data of the study sample and an explanation of some important terms that are used throughout this work. Further on I discuss the methods I have used to analyse the collected data, including a map of the social network that serves to describe the studied group in more detail and to give the reader an overview of its dimension. When talking about a community of people, it is usually understood as a group in a designated area (e.g. a village or a neighbourhood in a city), but this is not the case in this example. I think it is, therefore, necessary to explain how the people that form the community relate to each other and map their social network.

Entering the field

“Hay que vivirlo para entenderlo!”, Estela heartily repeated on numerous occasions. I agree. Words do not do it justice. My fieldwork in Catalonia felt like if I was on the Pala island from Huxley’s novel. Elevated on the mountain, surrounded by thick forest, looking down on our civilization in the distant valley. When there were days of thick fog surrounding us, it felt like nothing else exists. It felt like we are the only ones alive. The house, the forest, the birds, and the world at the foot of the mountain vanished.

How did I end up here? Like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz followed the yellow road to find her way home, I follow my path that took me from Slovenia to Catalonia in 2016. Back then I was involved with Slovenian NGOs organising seminars on the medical use of cannabis in countries of ex-Yugoslavia (Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, and Macedonia), which is where I met José Carlos Bouso and learned about ICEERS and their work. Soon after I got the opportunity to work for a R&D company in Catalonia and moved there in February 2016. After the first couple of weeks, I contacted José Carlos and arranged a meeting where I inquired about volunteering options in ICEERS. I was welcomed with open arms and started by doing transcriptions of an ongoing project on subjective acute effects of ibogaine. Later that year I volunteered at the II World Ayahuasca Conference organised by ICEERS in Rio Branco Brazil, where I also participated in my first Santo Daime and Barquiña ceremonies. That year I collaborated with the Macedonian Agency for Medicines in organising a seminar on the medical use of cannabis for medical professionals, I visited a conference on hemp and cannabis in Vancouver Canada and had a presentation about standardisation and quality control of cannabis on behalf of Dr Hornby at a conference in Medellin Colombia. In May 2017 my paid work in Catalonia was finished and I returned to Slovenia. But before I moved back, I started to look for possibilities to start a PhD research project on the topic of psychedelics. I

discussed my interests and intentions with José Carlos just before I left, and he offered to help. He proposed to do a classical anthropological study of an ayahuasca-using community in Catalonia and I said yes. José Carlos got in contact with one of the community members who he met in a court case where ICEERS assisted the defence with legal expertise. His contact directed us directly to Estela and said that it would be the most suitable place for me to conduct research. Estela said yes to our proposal (little did I know back then that Estela cannot say no to anyone who wants to come to the Stone House – this is the one condition, the one instruction she received when she was drinking Santo Daime alone in the forest at the mountain) and then José Carlos put me in contact with professor Oriol Romaní who directed my thesis together with José Carlos.

In February 2018 I returned to Catalonia to start my fieldwork. José Carlos and Marta escorted me. As we were approaching the mountain Estela notified us that due to rain and snow it might not be possible to ascend the mountain the same day. She got me a room below the mountain in an old little castle, which I later found out was her home while she was still married to her husband. We went to the location, met her ex-husband, had a chat and then José Carlos and Marta returned to Barcelona. I made myself comfortable in the room and fell asleep soon after. The next morning, I was looking at the mountain from the living room's window. It was surrounded by a thick fog. I had the phone number of Manuel, who was staying at the house, to check the state of the road. He said it's safe to ascend, so after breakfast, I went on my way. I visited the house once before and I had the directions to come to the house, in case I would get lost or something would go wrong, Manuel could come to pick me up. I arrived at the house around noon and Manuel showed me my room, the house, the toilets and shower outside. After we had lunch together, I felt tired, so I went to my room to rest. I woke up with a headache. It was around midnight. I heard a female and a male voice singing and playing the maracas in another room. I did not feel like getting up, but here I am, I have to show myself. Estela and Manuel were sitting on the floor in front of the fireplace and the lights were out. I sat quietly on the couch behind them. After they finished the song, Estela greeted me and invited me to join them in the circle. I did. She put a songbook in front of me so I could follow what has been sung. It was the Santo Daime hymn-book *Oração*. After the ritual, we introduced each other, had a vegetable soup for dinner and then we all went to sleep.

I came to Catalonia with my '96 Fiat Bravo 1.8 GT that brought me back and forth safely several times. Every time I drove up or down the mountain on the stone (not dirt!) road it was a gamble. When I arrived at the Stone House, I was the only one with a working car. In the first week or two, I was the chauffeur taking Estela and Manuel to look for cars, to the store and other urgent obligations. No accident ever happened, nothing broke, the car never left me on the street. Soon after Manuel bought a 4x4 which was better suited for transporting people and stuff up and down the mountain. Manuel was showing me the trickiest parts of the road and explained how to manoeuvre to avoid unwanted damages on the car. He calls the road “anaconda”, which I find a very appropriate term. It's long, scary and potentially dangerous, but also

beautiful at the same time. It takes about half an hour to ascend or descend the mountain with an average car and average driving skills. Manuel showed me a bar in the village at the foot of the mountain, which everyone is using as an “office”. “They are friendly, there's an electricity plug, Wi-Fi connection and coffee”, said Manuel. This bar became my office where I digitalised my handwritten notes.

I'm sitting in it right now, Friday the 9th of February at 3.50 pm. The bar is divided into two parts, the restaurant and another space with tables, electricity plugs, toilets, and a separate hall where on Monday's girls came to train ballet. I would sometimes meet Lucia there when she brought her daughter to the lessons. I usually sat in the second room where I had more tranquillity and space. Even if the air conditioning is quite loud and many people pass to go to the bathroom or the hall, I don't mind the happening around me, since I have my headphones always in my ears, listening to music while I am working. The two spaces are divided by a glass wall, so I can see what's happening in the restaurant and order coffee from a distance. The owners and the waitress already know me. I just wave with my hand and a few minutes later I get my *café con leche*. Sometimes I just stare at the guests while pondering and writing. It is a male-dominated space. Two tables get occupied by senior men from 3 pm on. They usually play cards and drink beer. Other customers come for a drink, a sandwich or lunch. Often there are also other people like me, with laptops, so I am not only one using the space as an office. No one minds. The bar also has a terrace where I rarely go. It is for the smokers, there are no electricity plugs and my laptop battery is lousy.

In the first weeks, Manuel took me to the closest biggest town (about an hour car drive) to show me where to do my laundry, where to shop for organic groceries, local fruits, nuts and vegetables, and where to get butane. He took me to the closest water spring where it took us more than an hour to fill almost 100 litres of water. We had the car full of 5-litre and 10-litre plastic bottles.

In the beginning, the inhabitants were curious and asking me about who I am and what I am doing in the house. What illness am I treating? What issues am I facing? I explained I am not coming with a problem or personal reason, but professional. It is my work; I am a researcher. However, in time I realised that, even if unexpected and unplanned, it did change my life to a great degree. A month and a half after arrival I stopped smoking tobacco (an endeavour I wanted to do for several years but never did it up until I came to the Stone House), I naturally (without intention or desire, it just happened) stopped using other psychoactive substances, my eating habits improved, and so on. The most profound experience was, however, the pilgrimage to Montserrat. The process I went through on this path to the Catalan mountain made me gain trust in myself and connect to my body as I never did before, it made me realise that human beings are made to walk, and I empirically understood what Estela was saying all the time: a pilgrimage is like a vacation. And each person needs some vacation at least once per year! When I consult my fieldnotes from the pilgrimage I remember all the beautiful and all the difficult times we had individually and as a group, but what stays in my memory is that this was one of the top three experiences in my life so far, besides accompanying a loved one at the moment of death and taking a large dose of a psychedelic substance. The pilgrimage also strengthened the acceptance of myself as part of the tribe. When I arrived in the Stone House I felt partially as an insider in the sense that I was a user of various psychoactive plants, but outsider because

I did not know anyone from the community before. Yet for them, I was a stranger who was not afraid of psychoactive plants.

During the time I was conducting fieldwork I had several presentations of my work in Spain and Slovenia, I participated in events and workshops organised by ICEERS, Metzineres (the first harm reduction program in Catalonia exclusively for women), or ENCOD (European Coalition for Just and Effective Drug Policy), and I did fieldwork for another ICEERS study about ayahuasca and public health. While I was conducting fieldwork several legal developments raised concerns such as the case of *La Maca*, a cannabis social club (CSC) from Barcelona that was on trial for several years until six people got sentenced at the beginning of 2020 with a 31 years prison sentence (in total) and high fines to pay for their involvement in the association. Another one was in the Netherlands where the religious use of ayahuasca in Santo Daime was prohibited. These are just two cases, out of many more, that we are currently witnessing all over Europe. In the field of drug policy, the struggle between the people and the states is ongoing.

Data collection methods

Multiple methods of data collection have been employed in the study to portray a personal and in-depth perspective of the community. It included participant observation, a data collection method that requires the researcher to be present at and involved in routine daily activities with people in the field setting. Field notes along with a diary have been used to record the daily activities and personal thoughts. Additionally, in-depth interviews with 22 individuals have been conducted and few audio recordings of ceremonies and other events have been made.

Participant observation

Participant observation stands for observing and actively taking part in social settings. The term was first introduced by Bronislaw Malinowski (1922) and has been widely used in anthropology ever since. Participant observation requires intimate and free contact with the observed group. To do so, the barrier between “us” and “them”, or better “me” and “them” had to be taken down (Kuper, 1973: 149). Participant observation means that a scholar observes the reality and appropriates the point of view of the observed not only through his/her words, but through his/her actions, and investigates to what extent the words and actions coincide or contradict. It is a type of research that describes in detail what the observed are doing but from the researcher’s perspective. In the beginning, the researcher usually must negotiate the way in through a gatekeeper, which is often also the first informant. In my case, the gatekeeper and key informant was Estela,

the person I was living with. Another man was living with us in the same house and occasionally more people came to spend there a few days or weeks. This allowed me to get access to several informants and get a better understanding of the phenomena I researched. After spending several months on one site, I went to visit other community members in the area and stay with them for a couple of days, in some cases few weeks, to see where and how they are living and use the opportunity to interview them. It's difficult to estimate the total number of people that are part of the community since I have not met every single one of them during fieldwork. I estimate to have met around one hundred inhabitants in one year of fieldwork. However, I had closer relations with a couple of dozens of all the people I have met. With few of them I was living with, others I have usually met in the ceremonies or visit them in their homes.

An extended stay in the field is crucial for gathering credible data. It requires daily recording of fieldnotes, close and intimate familiarity with the researched group and intense involvement in the social practice over a long period. For this reason, I was living in the research setting in a total of one year, whereby I had some breaks in between. Leaving the field and coming back helped me to reflect on what I have experienced. It happens that one can romanticise the observed culture by taking positions. It is, therefore, important to reflect on one's work constantly. If the fieldwork is done away from home for longer period homesickness and yearning for one's way of life can manifest. As I am used to travelling I rarely experienced homesickness. However, having a phone and internet connection enabled me to have regular contact with my family, friends and my partner, which was sufficient not to feel alone or isolated. On the other hand, after a time of accommodation and getting confidence, I felt well accepted by the community and did not feel "out of place", which is the basis for successful fieldwork.

The coming and going from the field helped me to establish some distance from the field and gave me time to reflect on my experiences. I left and returned to the field several times in three years. I started my fieldwork in February 2018 and stayed until July 2018 when I returned home to Slovenia. I came back one month later in August 2018 and stayed for another three months. At the beginning of November 2018, I went to Amsterdam where I stayed during the winter to organize the collected data. In March 2019 I returned once again and stayed for another three months. After the III World Ayahuasca Conference, which took place in Girona end of May, I went back to my home country Slovenia and later moved to Amsterdam. In 2020 I had a plan to return to the field several times but for shorter periods. Things did not go as planned and the COVID-19 Coronavirus, which has put the whole planet in quarantine for weeks and prevented me from travelling from Amsterdam to Spain in April as I have planned. I was only able to visit Catalonia for ten days in February 2020, two years after the initial start of my fieldwork. In March 2020 Spain went into lock-down due to the widespread virus and at this point, it is still uncertain how long the restrictions will last.

The repeated visits are a good opportunity to check the validity and reliability of the data I have gathered. Since I have finished the fieldwork in the summer of 2019 renovations of the house started, such as building a water tank and clearing the forest around the house. I was glad to see there is running water in the

house and the bathroom when I returned for a couple of days in February 2020. The biggest surprise was hot tap water in the shower. These short visits were opportunities to meet with the community again and get an update on the newest developments.

While it is possible to extract information from non-verbal communication in particular social contexts, linguistic proficiency is key to be able to engage in everyday activities, understand the conversations and decipher cultural symbols. When I arrived in the community for the first time my Spanish language proficiency was basic, and my understanding of the Catalan language was poor. I was worried about how I would be able to communicate and gather data because nobody living at the house at that time spoke English. Last few months I was preparing at home learning grammar and as many words as I possibly could. In the first week in the field, I was still carrying my dictionary and my phone (with a translate application) with me but soon realized that it is not convenient and stopped using it. In the beginning, I was more of a listener than the talker, which was good, because I was paying more attention to the surroundings, listened to the conversations, and observed. In general, my language skills were good enough to have a conversation, however, the communication was not always fluid. It took more time for the people to get to know me and gain trust in me because of that. Estela would occasionally ask me what am I researching and what will it serve for. Later we would be joking about it, but in the first month of the fieldwork, I was raising some suspicions among the people in the community. As anthropologists we undergo training to work with strangers, but “the natives have no such preparation to accept the unwanted guest – the anthropologist” (Mahana, 2009: 44). The anthropologist’s presence changes things and often becomes the target of an investigation by the study subjects. I was being observed during the ceremonies and asked questions about who I am and what I’m doing on different occasions. I was not a covert researcher; most people knew that I am there to do a study on the use of psychoactive plants. However, when I participated in ceremonies with more people, I would not go to all of those who didn’t know me to explain who I am and what I am doing. It did not seem appropriate, necessary nor unethical. Not everyone knows everyone in these circles. However, if someone was interested and asked me questions, I always replied honestly. Usually, I encountered appreciation for the work I am doing, although many of them had several reservations towards researchers and science in general, which I can relate to and understand where it is coming from. I was not the first researcher they had contact with, but I was the first one who lived among them. That I am a woman helped to connect with the informants since many of them were women. Yet to use science to understand and explain a way of life seemed flawed to many of them. It was repeated continuously that only by experiencing one can understand. Moreover, they did not agree with the current scientific dogma on cannabis and other psychoactive plants claiming them to be intrinsically dangerous or bad for the human being and society. More than anything else, they did not think that current drug policy on a global level does justice to these plants nor them as users.

As I mentioned before, at the beginning of the fieldwork there were moments when I sensed some concern about my presence in the community by Estela, the initiator of the community and the person I lived with. She made it clear that I should not publish any one's real name or places in my work. She also did not like me to take photos. I ensured her everything and everyone will be kept confidential and anonymous, just as we agreed beforehand. The consent of the people was informed and voluntary. This was the only condition to open the doors to me in the first place. As the days went by, we slowly got used to each other. I tried to do my best in helping with everyday activities in and around the house, getting wood from the forest, gardening, and such. Being helpful and participating in daily activities was one way how to gain trust. But there were only a few events that "boosted" the trust and acceptance between us. Intense involvement is essential to produce reliable data and for the researcher to be taken seriously by the informants (Fotiou, 2010; López-Pavillard, 2015). Anthropologists researching the use of psychoactive plants frequently report that taking these substances is of crucial importance for establishing credibility and trust between the researcher and informants (Dawson, 2010; Harner, 1980; Luna, 1986; Fotiou, 2010) and to understand the spiritual and cultural worldview of the subjects. It represents an important step of community bonding and I experienced the same while conducting fieldwork. When I asked people about their use of psychoactive plants the usual response was that one cannot understand it if one does not try it. To know means to experience it, words cannot do it justice. Many times, I would hear "if you want to know about it, you have to take it." They did not think much of researchers who would sit quietly in the corner with their notebook, taking notes and not wanting to experience the plants and participate in the activities themselves. By showing my willingness to actively participate in the rituals I managed to slowly take down the first invisible wall between us and getting to know each other.

As anthropologists, we are trained to observe the Other, but no one ever prepared us for being investigated ourselves. Social interaction is a two-way process. The observed is not only going after the usual business but is adapting to the situation and it was not only me wanting to learn about them, but they also wanted to learn about me. Taking the psychoactive plants together in the rituals and ceremonies meant sharing this personal moment when you are feeling vulnerable (at least I consider it in this way) with everyone present. I felt like everyone was curious to see how I'm going to adapt and behave in these situations. Especially in the first couple of ceremonies, I was under the watchful eyes of Estela. Yet, only participating in ceremonies represents only a small part in my endeavour to gain their trust. Living with them, or better, living with ease in these isolated *fincas* for several months increased their trustworthiness in me. Not everyone is prepared to live in such basic conditions and, in their eyes, being able to live there means you can live everywhere. Not having all the comfort of modern housing such as running water, central heating, unlimited electricity or flushing toilets, forces you to adapt and be mindful about things you usually take for granted, but on the other hand, you realise how little you need for living. Luckily, I grew up in a small village in Slovenia and had some previous "off-grid living" experiences before I went to do fieldwork, so I came prepared. After being in the field for two and a half months I decided to go with them on a ten-day

pilgrimage to Montserrat. Later it became clear to me that this was an important moment where my status shifted from an outsider towards insider. The people started telling me that my face has changed. I do not know what exactly they saw, but they started to look at me differently, considering me as one of their own. Some other friendships started in the kitchen. It was a place where I connected with two women, who were distant at first, but by helping them in the kitchen, chatting and singing while cooking we bonded to a great degree. The kitchen is a special place, where there is a lot of action, a lot of energy and is one of the most important places in the house, especially while a ceremony is going on. It is important to feed the people at the right times, to serve good food, and to keep a good spirit in the kitchen. To be in the kitchen means respecting rules, doing a good job, be swift and quick, and have access to the backstage of the happening. It is a place where you show your real face. It can bring out the best of you and the worst of you. It is also a place where not everyone has access to, only people living in the house, the cook and one or two volunteers. Having access to the kitchen meant having access “behind the scenes.” In other words, the kitchen was a place where the kind of internal discussions took place that an “external ethnographer” would normally not have access to (Rappaport, 2008). I will write more about the importance of the kitchen in a later chapter about health and well-being.

To be accepted by the community meant for me being able to have my notebook with me in the ceremonies or on other occasions and writing my notes openly in front of everyone. They got used to me, they knew what I was doing, and we made jokes about it. It was just part of who I am and there were no curious, distrusting or suspicious looks anymore. However, time had to pass to get to this point. Before that, I was writing fieldnotes when I had some time for myself or before sleep and had to make notes from my memory. I was writing my diary with paper and pen and later went to my car or the bar in the village below the mountain to digitalise it because the solar panels and the batteries in the house did not give sufficient power to charge my laptop. Yet, no matter what you do and for how long you do it, the immersion in a field is never complete, it is an endless ongoing process. The fundamental challenge that each anthropologist is facing is to gain access, to win over the community. This requires a fair amount of sensitivity, empathy, discretion, and caution not to say or do inappropriate things or harm someone. The researcher generally remains an outsider for the natives. Although I was gradually accepted and felt part of the community, I was still seen as being in between, the one who is just temporary staying with them and learning about them to then bring this information to the rest of the world. Another aspect is that the data is limited to observable parts of culture and you can observe only what happens in the present. Historical events are crucial for understanding the present, however, what happened before I arrived in the field I did not observe or experience first-hand, so the most I could do is gather the stories of different people about certain past events and write them up according to what I was told.

Participant observation counts as the best available methodological tool of anthropological enquiry although it has several shortcomings. The sole act of the observer observing the observed may prevent the

observed from acting naturally. There might also be a non-equal relationship between the researcher and the study subjects, which can lead to a feeling of superiority or inferiority between them. Some researchers think of participant observation as an oxymoron. Narby states that “participant observation is a contradiction in terms, because it is impossible to observe people from above while participating in the action at their side, to watch the game from the stands while playing on the field. The anthropological method condemns its practitioners to [...] play the schizophrenic role of player-commentator” (Narby, 1998: 14). Jackson writes that observation collects objective data and participation collects subjective data therefore “one can observe and participate successively but not simultaneously” (Jackson, 1989, 51). Such thinking, according to Tim Ingold, is “founded upon a certain understanding of immanence and transcendence, deeply rooted in the protocols of normal science, according to which human existence is constitutionally split between being in the world and knowing about it” (Ingold, 2014: 387). The asserted incompatibility between the two is only a result of this split. For Ingold, participant observation is “living attentionally with others” (Ingold, 2014: 389). It means to pay attention to what is done or said and what is around and about. This interaction he labels “correspondence” (Ingold, 2013: 105-108), which means to learn with and from whom we study and go along to wherever it might take you. It is both education and ontological commitment. Such an approach goes further than ethnographic description and documentation (Ingold, 2014: 390).

Several researchers proposed a more engaged role of the researcher in the field, which should help to overcome some of the limitations of the technique, such as the “complete participant” where the observer is fully engaged with the observed, often done covertly (Gold, 1958). Others proposed a shift from participant observation to “partisan observation” (Sanadjian, 1990) or “action-through-research” (Huizer, 1979) to “react to the events and situations with regard to the problems of the subjects of their study” (Mahana, 2009). In such a case, the anthropologist is not merely an observer witnessing things that occur, but acts as a catalyst (Tax, 1975) and intervenes with the intent to address the encountered problems. Another term used by some researchers is “radical participation” (Goulet and Granville Miller, 2007; López-Pavillard, 2015) described as a method of experiencing what the informants experience and comparable to “participant experience” (Prat, 2014), which has the aim to gain a first-hand intersubjective understanding that improves the interpretation and the analysis of the data obtained in the field. Radical participation is supposed to differ from participant observation by the intensity of the personal and experiential involvement. Wacquant (2004) completely changed the role and the relationship of the researcher in the fieldwork by flipping the concept “participant observation” around into “observant participation” and, with it, shifting the emphasis from observation into participation. The active role of the researcher in contemporary anthropology is not an issue any longer, what remains a challenge is finding “ways of acting more effectively and ethically while linking the specificity of local problem solving to larger sociopolitical contexts” (Rylko-Bauer, Singer and van Willigen, 2006: 185) and “the recognition and the successful exploitation that the anthropologist makes of his/her presence in the making of his/her inquiry” (Chauvier, 2005: 302 in: Severi, 2019: 234).

To conduct observant participation while using or being under influence of psychoactive plants was difficult to manage. In general, it is impossible to present exact and precise data, that are at best approximations (Fine, 1993). There is surely also information that I missed or did not see because I was not “situationally knowledgeable” (Fine, 1993: 279). Even if physically present, one is not always present in the mind, the observational focus is fluctuating and influencing that one misses, forgets or misinterprets information. This can also happen because of fatigue or personal reasons that make us emotional and influence the choices we take in the research (Kleinman, 1991). Fine (1993) admitted that when he used cannabis with the people, he researched his “powers of concentration were altered for the worse and better” (Fine, 1993: 280). In my case, doing fieldnotes was possible only with paper and pen, after the ceremony was over the next day. Often, I was feeling too tired to write before going to sleep. The next day, of course, the memory of the ceremony was pale, and the insights were gone. In time, everyone got more comfortable with my presence and there was no problem to have my notebook always with me and make notes during the ceremonies. On some occasions, it was even appreciated by the people because I was writing down recipes that I shared with them later. I was writing fieldnotes mainly in the English language, some parts were in Spanish, and few were in Slovenian language. I have the impression I used my mother language only when I was still under the acute effects of the substance or if I was writing about things that had upset me. I kept my field-book always with me and often in plain view, which perhaps decreased errors since I could write down my thoughts immediately, but it was possibly also distracting my informants. The fieldnotes contain the descriptions of events, situations, and conversations, as well as observation of my thoughts or moods and bodily experiences. From my supervisor I got the advice to keep the technical fieldnotes and my diary separated, which was, in the end, easier said than done and I did not manage to truly separate the two. I did that later when I digitised the writings.

Participation in ceremonies

Apart from the daily use of Santa María in the morning and evening rituals, I was participating in several Santo Daime ceremonies, one peyote ceremony, one ayahuasca ceremony with the indigenous from Brazil, few vision-quest-like ceremonies, a couple of *temazcals*, one pilgrimage to Montserrat and two walks in Montserrat, and some other events. There were more activities taking place in the time I was conducting the fieldwork, but I could not go to all of them.

In total, I have participated in 18 ceremonies during fieldwork, besides the mentioned daily use of Santa María. These are, however, not the only ceremonies that I have been present at, but only the ones I have participated in. There were more ceremonies taking place where I was just an observer from a distance, staying at the location, but not participating in the activities. To have an overview of those I have participated in, I have made a table with essential information about the ceremonies, the date it took place, the type or the

name of the ceremony, the pseudonym of the person leading the ceremony, the location where it took place, and the plant used in the ceremony (Table 1). From it, the reader can see the frequency of the ceremonies and their diversity. These were mainly ceremonies where a small group of people would participate. In the daily rituals, we would be just a few people, mostly three of us. In other ceremonies, there would be around a dozen or two of people participating. Most people (mostly women) participated in the *Retiro de Luna*, where up too thirty-five to forty people came together mainly from Spain, Italy, and France. The ceremony guide was a woman from Ecuador.

Date	Ceremony type	Facilitator	Place	Plant used
Twice daily	Santa María	Estela	Stone House	Cannabis (Santa María)
11.2.2018	<i>Temazcal</i>	Estela	Stone House	None
30.-31.3.2018	Santo Daime + <i>trabajo en la naturaleza</i>	Estela	Stone House	Daime, Santa María, <i>rapé</i>
7.4.2018	Before the interview	Gloria	Village 1	Tobacco, Santa María, Daime
18.-27.4.2018	Pilgrimage	Estela	On the road	Daime, <i>rapé</i> , Santa María
3.5.2018	<i>Temazcal</i>	Ramon	Stone House	None
4.-6.5.2018	Trabajo de sanación	Alfredo	Stone House	Peyote
26.-27.5.2018	Ayahuasca	Brazilian tribe	Water House	Ayahuasca, <i>sananga</i> , <i>kambo</i>
2.6.2018	Santo Daime	Estela	Stone House	Daime, Santa María, <i>rapé</i>
4.8.2018	<i>Temazcal</i> Wixárika	Wixárika	Village 2	Peyote (chocoyote)
14.-15.8.2018	Walk in Montserrat	Estela	Montserrat	Daime, <i>rapé</i> , Santa María
21.-30.8.2018	Retiro de luna	María	Water House	Tobacco, Santa María, peyote
1.9.2018	Santo Daime	Alma	SD church 1	Daime
29.9.2018	Santo Daime	Federico	SD church 2	Daime, Santa María
6.10.2018	Santo Daime	Miguel	SD church 3	Daime
12.-21.10.2018	<i>Navegación Mariana</i>	Estela/Sofia/ Jasbir	Stone House	Santa María, degh, <i>rapé</i>
20.-23.3.2019	Walk in Montserrat	Estela	Montserrat	Santa María, <i>rapé</i>
11.-14.4.2019	Degh	Jasbir/Amar	Stone House	Santa María, degh
10.-12.5.2019	ICEERS weekend	Estela/Sofia/ Alma	Stone House	Santa María, <i>rapé</i> , daime

Table 1: Timeline of attended ceremonies.

I participated in ceremonies that were led by a number of facilitators or guides. Facilitators, in these cases, are the people who perform and oversee the ceremony. Even if there is only one facilitator, they always have a group of people (two to four assistants) who help them, and each has a specific task. In Santo Daime the structure and roles of who does what and when are strictly defined to secure a safe environment for everyone, in other types of ceremonies a similar practice is being employed. One or two take care of the

fireplace, two people are at the door and take care of people in case of need. These helpers are experienced and trusted people.

In-depth interviews

Besides direct observation and participation, the field research included carrying out in-depth narrative interviews to get more information about specific topics and to get to know the person better. The interviews were recorded with an audio recorder and later transcribed. Most interviews were done in Spanish language, few also in English. I have transcribed and translated the parts used in this monograph from Spanish into English myself.

The interviews were semi-structured and based on my observations while conducting fieldwork. The majority of the interviews were done after I was on the field for over one year already. Some people I would interview twice, upon my arrival and after one year. With my key informant, Estela, I had several non-recorded conversations and two recorded interviews (Table 2). She was not very comfortable to be recorded and I have noticed that her narrative changes when there is no recording device in front of her, so I just used the time we lived together in the Stone House and talked about various topics with her and afterwards made notes about it. There were a few occasions, where she had a public presentation, and I used the opportunity to record her talks.

The interviews I conducted were based on the topics that were often discussed by the people themselves, but also topics that were particularly interesting to me. The questions were very broad and included topics such as the perception of health and sickness, how they encountered psychoactive plants and about their use of substances, their understanding of men, women and relationships, about the education of children, and what they think about western society. The interview would start with questions about demographics and then build up to cover more emotional or intimate topics. I would not interfere much in the topics the person wanted to talk about. I would not really ask questions, but say a general theme that I would like to talk about, like for example psychoactive plants or family, and then let the person say whatever he or she feels like. Depending on the information shared I would ask questions related to what came up in the conversation. The most important was to create a comfortable atmosphere so that the people felt free to talk openly and “to listen for subtexts and turnarounds, spaces and gestures between words, and to take my time” (Alia, 1996: 106).

I have been working as a researcher on several projects in the past. What I have learned from my experience is that no matter what the study subject is about, whether it is memories of the iron curtain, fertility behaviour, acquirement of non-formal knowledge, no matter what, people will tell you their life story, if there is someone interested to listen to it. Throughout the years I heard many amazing and heart-

touching stories that just wanted to be heard. Being listened to and having the opportunity to say out loud what you might never did before seemed to be liberating for many people. Many interviewees enjoyed the interview, and several persons were surprised by the amount of intimate information they shared with me, although they did not have this intention at the beginning of the interview. These responses had a significant impact also on me. When a person is thanking you for listening and appreciating an honest and open conversation, I feel confident that the data obtained is authentic and valuable. Not only the interviewee should feel comfortable to open up. After all, each interview, if done well, there is bonding happening between the interviewer and the interviewee, which is only possible, if the interviewer is opening up by sharing his/her own experiences and life events in the conversation from a place of equality. As Oriana Fallaci wrote in her book *Interview with History* (1976: 9):

I do not feel myself to be, nor will I ever succeed in feeling like, a cold recorder of what I see and hear. On every professional experience I leave shreds of my heart and soul; and I participate in what I see or hear as though the matter concerned me personally and were one on which I ought to take a stand (in fact I always take one, based on a specific moral choice).

The border between the researcher and the researched vanishes. Ideally, this happens with each interview. The reality is however different. Although I would have many good experiences, there were a few occasions where it was challenging to do an interview. It happens commonly that, as soon as you press the record button on an audio or video recorder, the person changes the narrative, the conversation is not flowing, the answers are short and it feels forced and “unnatural”. The art of interviewing is to create space where the interviewee forgets that there is a recording device (even if it is right in front of him or her) and talks to you as if you two are all alone and no one can hear you. It has to be like any other conversation with your good friend who wants to share with you a part of themselves. Estela, my main informant, told me from the first day on that she doesn’t have anything to say or teach me. If I want to learn and understand, I do it by being there, living there and participating. She doesn’t like interviews because she finds it difficult to answer the questions. Her dislike partially comes from past attempts of other researchers and journalists that would ask her questions based on what they wanted to hear and not on what there is. She would continuously repeat:

What is true for me, might not be true for you. You have to experience it for yourself and then write about what you discovered or experienced. Everything I tell you is a lie. It’s all made up!

I did two interviews with Estela that I recorded, but the best moments were the spontaneous conversation when we were all together in the living room around the fireplace after the evening ritual with Santa María, eating and talking. We would move very naturally from one topic to the other, in one moment discuss the traps of the modern comfortable life, to what we are going to do in the garden tomorrow, gossips in another moment, and finish with a philosophical debate about how men and women are relating to each other in today’s society. The recorded interviews and the notes from the numerous conversations we had throughout the one year of fieldwork resulted in a decent pile of data and a part of it is used in this thesis. Another challenging interview was the second one I did, but it was not challenging because it was one of the

first ones. I scheduled the meeting with Gloria in April on a Saturday evening. During the day I stayed at the Stone House and baked bread. I had a terrible headache, but I didn't want to reschedule the interview. I met Gloria at her home in the village below the mountain. When I arrived, she asked me how I was, so I told her about my headache, and she prepared some ginger tea with honey. While we were drinking the hot beverage, she started to interview me, asking me questions about my relationship with my parents and my past. I told her that I am not here to get healed or deal with my inner demons, I am here to learn and do my research. While I was being "interrogated", my headache completely disappeared. We went upstairs to do the interview. It was a small room with a couch, a chair, a shelf with books in the Spanish language about I ching, Buddhism, nutrition as medicine and similar. We sat down in front of a little altar facing the wall. Gloria lit up a candle, took a corn husk and tobacco and started to roll it up. She lit it and shared it. Each time you would smoke the tobacco you would say something. For example, thank the Great Spirit or ask for protection. After smoking the tobacco, Gloria took the rolled cannabis (Santa María) and shared that one too. We were smoking it in the same manner as I learned it in the Stone House, in complete silence. As last Gloria took a bottle with a dark brown liquid in it, ayahuasca, and gave me one full spoon. I was quite carried away by the cannabis and everything else, so the last thing I wanted to do in that state was to do an interview. The next moment Gloria said 'I am ready. We can do the interview now.' I looked at her with surprise and said that I would prefer to postpone it to some other day. Gloria had a different opinion. So, I took the audio recorder and hit the record button. It was late, I was tired and high on cannabis. I found it difficult to follow the conversation properly and to find the right words in Spanish to ask the questions. At that point I also had a feeling that it didn't matter what I ask, she was saying what she wanted to say. The interview lasted for almost two hours and it was rather a monologue than a conversation. Although it was a challenge for me, I later realized that it is not uncommon for these women to smoke or eat Santa María before a public appearance, a public talk or similar occasions. Estela said it helps her to express herself more eloquent, the plant helps her to talk. Interviewing Luna was another challenge. I never interviewed a child. Before I asked her if she would like to do it, I talked to her parents to get consent from them. She was 10 years old at that time, the oldest among the children I have met. I was interested in what she thinks about psychoactive plants, school, travelling and free time. I used the same template as for all the other interviews and kept the topics very open. Her answers were short and straightforward. On several occasions, she asked me to clarify the question, so I had to rephrase or explain the question. The whole conversation lasted less than half an hour from which half of the time I was the one talking. Although it was short, Luna shared bits from her life with me and expressed her likes and dislikes honestly. I would like to meet her and other children I have met after a decade to see how they developed and to talk to them about their childhood.

While conducting fieldwork, I have met several dozens of people on various occasions. For the study, I did interviews with 22 of those who I had more contact with and who agreed to participate. Five of them are facilitators of ceremonies and rituals. Most interviews were done after conducting fieldwork for one year. With some persons, I made several interviews (Table 2). I had many more informal, not recorded

conversations. I am not claiming to have established friendships with many of the people I have met, but I do consider some of them my friends and I hope they do the same too. The stronger the bond between us, the more intimate information they would share with me. I experienced the community as very open and open-minded. It didn't take long to create a bond. With some the process would speed up significantly by spending a day or more together in the kitchen, with other months would pass and still, I perceived a certain distance among us.

ID	Date of interview	Sex	Residence	Age	Family status	Occupation
Estela	03/2018, 10/2018	Female	Rural	66	Divorced, 5 children	Facilitator, retired tourist guide
Gloria	04/2018	Female	Rural / Village	n/a	n/a	Facilitator, retired nurse
Ramon	04/2018	Male	Rural	40s	Single	Facilitator, sociologist
Nina	05/2018	Female	Urban	43	Separated, 1 child	Telephonist
Mateo	05/2018	Male	Rural / Village	36	Separated, 2 children	Biologist, eco-farmer
Jasbir	10/2018	Male	Urban	41	Divorced, 2 children	Facilitator, therapist, musician
Lucia	10/2018, 04/2019	Female	Rural	36	In relationship, 3 children	Educator
Carlos	10/2018, 04/2019	Male	Rural	40s	In relationship, 4 children	Worker, janitor
Emma	10/2018, 04/2019	Female	Rural / Town	36	In relationship	Teacher
Alma	11/2018	Female	Urban	43	Divorced	Facilitator, cook
Sofia	11/2018, 04/2019	Female	Rural	43	In relationship, 1 child	Facilitator, cosmetician
Luis	04/2019	Male	Rural	56	In relationship, 1 child	Self-employed in a natural medicine centre
Olivia	04/2019	Female	Rural	27	Single	Saleswoman
Susana	04/2019	Female	Urban	53	Single	Post office worker
Tomas	04/2019	Male	Rural / Town	40	In relationship, 2 children	Gardener
Luna	04/2019	Female	Rural	10	/	Student
Julia	04/2019	Female	Rural	59	Separated, 3 children	Cook
Manuel	04/2019	Male	Rural	36	Single	Social worker
Aurora	04/2019	Female	Rural	36	Single	Cook
Leila	04/2019	Female	Rural	44	Single	Geriatric care
Paloma	05/2019	Female	Urban	49	In relationship	Post office worker
Isabela	05/2019	Female	Rural / Town	47	In relationship, 2 children	Telephonist

Table 2: Demographics of the interviewed persons. “Facilitator” refers to a person who is conducting rituals or ceremonies in the community.

Not all of them wanted to share their deepest thoughts and feelings, at least not on tape. The moment I would turn off the recorder many would start to talk. A few told me after the interview was finished that they have told me much more than they intended in the beginning. I consider it a privilege to create a space where

they felt safe to share. One of the biggest rewards when doing an interview is when the person thank you for having listened to them or asked them to think or articulate things they would normally not do. For some it was a cleansing, freeing experience. For these reasons I don't think there was ever a power relationship between the interviewees and the interviewer in the sense of exploiting them to make my career. Most of them were happy to collaborate because they found the work important so that the world can learn about these plants and the knowledge that comes with them and starts to appreciate them more.

Data analysis methods

The analysis was done primarily with the inductive, data-driven, “bottom-up” approach. However, in social sciences, the research is often an interplay between inductive and deductive approaches. The study aimed to investigate regular and long-term use of psychoactive plants and their implications on health and society. Based on approximately one-year long participant observation, the main themes of the research have been identified. I started the fieldwork knowing very little about the community I was supposed to research. I only knew it is a group of people who regularly use psychoactive plants in the countryside and in some kind of “traditional manner”. The objective of the fieldwork was to document the use of psychoactive plants in contemporary communities with everything that this implies in terms of coexistence and community, conceptions about health, children's education, social relationships, etc. My main interests were the practices of use, but also the community itself, the life stories of the people. Who are they? Why do they use the plants? Which plants do they use? How do they use them? How did these practices of use develop? Who are the women that work with these plants? What effects does the use of these plants seem to have? What role do psychoactive plants have in the lives of the people? To answer these questions, I had to look at the community from a broader perspective. I had to take their everyday life and their worldview into account. For example: How do they live? What are their values? How do they define health and well-being? To name a few. During fieldwork, another prominent topic surfaced related to gender roles, the role of the men and women in society. What does it mean to be a woman? What is femininity? The focus of the study was the use of psychoactive plants, but to understand this phenomenon accurately, it is crucial to know the people who use them. After all, the life of these people in their day-to-day is not focused and only turning around the use of psychoactive plants. On the contrary, what I have learned from the fieldwork is that it is just one part of their life, which had a big impact on how their life developed, but it is not the most important thing in their lives.

The information was collected on the field, from the interviews and from reviewing relevant scientific studies and policy reports. The interviews have been analysed by coding and abstracting the main themes and subthemes, which are presented as a “thick description” that seeks to present a detailed explanation of the

practices, rather than just focusing on the motives for psychoactive plant use. Practice here is understood as a routine activity and consists of a variety of places, substances, techniques, purposes and meanings. Some of the most prominent or unique practices that I have encountered in the field are presented in this work. Additionally, social network analysis has been done to show the relationships between the people and the extensiveness of the community.

During fieldwork, I was taking notes with paper and pen. By the end of the fieldwork, I had two A6 size notebooks full and a third of A5 size. Some notes I did directly on my laptop. The notes included also my diary. In total, after I digitised all, I had over 80 pages of fieldnotes. The 22 interviews (in total duration of over 52 hours, on average 2,3 hours per person), I have transcribed in the intelligent verbatim transcription style. Not word for word, but by choosing the relevant parts of the conversation and doing clean transcripts, which means editing out the fillers and repetitions. That makes it easier to read, while the message stays true to the intended message of the interviewee. An intelligent verbatim transcript captures what was said, not how it was said. Since most of the interviews were done in the Spanish language – the transcription was done in the Spanish language too, later I translated into English only the parts or quotes used in the thesis – it also did not make much sense to include all the actual words said by the interviewee. The slang or grammar mistakes disappeared in this process too. I tried, however, to maintain the accuracy, the gist and the styles of speech of each person, because it is not only important what was said, but how it was said. While doing the transcription and later the translation there is the danger that bits of information are taken out of context. I tried to avoid decontextualisation as much as possible, however, this change from spoken to written language is a necessary step and things always get lost in the process. Some researchers proposed consulting interviewees as a method to verify the overall results of the study (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). However, most of my informants do not speak English, so it did not make much sense to consult them. Moreover, consulting interviewees to ensure credibility is not considered a trustworthy verification method. “Although it may seem attractive to return the results to the original participants for verification, it is not an established verification strategy” (Elo, Kääriäinen, Kanste, *et al.*, 2014), because the judgements might not be correct. Some even see these methods as a threat to validity (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, *et al.*, 2002) because the interviewees might not apply a critical understanding of the study results, while researchers have an academic obligation to apply it (Pyett, 2003). It is necessary, therefore, to return to the data repeatedly to identify, if the interpretation is true (Pyett, 2003), which is what I did. Another method is to consult people familiar with the research topic to evaluate the validity and trustworthiness of the results (Cavanagh, 1997; Downe-Wamboldt, 1992; Hickey and Kipping, 1996). Therefore, the study results have been consulted not just by the two coordinators of the study, but also, independently, by colleagues from ICEERS and expert in drug policy, and another expert in medical anthropology.

Social network mapping

In anthropology social network analysis is used to understand ways in which social relationships are linked to each other, how people communicate with each other and pass on their knowledge with the motive to study an increasingly varied set of social structures or relationships and offer a coherent view of a differentiated social structure. The concept of network is to the anthropology of complex society what “genealogy has been to the study of traditional kinship-based society” (Hannerz, 1980: 186). Throughout the 20th century, various decentralised movements consisting of relatively small, interconnected and autonomous politically active groups developed. These movements grew by uniting people of diverse backgrounds who don’t necessarily have a lot in common and are linking among themselves as they please for as long as it lasts. In this way, the groups are constantly forming, reforming and transforming by which new alignments emerge with time (Hannerz, 1980: 199-200). Social movements are complex, often trans-local and transnational knowledge-producing networks defying traditional notions of Cartesianism, rather than discretely bounded entities (Casas-Cortés, Osterweil and Powell, 2013: 202-206). The understanding of social movements as networks brings along an important shift in the methodological and political understanding that better conceptualizes the complex objects and actors, as well as the patterns of interaction they produce (Casas-Cortés, Osterweil and Powell, 2013; Bott, 1957; Barnes, 1972; Mitchell, 1969; Comelles, 1986; Comelles, Casas and Udina, 1975). As anthropologists, we are challenged by a number of knowledge producers (for example journalists, policymakers, attorneys, aid workers, activists) to articulate the unique contribution of our methodology in a particular issue, especially when our critical perspective is not always welcomed by others (Casas-Cortés, Osterweil and Powell, 2013: 216-217).

The community I was researching is a network of diverse people who share an understanding of psychoactive plants as entities or plant teachers and partake in group activities of personal growth and self-care. It is dispersed spatially and vocationally, as well as composed of diverse practices and actors. The people are like a big family, a tribe, and refer to the elders as “grandmothers” and “grandfathers”. When facing challenges in life people go to them and talk about what’s happening and seek advice. Psychoactive plants, such as ayahuasca, are used to facilitate self-reflection and help them overcome challenges. Sofia, the guardian of the Water House, explained:

The people who come here are people who are in a search, they are looking for something. I mean, why am I going to a ceremony? Because I love the plant and I want to take a little step further to develop myself. I always look for something that can help me do it. You realize that it is like the layers of the onion, there is always a little bit more to discover. When I go to an ayahuasca ceremony, it gives me a vision, an understanding of myself, of something that I can correct, because it shows me things. Sometimes it would show me things that I do not like, but I can say ‘thank you for helping me to see that my behaviour was not right in that situation.’

Besides the Stone House and the Water House, where I lived for the time being, I have visited other places in Catalonia where ceremonies with psychoactive plants are conducted. In Figure 1 (see below) I have

marked the places where there is the most activity from data I have gathered during fieldwork. These are also the sites that have a stronger connection and exchange among them. For sure there are more such places in the area, but I did not include them, because the purpose of this graphic is to show the region and the interconnectedness of places and people that form part of the community I was researching, not a map of all the places that offer psychoactive plants in ceremonial settings. At this point, I would like to point out a distinction between groups and communities that offer ceremonies in a more corporate manner and those whose aim is to create an actual community of people where the use of psychoactive plants is just one of the activities that are done together. There are no economic benefits from the activities other than paying the travel expenses, materials and food for all the participants. The two women I lived with during fieldwork were not having the intention to guide ceremonies or give people these plants. They were on a search for themselves, encountered these plants, started to work with them on a personal level and are doing it until this day. Some of the structure in the community comes also from Santo Daime, where many of them started their spiritual path. The facilitators of the ceremonies are mainly (but not only) elderly people who are well respected by the community members because of their work, their willingness to welcome and accommodate anyone if needed, their experience, personality, simplicity, authenticity, and wisdom. There are several community leaders, for example, Estela who is in her mid-60s who started this path when she was 40 years old, after divorcing and separating from her husband with whom she has five children. The other one is her “spiritual daughter”, Sofia who is in her mid-40s who wanted to change her life, left her job and house in the city and moved to a *finca* in the forest. The third is Alma who was born in Brazil, growing up in Céu do Mapiá (a Santo Daime village in the jungle), coming to Europe after marrying a Spanish man and since then living and leading a branch of the Santo Daime church in Catalonia. Another is grandfather Owel, who is over 80 years old, originally from Java, but lived in different parts of the world, whose teachings are concerning nutrition and how it influences the body and mind. The transmission of the knowledge to younger generations is not structured but happens spontaneously where some of the people carry on the messages, carry out the rituals and even invent new ones.

The community was established in the mid-1990s when four women with their children moved into the Stone House on the top of a mountain in rural Catalonia. Some of these women already had contact with South American communities who have a long tradition of ritualized psychoactive plant use, and they were also involved in Spanish social movements. Over time, other people from urban Catalonia as well as South America and other parts of the world came to live on the mountaintop, bringing a variety of rituals and practices with them. This community is generationally, ethnically, and professionally very diverse. During fieldwork, I have met close to a hundred people with diverse professional backgrounds, including architects, lawyers, psychotherapists, biologists, educators and professors, social workers, nurses, cooks, business people, labourers, artists, administrative workers, farmers, and students among others. Although I spent my time in the fieldwork with more women and also interviewed more women, men form part of the community as well, but there have always been more women than men in the community. Most of them come for a

shorter period to participate in a specific ceremony, which can last for a weekend up to a week or two and then return to their homes. Few people are staying in the house temporarily for several months.

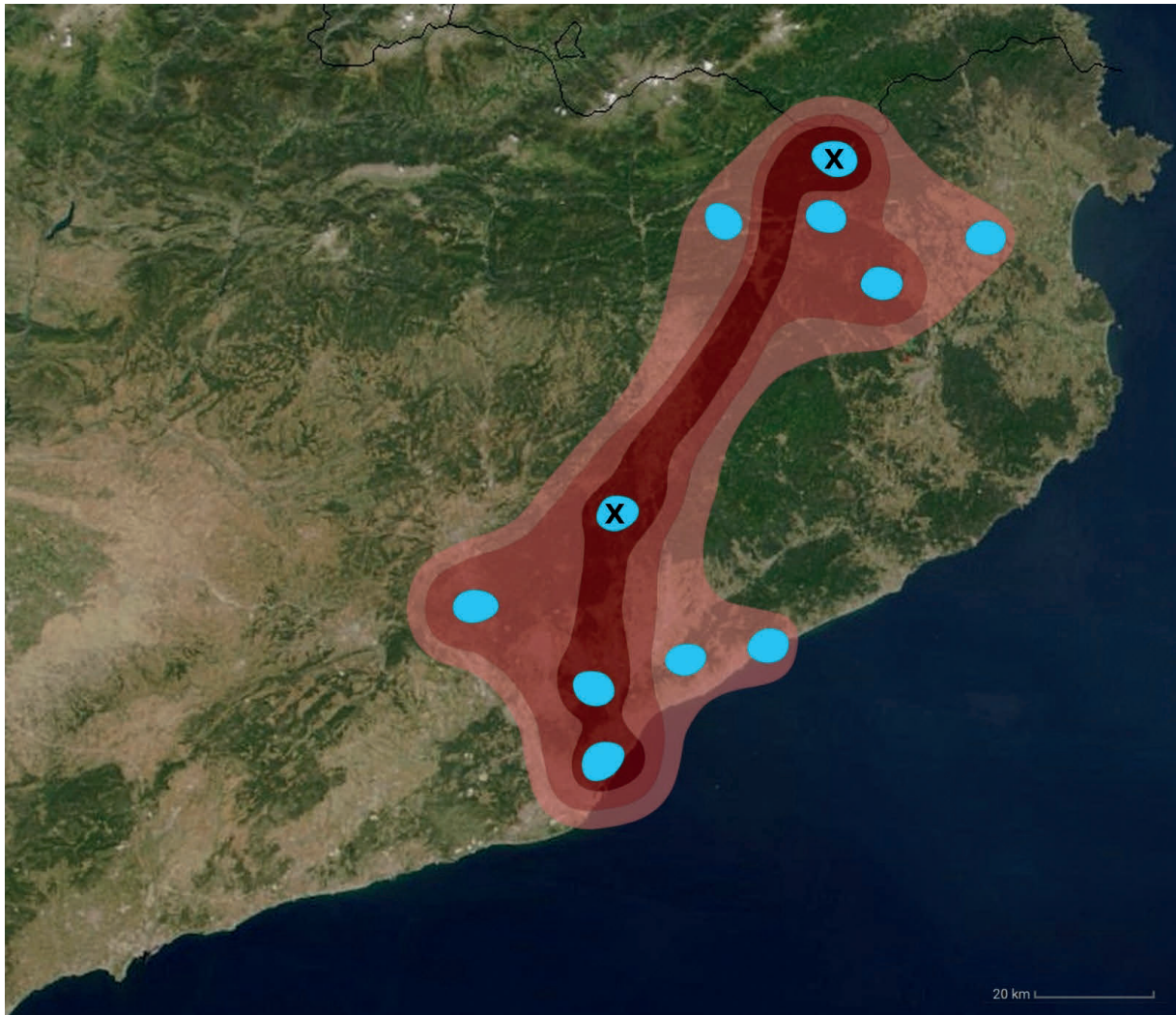


Figure 1: Ritual places in Catalonia. Blue indicates ritual zones. The two crosses represent the Stone House and the Water House. Red indicates relatedness and influence zone. Darker colour represents stronger relatedness.

The Water House is inhabited by a family of three and there is almost always a couple of “workawayers⁴” staying there for some months to help maintain the house, the garden and the forests that belong to the property. Both places, the Stone House and the Water House, are connected and the people help each other, if needed although they are 100km apart (a distance that takes from door to door a bit more than two hours by car). The Water House established about fifteen years ago and is considered as an offspring of the Stone House. Both of the places were established by women who started to inhabit the houses and step-by-step reconstructed the buildings and the surroundings. The elders in the community are referred to as grandmothers and grandfathers (*abuelas* and *abuelos*). As they are the carriers of wisdom the younger community members seek advice or direction from them in times of need.

4 Volunteers from different countries.

The Stone House and the Water House are places where the community comes together for a specific ceremony, but they also offer shelter to those who are facing changes or challenging stages in their lives. Several community members lived there temporarily at some point in their lives. It is like the centre of a worldwide movement where various cultures, traditions, or lineages meet and invent a new state of being that they call “Wonderland”.



Figure 2: World map of the “Wonderland network”.

Wonderland⁵ (*País de las Maravillas*) was inspired by Alice in Wonderland, the work of Lewis Carroll. It is not a physical place, but a state of mind, which I will describe in more detail in the following chapters. The community is, therefore, not a community in a geographical sense, but a phenomenological community. Rather than by spatial designation, a phenomenological community is defined as a group of people who not only share a common worldview, values, interests, beliefs, and goals, but who, through rituals, create anti-structural, phenomenological, existential, and experiential *communitas* (Turner, 1991), a space of introspection and innovation. The community is therefore not a community in the sense of people living together in only one house or concentrated in a village. The members of the community live across Catalonia, some in villages and others in the cities. Some of them live in other countries and visit community places every year (Figure 2). This is not to say that it is a complete map of the whole community’s network, but only the result of my observations and who I got the opportunity to meet while doing fieldwork. Most commonly people who reside in Catalonia come to take part in the ceremonies due to the proximity. People from other European countries would generally come once per year for a particular ceremony. I observed a continued exchange between the Americas and Europe, the activities going both ways. Most people come from overseas to Europe for a few months to do ceremonies in various places. Europeans travel to South America to do the *feitio* and bring back the Daime to have for the regular activities of the Santo Daime

5 I use the term “Wonderland” in this monograph with their permission.

church. They also visit some tribes in the Amazon to interact and exchange with the community. These exchanges can be quite practical, and in a later chapter about women and femininity, I am describing one that concerns intimate hygiene.

The people might live in remote places, but they are not isolated from the world. The means of technology are keeping them globally connected. The usual communication channels that are used are telephones, emails, and with the most frequency the application WhatsApp, where the community converse in group chats. These group conversations count several dozens of people which share thoughts, events and other messages. Main communication languages used are Catalan and Spanish.

Thematic analysis

To analyse the interviews, I found thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) as the most suitable approach. Thematic analysis is a generic method for identifying and analysing patterned meaning within data. It is a flexible approach that includes interpretation of data that goes beyond identifying themes only but tells us what is interesting about the data and why it is interesting. It requires that the researcher is actively engaged by explaining the decision-making process: discuss how the themes were created, with what procedures, and what theoretical presumptions were taken. The theoretical flexibility implies reflexivity and is crucial for the successful implementation of thematic analysis. The researcher makes active choices and reflects on what is being done, why and how. The researcher's values, positioning and experiences all shape how the researcher sees and reads the data. In our case, as mentioned above, reflexive thematic analysis is primarily an inductive (data-driven) approach with an experiential framework that is capturing people's meanings, lives and realities. However, accounts in the data are not the endpoint of the research, but a starting point going toward a more critical orientation interpreting what's going on and what sense is being made. The data gives us access to some kind of reality, a situated or located truth about the researched phenomena.

The procedure predicts six stages of analysis, which are, however, not to be seen as a one-way street or a ladder that you climb up. It is not a straightforward, linear approach, but rather a recursive approach, a spiral where you go backwards and forwards. Qualitative research is a creative process and thematic analysis gets you started on the journey, but it should not be rigidly held on to. The six stages are, in this sense, recommendations not rules. The first step is to familiarise with the data and identify items of interest. In the process of collecting all the data myself, I already had a good overview of the information gathered. By transcribing all the interviews and recordings myself the immersion into the data was enhanced so that when I was reading the data again, I was already familiar with its content. The next step was to generate the codes from the transcripts, which is the first systematic part of the data analysis. It is a fluid, flexible, subjective and organic process and, therefore, takes time and reflection to unfold. That is why I repeated this process

three times to thoroughly capture the topics of the gathered data in a few weeks. Coding means labelling something interesting in the data which has, both, semantic (surface meaning) and implicit (assumptions that are not explicitly said) message. I wrote notes and headings describing all possible contents, such as major themes, significant repeated words and unusual events (Bryman 2008; Burnard 1991, 1996; Hsieh and Shannon 2005), directly in the transcript using the comment tool in LibreOffice Writer. I avoided the use of single-word codes since the codes have to work independently from the data and need to evoke the data by itself, for which single words say too little. After the process was completed and all transcripts were coded, I made a final sweep through the text and made a coding list, or better, coding sticky notes. I wrote each code on a separate sticky note and checked once again if it is properly represented in the data. Then I went on to the next stage of organizing the codes into clusters with topics that relate to each other to generate initial themes. To visually map individual clusters, I used several blank A3 paper sheets, each for a particular theme and grouped them around a “central organising concept” (Braun and Clarke, 2013) for each theme. I did that by searching for the bigger meaning that cut across the data set, not just selecting the most frequent things that were said by the interviewees. I was capturing the micro-levels of meaning, things that relate to my research interest (the use of traditional psychoactive plants and their associated rituals in contemporary societies) and things that captured what the interviewees or I think is important and related. In the process of theme development, I discarded a few codes and systematised some themes with subthemes to highlight certain notable aspects of a particular theme. I have reviewed the initial themes against the coded data and the data set several times to refine them. Finally, I constructed two main themes and seven sub-themes (Figure 3), which will be presented in detail in the following chapters of this monograph.

All themes and sub-themes are not stand-alone themes, but interconnected categories. As an introduction, I have written a chapter about the history of the community to familiarise the reader with the subject of the present monograph. As my work is based on a community of people, I find it essential to present the group in an overall context first. By knowing about the people’s way of life, their values and their relationships we can get a better idea of who the people are, how they live and how they think. Talking about values and needs was a common topic of our conversations. Especially concerning family life and how they raise their children. In that regard, the topic emerging often was also about the roles of women and men in a community. Since I spent a fair amount of the time on the field with women, we talked about femininity and what it means to be a woman. They shared with me their personal histories, their experience with intimate relationships and their reflections on modern society. The use of psychoactive plants was one of my main research interests and is discussed in detail in a separate chapter. The questions I was investigating were: What plants are being used by the people in the community? How they are being used? What pitfalls people can fall into when working with certain psychoactive substances? Talking about psychoactive plants implies talking about health and well-being that consists of several features and practices, and nutrition play a central role in it.

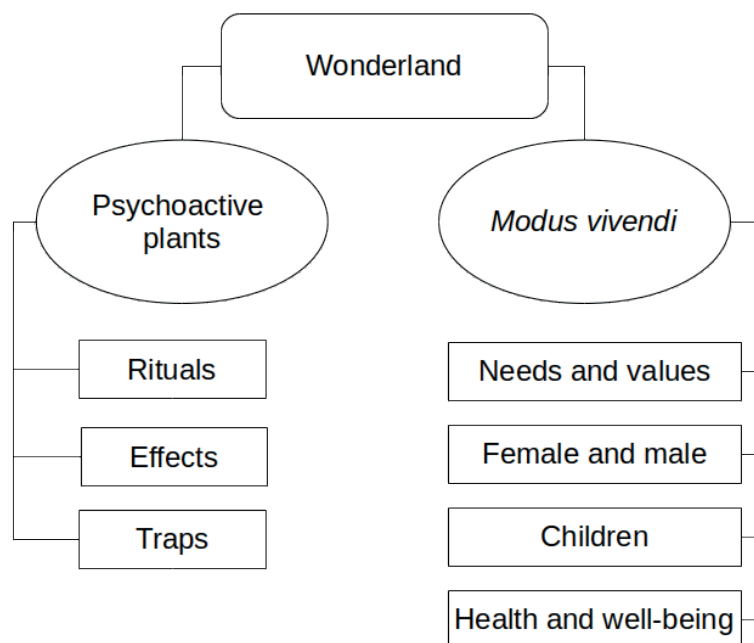


Figure 3: Thematic map showing the abstraction of the main themes and sub-themes of the study.

All these topics are being critically reflected in the present monograph in the context of medicalisation, drug policy, public health and human rights. It is impossible to understand the phenomena of drug use without placing it into the context of everyday living and the characteristics of the people who use them. This has been demonstrated by a number of sociological and anthropological studies, which are discussed in continuation.

The use of psychoactive plants in western societies is spreading and the associated rituals can be seen as forms of self-care and community-care (Oña, Kohek, Massaguer, *et al.*, 2019). This benefit, derived from the ritualized use of psychoactive plants, has been demonstrated to be universal in indigenous cultures. As such it is not surprising to find its recreation in a modern world that is experiencing new public health challenges with the depopulation of rural areas and new urban ways of living, where many people are experiencing mental health issues, loss of social bonds and increased loneliness. The ritualized use of psychoactive plants is an example of how controlled use can be of benefit for the individual and the community. Moreover, in terms of drug policy, the prosecution of people who use psychoactive plants (and other substances) is a violation of human rights as it is not causing harm to anyone (Bouso and Sánchez-Avilés, 2020). On the contrary, the practices of use are meant to educate the users on how to do it in a way to achieve the highest possible level of wellbeing. Prohibition and criminal prosecution of people who use any substances that are currently considered illegal are causing more harm than the use itself. There is no doubt that in some cases use can turn into misuse. This happens, however, in a small percentage of cases, as it is evident also from the cases presented in this monograph.

Finally, the present work isn't about giving a complete, absolute and total picture of the researched phenomena, but telling a particular, relevant and rich story, a thick description that reveals a salient content in the data (Whittemore, Chase and Mandle, 2001). To illustrate the data accurately, the findings must reflect the actors' voice and conditions of the inquiry and minimize my own biases, motivations, or opinions (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Polit and Beck, 2003). For this reason, I am using several quotations from the transcripts that demonstrate the connection between the data and results from various persons to demonstrate depth and diversity (Graneheim and Lundman, 2004). The tables, figures, photographs and other visual materials are used to facilitate and explain the presented data (Elo, Kääriäinen, Kanste, *et al.*, 2014). The presented data are, nonetheless, my interpretation and thus inevitably subjective, reflecting my positioning, which I try to counterbalance with rigour, systematic approach and continuous self-reflection.

Reflexivity and autoethnography in anthropology

Anthropology is a young discipline with a complex history. In its beginning the noble aims of understanding human society transformed into ideologies that glorified the white man's culture. It "began as an attempt to decipher the exotic other, with the hope that by embracing the wonder of distinct and novel cultural possibilities, we might enrich our appreciation and understanding of human nature and our own humanity" (Davis, 2009: 10), but got "hijacked by the ideology of its times" and the anthropologists were like "agents dispatched to the far reaches of empire with the task of understanding strange tribal peoples and cultures that they might properly be administered and controlled" (Davis, 2009: 11). Anthropology "was a tool of domination and [the] discipline was not only a child of colonialism, it also served the colonial cause through its own practice" (Narby, 1998: 14). The 20th century represents a paradigm shift in anthropology by leaving the armchair and going into the field. The pioneering work of Bronislaw Malinowski, Franz Boas, and later Claude Lévi-Strauss and others set modern anthropology on a new course not only giving a voice to the actors for the first time in the history of the discipline but challenging the notion of the "primitive vs. civilised." Participant observation made it possible to appropriate the actor's point of view, that means, described in detail what the subjects do, but from the researcher's point of view who lives within the researched community. In 1922 Malinowski wrote in his monumental work *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*: "What interests me really in the study of the native is his outlook on things, his *Weltanschauung*, the breath of life and reality which he breathes and by which he lives. Every human culture gives its members a definite vision of the world, a definite zest of life" (Malinowski, 1932: 517). In the 20th century, the study focus shifted from the "exotic others" to "doing anthropology at home" focusing on contemporary issues of society, economy, or policy and seeking solutions for encountered issues. This shift in focus implied a shift in methods, theories and approaches (Mahana, 2009) and reframed the way of how data is collected, analysed and what is being done with it. Since the 1930s a significant number of studies started to utilize the point of

view of the actor, especially when researching processes of health, illness and healthcare (Menéndez, 2010). Eduardo L. Menéndez (2010) has written extensively on the “actor’s point of view”, its valorisation and usefulness for studying particular cultural groups, but also the need for its re-evaluation due to the “conceptual and ideological erosion that it currently suffers” (Menéndez, 2010: 295) and the prevailing focus, of those who use it, on a single actor although the approach assumes the existence of different social actors in interaction. The proponents of this approach, especially in the field of 'madness', criminality, gender or ethnicity, were using it to recover the word and action of certain actors and find solutions to their problems (Menéndez, 2010: 302). In the last couple of decades, the actor’s point of view has been promoted in anthropology by various groups, organizations and social movements. However, many have been focusing on the individual actor in terms of meanings or experiences excluding social relations along with ideological, economic and political aspects (Menéndez, 2010: 295). The emic approach, that has been woven into the fabric of anthropology, has to be revised critically and combined with the etic approach to somehow accurately present the study subject. In the conventional anthropological works the researcher is generally an invisible, but all-seeing omnipresence (Anderson, 2006: 383). By making this “ghost” a visible part of the field and of the analysis transforms it into an investigative tool that has a crucial role in the fieldwork along with every other actor (Severi, 2019: 230-232), which is also at the foreground of the relational perspective in anthropology (Menéndez, 2018). According to Bourdieu (1990: 292):

The anthropologist would speak much more effectively about the beliefs and rites of others if he started by making himself the master and possessor of his own rites and beliefs, both those that are buried in the folds of his own body and in his turns of phrase and those that run through his scientific practice his prophylactic notes, his propitiatory prefaces or his exorcizing references, not to mention his cult of the founding fathers and other eponymous ancestors.

Anthropology is a “form of interpretation” (Narby, 1998: 14) and its purpose “is not to answer our deepest questions, but to make available to us answers that others, guarding other sheep in other valleys, have given, and thus to include them in the consultable record of what man has said” (Geertz, 1973: 30). The anthropological analysis has to balance between the emic and etic approach to express the point of view of the group studied and the point of view of the investigator. For Geertz, the role of the anthropologist is, therefore, to observe, participate, record, and analyse a culture by interpreting the interpretations obtained from the actors and to interpret signs and their meaning within the culture itself, rather than just giving the actors a voice through narratives (1973). Such interpretation must be a “thick description”, a detailed account of the fieldwork which elucidate the patterns of cultural and social relationships and put them in context (Holloway, 1997). Yet, however detailed the description might be, it can never be complete and is only based on extrovert expressions of culture of, both, the researcher and the researched. Furthermore, the anthropologists tell a story, which is inevitably selective and a reflection of the researcher’s person and own experience, which can lead to biases in directions of inquiry and analysis. To overcome the limitations the anthropologist has to abandon “egocentrism and anthropological ethnocentrism” and become a friend with the people he or she studies, which implies that “the categories of 'informant' and 'expert' disappear” and

makes space for a dialogue between equals (López-Pavillard, 2015). This requires authenticity, collaboration and long-term involvement of the researcher and the researched. In reality, it is difficult to connect with all the people one meets in the field, which is what I experienced. There were few I felt dislike for, but in a manner of “the kindly ethnographer” (Fine, 1993) I acted more sympathetic than I felt. I would share my thoughts about it with some other people from the community, who I felt close to. Although I felt dislike for them, my intention is not to “crop them from the picture” (Fine, 1993: 273) and distort the view of reality (Menéndez, 2010). On the contrary, when talking to other members of the community about my dislikes, observations and feelings, they told me about the traps that these plants bring with them and one can get caught in them and I am writing about this in a later chapter. Furthermore, I met numerous people and every person has their perspective, some are similar and complementary, but there are also opposing ones. To exclude these different realities means to reduce the relational and social information of the people (Menéndez, 2010). Besides fieldnotes, observations and other information from a variety of people, the researcher needs to include all the nuances – the songs, proverbs, gossips, etiquettes, and similar information – as anthropological facts along with continuous ethical considerations that are key for positive relationships with the researched people and open up space for auto-ethnography and self-reflection, while maintaining space for critical reflections (Mahana, 2009). We should, however, not assume that what is depicted is the whole picture. “Objectivity is an illusion” and “the world is always known from a perspective” (Fine, 1993: 286). Like represented in the Japanese film *Rashomon* or the tale about the *Blind Men and the Elephant* one event can be understood quite differently by different people and different sets of discursive practices. “Data are never presented in ‘full’, and choices are inevitable” (Fine, 1993: 287). This is why “other ethnographers might have reached sharply different conclusions from highlighting other material” (Fine, 1993: 279). Deleuze and Guattari (1987) used the term “rhizome” to describe research where the representation and interpretation of data are generating multiple non-hierarchical perspectives. This “Rashomon effect” is the result of multiple factors. There is the researcher’s point of view whose “background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions” (Malterud, 2001: 483-484). A seemingly neutral role of the researcher in the field is non-existing and there is no scientific method that would free us from our cultural apparatus (Barley, 1989). Any text that is written by a human being is reflecting, in some way, the personality, experience and point of view of the author. We have to be aware that our point of view is “a point of view on a point of view” (Bourdieu, 1999: 625). This has effects on the questions we ask ourselves, the people we seek, the relationships we establish, the insights we have and how we interpret them. All is based on who we are, our gender and class or culture and these factors frame our whole research (Van der Geest, 2019). As researchers, we are not just observing and analysing an objective reality and interpreting it, but actively influencing and transforming the observed setting with our presence and, vice versa, the setting influences us. It means we get emotionally involved with the informants and that, on one side, “allows access to a whole world of clearly subjective meanings

that connect personal issues, with the sociocultural sphere, but also with politics” (Pérez Espuñes, 2019: 199), and on the other side, impacts us as human beings. The anthropologist generally chooses a specific research topic due to a personal connection to the subject, even when it is not recognized at first (Ricció, 2019), and adopts a double identity as a subject and object of the study (Pérez Espuñes, 2019: 205). Conducting fieldwork can have a lasting impact on our lives due to the intensive and long-lasting presence in the field. We can often face situations in the field that make us question and reflect our preconceptions, beliefs and values, on things we take for granted. As ethnographers, we explore ourselves “by looking at and listening to others” (Van der Geest, 2019: 34). Our personal experience is a relevant source of knowledge that needs to be taken into account when producing interpretations and explanations as it is a powerful analytical tool that lends for knowing the subject in its different and multidimensional states (physiological, emotional, mental and spiritual) as an interrelated system and not as separate systems (Romero-Villadóniga, 2019: 152-155). Employing personal relationships as the primary dimension of knowledge production (Severi, 2019) challenges the academic hierarchy, constrained by norms of the Cartesian-Newtonian rationalist vision (Romero-Villadóniga, 2019: 152), but opens up space for an “anthropology of oneself” (Esteban, 2004). Autoethnography enriches the narratives by inviting the author to expose himself or herself in the text showing one’s strengths and weaknesses, the emotions that appear, the dilemmas, concerns and successes that allow us to reflect on the experience and generate knowledge (Alegre-Agís and Fernández-Garrido, 2019). The use of autoethnography as a methodological strategy is not an easy task. The process of self-observation and self-analysis is a challenge for we cannot simply break free from the unconscious mechanisms we have acquired throughout our lives (Pérez Espuñes, 2019: 206).

Casas-Cortés and colleagues (2013) propose a shift in the methodology by suggesting a different understanding of the research aims and process. Rather than explanation or representation, they introduce the process of translation and weaving in which the anthropologist is “one voice or participant in a *crowded field* of knowledge producers” (2013: 199) involved in the creation of new worlds, new thoughts, bridging previously unconnected debates. Translation does not stand for the reproduction of what others are saying – in the sense of speaking for those who made no sense or as an authority speaking on behalf of the voiceless – it means “attuning oneself to others’ utterances and modes of living, and putting what others are saying into another code” (Casas-Cortés, Osterweil and Powell, 2013: 220), a code of medical anthropology. Through the process of translation, the anthropologist incorporates also his or her own experience and background. A relational approach transforms both the researcher and researched and dehierarchises their relationship by opening it up to “mutual influences and explicit contagions”, which convert the ethnographic practice into a “weaving technology” (Casas-Cortés, Osterweil and Powell, 2013: 223). In this context, the researcher is neither totally outside nor completely inside of the field but has the role of a “connective node knitting broader nets of engaged knowledge producers” (Casas-Cortés, Osterweil and Powell, 2013: 223). The researcher is interwoven into the relational network that “constitutes his or her own research topic intermeshed with her or his life trajectory” (Casas-Cortés, Osterweil and Powell, 2013: 224). Such an

approach shifts the researcher's focus from doing an ethnography of a people to doing an ethnography of a problem, from product to process, and shifting from seeing the informants as research subjects to collaborating with them on common problems (Casas-Cortés, Osterweil and Powell, 2013: 224) and to build bridges between a political-intellectual conversation (Escobar, 2008: 25).

MEDICALISATION OF DRUG USE

*If I believe that "the" cause of the illness is economic,
or spiritual, or psychological, I necessarily believe
that remedying "the" cause leads to sanity.
On the other hand, if I see how the various aspects are interrelated,
I shall arrive at the conclusion that sanity and
mental health can be attained only by simultaneous
changes in the sphere of industrial and political organization,
of spiritual and philosophical orientation,
of character structure, and of cultural activities.*

– Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society*

The term medicalisation stands for a social process in which normal human conditions and behaviours enter the domain of medicine and are treated as medical conditions. In the late 1960s, medicalisation was labelling alcoholism, drug addiction, prostitution, paedophilia, masturbation and so on, as deviant behaviour (Pitts, 1968; Conrad, 1975; Kittrie, 1971), which was believed to need medical attention. The number of human conditions that get pathologised and enter into medical jurisdiction is growing exponentially (Freidson, 1970; Zola, 1972; Illich, 1976) and is considered “one of the most potent transformations of the last half of the twentieth century in the West” (Clarke, Shim, Mamo, *et al.*, 2003: 161). Common behaviours that were considered immoral, sinful or criminal in the past have transformed into sickness due to medicalisation such as obesity, malingering, kleptomania, grief, divorce, bachelorhood, unwanted pregnancy (Szasz, 1977), along with common life processes such as mood, childbirth, infertility, menopause, ageing and death (Conrad, 2007). Particularly in the 21st century, we see an expansion of states which are being medicated, particularly mental states like attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), anorexia and bulimia, chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), panic disorder, anxiety, premenstrual syndrome (PMS) being among the most prevalent ones (Conrad, 2007).

The female body is significantly more medicalised compared to the male body (Miglioranza, 2018). Offman and Kleinplatz (2004) argued that diagnoses such as premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD) are medicalising normal human behaviour for which relabelled pharmaceuticals are being prescribed. Medical discourse about the women's bodily experiences such as menstruation, pregnancy, PMS, PMDD, menopause and so on, leads to the “medical ownership of women's experiences and ultimately the medicalisation of these experiences” while focusing in positive aspects of menstrual cycle-related changes would lend to an understanding of the female body as cyclical, fluctuating and normal (Kleinplatz, 2001). Besides the women's natural cycles, the social ideal of feminine beauty curbs procedures and treatments in the cosmetic surgery industry such as breast enlargement (Jacobson, 2000; Gimlin, 2000), nose and eye corrections (Kaw, 1992), Botox, and many more. Countries like South Korea are world-renowned for their affordable

“cosmetic tourism”⁶ and has the highest number of cosmetic procedures per capita worldwide (Lee, 2019; Marx, 2015; Jacobs and Zheng, 2018). Body enhancement to meet the cultural representation of an ideal female body is a commonality in industrialised societies. While cosmetic surgery is getting popular among the younger population, another normal human state is getting an increasing amount of medical attention and control which is ageing, particularly when related to sexuality (Gullette, 1997; Marshall and Katz, 2002; Katz and Marshall, 2004) and menopause (Friedan, 1993; Lock, 1993). Men’s bodies, on the other hand, are significantly less medicalised, perhaps because “bodies of white, European, middle-class, heterosexual men have been constructed as the standard for measuring and evaluating other bodies” (Petersen, 1998: 41). The medical market for men (testosterone, hair loss treatments, impotence, ageing, etc.) is, however, growing significantly in the past decades (Conrad, 2007), yet there is still a difference in medicalisation between the sexes, which is largely the result of sociocultural representations of the body (Halliwell and Dittmar, 2003; Turner, 1992; Gatens, 1996) and the fact that the women’s body has long been an object of medical control (Riska, 2003). Maybe this is why women seem to be more often seeking alternative options as they are refusing or questioning the medical approach.

In the past century, the most important authorities of medicalisation were “physicians, social movements and interest groups, and various organizational or interprofessional activities” (Conrad, 2007: 133). There has been, however, three major changes in the medical knowledge and organisation in the past couple of decades that curb medicalisation in the West: biotechnology, consumers, and managed care (Conrad, 2007). Physicians kept the authority, but their role has become more subordinate. Now the pharmaceutical industry has become a major player in medicalisation driven by commercial and market interests (Canals Sala and Romaní, 1996). The pharmaceutical companies have an increasing influence on the definitions of normal and pathological and exerting social control driven by shareholders and businessmen (Wilkes, Bell and Kravitz, 2000). Healthcare transformed into a commodity on one hand and the patients are transforming into consumers of health care on the other (Conrad, 2007). The transformation from patients into consumers brought about a more active role of the patients in the treatment, who are more demanding, but also less tolerant of minor symptoms and benign conditions (Guadagnoli and Ward, 1998; Barsky and Boros, 1995). Particularly in the field of mental health, the industry is now advertising medical products to the patients-consumers directly, while insurance companies become keener to cover medication rather than psychotherapy (Shore and Beigel, 1996). Both the patients-consumers and the pharmaceutical industry are looking for “silver bullets” for modern ailments. Moreover, the list of mental disorders, for which pharmaceuticals are being prescribed, is expanding and gaining legitimacy by each new edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM), which is based on “social values, political compromise, scientific evidence and material for insurance forms” (Kutchins and Kirk, 1997: 11). The medical professionals and the patients-consumers are growing more reliant and depended on prescription

6 Retrieved on the 17th July 2020 from <https://www.jkplastic.com/en/>.

drugs for a variety of life problems (Johnson, 1998) and creating profits and growth for the pharmaceutical industry (Murray and Deardorff, 1998).

Pharmaceutical drugs play an important role in the process of medicalisation of contemporary society. Neuropolitics is affirming that human conflicts and suffering originate in the brain, whereby it hides its socio-political roots, and drug use plays a crucial role in regulating these behaviours. Drugs have a strategic position in the processes of social control in western neoliberal societies, which is not something new. The use of psychoactive substances was an integral part of political-religious rituals that constituted societies throughout history. The difference between now and then is that science now occupies a supposedly neutral and therefore indisputably true discourse that is seemingly free of values and interests (Romaní, 2020). Under the pretence of science, pharmaceutical drugs are being marketed to children, adults and seniors for treating lifestyles and problems that are not necessarily medical. The clinical trials on the efficacy and safety of the drugs are funded by the pharmaceutical companies themselves who are motivated by profit more than health and raw data is largely unavailable to “outsiders” under the pretence of confidentiality and trade secrets (Doshi, Dickersin, Healy, *et al.*, 2013; Sismondo, 2010 and 2015; Sunder Rajan 2017). Such a situation inevitably leads to overestimating a drug’s efficacy and downplaying its risks. Moreover, the income generated by pharmaceutical companies is so big that it easily pays million dollars worth of fines for illegal marketing, data manipulation and fraud (Gøtzsche, 2012). Meanwhile, the use of stimulants, tranquillizers, growth hormones, impotence medication, selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), and many other pharmaceuticals (with or without a prescription) is increasing dramatically in the last two decades even amongst children and adolescents (Conrad, 2007; Olfson, Gameroff, Marcus, *et al.*, 2003; Zito, Safer, Dosreis, *et al.*, 2002; Thomas, Conrad, Casler, *et al.*, 2006). Many of these are supposed to be taken for the individual’s whole life. Worldwide over half of all pharmaceuticals are prescribed, dispensed or sold inappropriately. Such irrational use is due to polypharmacy, over-use, over-prescription and inappropriate self-medication (Holloway and van Dijk, 2011). Along with the increased use of pharmaceuticals, there is also a steady increase in people affected by mental health disorders on a global level. As a solution to the rising number of mental health problems the Lancet Commission on Global Mental Health and Sustainable Development proposes a global increase of psychiatric services, reduced cost, and improved supply of psychotropic drugs for these disorders (Patel, Saxena, Lund, *et al.*, 2018). The question arises: How can it be that despite the increased effort, resources and allegedly effective treatments the psychological distress is worsening and not improving on a global level? Do these treatments work in a lab setting, but fail at a community level? A rising number of experts are questioning the current system and call for re-evaluation and re-definition of our understanding of mental health (Mulder, Rucklidge and Wilkinson, 2017; Jorm, Patten, Brugha, *et al.*, 2017; Morgan, Waterreus, Carr, *et al.*, 2017; Nikkel and Whitaker, 2018; Bouso and Sánchez-Avilés, 2020). Particularly antidepressants and antipsychotics are being increasingly debated and questioned for their efficacy concerning the harmful side-effects they can provoke (Gøtzsche, 2013 and 2015; Gøtzsche, Young and Crace, 2015), while all these pharmaceutical therapies fail to address some

central elements to recovery that increase mental distress, such as the provision of basic necessities of everyday living, inequalities, discrimination, prejudice, loneliness and loss of reciprocal relationships, unhealthy diet and lifestyle, unemployment or precarious work, stressful environment, competitiveness, frustrations and uncertainty, exhaustion and burn-outs, etc. (Foulds, Wells and Mulder, 2014; Jorm, Patten, Brugha, *et al.*, 2017; Mulder, Rucklidge and Wilkinson, 2017; Martínez-Hernández, 2017). Antidepressants have become a mechanism for addressing social and biographical problems by labelling them as “neurotransmitter imbalance” or “brain chemistry imbalance”. The social context of discomfort is getting obscured by brain theories about depression and disassociating the social environment, the personal reality and physiological processes from one another, thus creating “neuro-narratives” and the “neural self”. The pharmaceutical drug transforms into the salvation that “fixes” your brain and changes your life (Martínez-Hernández, 2017). Huxley’s *soma* (1932) appears somewhat prophetic in this regard.

Without doubt, medicine contributed significantly to welfare and well-being of humans, but medicalisation gave biomedicine a hegemonic role in healthcare that penetrated everyday life and is redefining the concepts of health and sickness, or the normal and the pathological (Canguilhem, 1998). Biomedicine divided the religious domain from the medical one, which represents a rupture between “superstitious folk belief” and “scientific medical knowledge” in the area of health care. While Claude Lévi-Strauss was exploring the efficacy of magical healing practices (e.g. singing) in a healing process and comparing the psychoanalyst to the shaman in his famous essays *The Effectiveness of Symbols* and *The Sorcerer and His Magic* (1963), the evident interrelatedness between religion and medicine throughout human history and phenomena such as placebo (Moerman, 2002), religious cures (Vallverdú, 2010; Sibley and Bulbulia, 2012), and magical rituals (Saintyves, 1914) were being meticulously discarded by biomedicine. Religious and spiritual practices were separated from the medical practices due to medicalisation, leaving no space for ritual or symbolic healing modalities within the western medical system. What medicalisation did instead was it constituted biomedicine as a globally dominant medical system and legitimized social control performed by the medical profession (Foucault, 1975) as well as state control over the use of medicines, including the regulation and scheduling of psychoactive substances (Apud and Romani, 2017).

Holistic health practices, that approach health and sickness from a different perspective than biomedicine, are generally understood as demedicalisation, which occurs “when a problem is no longer defined in medical terms and the involvement of medical personnel is no longer deemed appropriate” (Conrad, 2007: 97). However, in the 21st century, holistic practices are not necessarily demedicalised. Complementary and alternative medicine is shifting towards professionalisation and conventional medicine and, with it, into medicalisation (Conrad, 2007). It appears that the same is happening with the use of psychoactive plants, particularly in the case of cannabis and ayahuasca, but also other – currently illegal – psychoactive substances.

In the last decade, the medical use of cannabis gained significant popularity to the degree where numerous countries worldwide started to loosen the drug laws concerning cannabis and its use for medical purposes. Since prohibition, these laws were not being so profoundly challenged until just recently when the popular discourse started focusing on the potential medical benefits of cannabis. A global social movement got engaged organising public events for the general public, the media started to write about it more positively, scholars started to investigate the potential health benefits of these plants (see Figure 4) and physicians in several countries worldwide are now prescribing cannabinoid-based medicines. The plant itself is less commonly used for medical purposes because it contains over 140 cannabinoids and many other compounds and has, therefore, complicated pharmacology. It is considered a “dirty substance” from the pharmacological point of view compared to THC or CBD only, which effects in the human body are easier to research in their pure form as well as easier to standardise as medicine. There is, however, an ongoing debate about the “entourage effect” and the claim that the natural plant with all of its constituents is more effective than isolated compounds (Oña and Bouso, 2019; Oña, Dos Santos, Hallak, *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that a plant can have a different effect if used in a contextual setting by indigenous healers or in a controlled setting of a clinical trial (Laplante, 2015).

Ayahuasca gained medical attention in the last few decades when its use spread in western countries. The beneficial effects of the brew for various mental health issues are being studied particularly in Brazil and Spain where its use in ritual or religious settings is the most prevalent. Research of cannabis and ayahuasca for medical application is rising steadily in the past decades (see Figure 5 and Figure 6). While scientific papers on ayahuasca in the last years rose too several dozen per year, cannabis studies increased to more than 2.000 per year in the last two years.

Both ayahuasca and cannabis are entering the medical sphere due to the activities of social movements, various organizational or interprofessional activities and politics. In the past, scientific research was heavily influenced by prohibitionists and political decisions have been mainly based on prohibitionists reports with the exemption of the Netherlands (Hulsman Committee report from 1969 and Baan Committee report 1972). In a recent paper, Martínez-Oró and colleagues (2020) have shown how drug policies were created on the grounds of prohibitionist “science” that was based on moral premises rather than ontological, epistemological and methodological ones. Moral “truths” were prioritised more than sound scientific research, which generated knowledge based on the paradigm of scientific prohibition that was focused on the problems and toxicity of drugs and completely neglecting non-problematic recreational uses, the right to freedom of conscience and/or religious practice, and even the potential therapeutic benefits. Furthermore, prohibitionist science still tries to convince us that science is free from interests and moral biases. What is evident from the example of cannabis and psychedelics prohibition is that power relations that exist in our society are stronger and more decisive than scientific evidence (Martínez-Oró, Apud, Scuro, *et al.*, 2020).

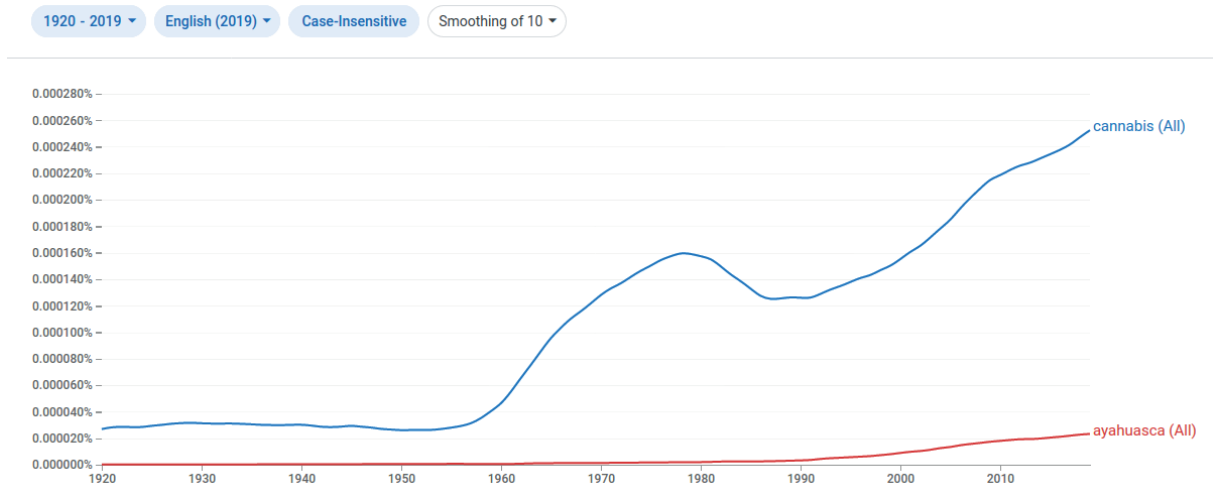


Figure 4: Google Books Ngram Viewer analysis of the number of publications in English language mentioning the terms “cannabis” and “ayahuasca” in the last hundred years (1920-2019). Retrieved on 19th of July 2020 from <http://books.google.com/ngrams>.

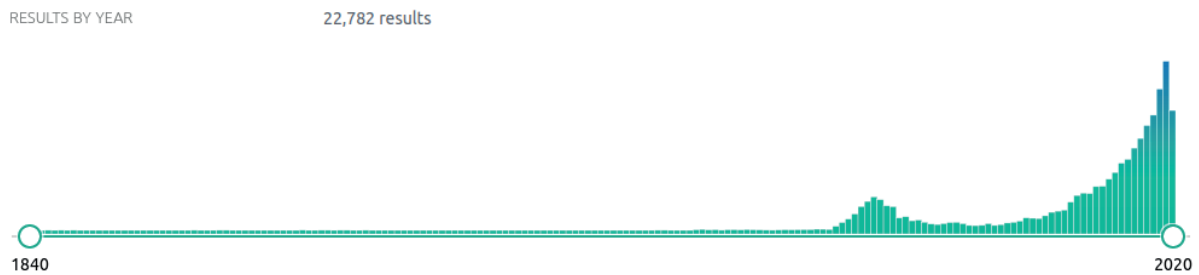


Figure 5: PubMed statistics on published papers in scientific journal on cannabis between 1840-2020.

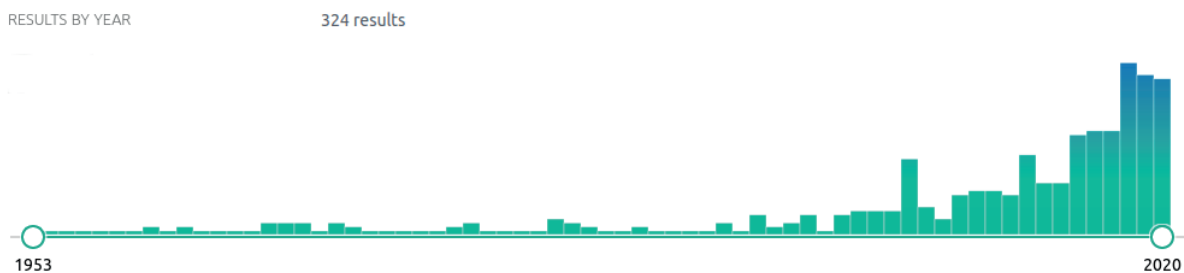


Figure 6: PubMed statistics on published papers in scientific journal on ayahuasca between 1953-2020.

Cannabis and ayahuasca are on the doorstep of medicalisation and physicians or psychiatrists might become the gatekeepers deciding who does or does not get access to them. Such a scenario could make access to cannabis and ayahuasca potentially more difficult for a community like Wonderland, where people learned how to use them safely to improve well-being. Medical access to them is required without doubt, but would the access be limited only to those with a specific diagnosis? In what kind of setting would they be administered? What kind of training would be necessary for medical professionals to treat their patients with

them? Certainly, we cannot expect physicians and psychiatrists to facilitate a ritual, a spiritual journey or anything alike. Would the effects of the substances differ, if administered in a hospital? I believe all these questions are difficult to answer and will need to be addressed in the future. It might lead to a new understanding of health and sickness, treatment and healing, and the inclusion of new (post-modern or post-industrial) elements into modern medicine and science. We live in complex situations and societies where the old formulas no longer work. Perhaps it is not about transforming something into something completely different, but simply allowing new scenarios or approaches to appear and coexist by embracing complexity and diversity. We seem to be facing a paradigm shift in which the cultural perception of drug use and drug policies began to be reformulated. The criticism of prohibition is getting louder and stronger by demanding respect for human rights, pointing out the harms caused by drug policies and urging for new regulatory frameworks. The globalised neoliberal market with its large capital invests into research and development of evidence for the opening of markets (Martínez-Oró, Apud, Scuro, *et al.*, 2020) and the pharmaceutical industry wants a piece of the cake. Without a doubt, the regulation of cannabis and other psychoactive plants would have to consider the medical perspective, but at the same time leave autonomy in cases of personal and small group ritual use that has been proven to be healthy. What about indigenous communities across the world who use these plants for centuries? Are we prepared to learn from them or with them?

In this chapter I want to dive deeper into the construction of scientific knowledge, the western conception of drug use, biomedicine and evidence-based practice, the role of anthropology to build a bridge between modern science and indigenous knowledge about psychoactive plants, and to explore possibilities for future research. The aim of my work is firstly to contribute an anthropological perspective on the use of psychoactive substances, which is more commonly researched by disciplines such as epidemiology, pharmacology, neuroscience, addiction studies, sociology, and criminology, which consider drug use as inherently bad for the individual's health and destructive for the whole society. Non-problematic use of psychoactive substances is an under-researched aspect. Secondly, I believe my work gives an insight into the new forms and contexts of non-problematic use (such as ritual or ceremonial use) that are gaining popularity in the globalised world. Thirdly, my work contributes to the normalisation of the discourse on drug use in general by understanding drug use as a social phenomenon in its particular social and identity context.

Drug use paradigms

In the western world, the understanding of drug use is mainly based on data from institutions like prisons, hospitals and treatment centres. The discourse of criminality and dependency was and still is, dominating the scientific field of drug use. As an attempt to challenge the stereotypes and pathologies proclaimed by the medical and juridical establishment, the concept of “drug user subculture” emerged in the 1950s (Page and

Singer, 2010: 50). The employment of ethnography in the study of non-pathological drug use in genuine environments gave space for the expression of the drug user's perspective. In sociology, Bingham Dai was the first to introduce ethnography in the field of drug use in the study on opium users in Chicago (1937). He explained drug use as a response to the new urban living conditions which led to social disorganization, isolation of individuals and depersonalization of relationships. However, his general understanding of drug use was still that of deviancy, which created a biased image of the "addict". Throughout history, the use of mind-altering substances was found to be an integral part of life in many communities, whereas in western society we are putting a lot of effort into decreasing and limiting the use and replacing it with fear of these substances and plants. All the biased images of the drug user that were portrayed by prohibitionist propaganda for more than fifty years were helping to shape the image of the drug user of today.

Romaní identifies three main paradigms of understanding drug use in contemporary society: the judicial-repressive, the medical, and the sociocultural (1997: 43-45). Since the 19th century (and up to this day) drug use is considered delinquent and analytically (self)confined to problems, which occur as a consequence of politics and ideology not drug use *per se*. Researchers collect bare quantitative data on drug supply (production), drug market (trafficking), new supply methods (online markets/dark-web), seized substances, the emergence of novel psychoactive substances (NPS) and precursor chemicals, as well as minor and major penalties (EMCDDA, 2016). Such crime statistics has the function of social control, as Hall and colleagues stressed several decades ago and can be manipulated for ideological purposes to ignite public support for police interventions (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, *et al.*, 1978). In Cohen's terms, drug users are "folk devils" representing a threat to society's values and inducing a state of moral panic (Cohen, 1973), in the western world popularly known as the war on drugs. What we have learned since prohibition, is that the system of social control, which we have put in place to lower the drug demand and supply chain, is not tackling the issue. Albeit growing in restrictions and regulations, it is remaining fairly ineffective to regulate the consumption of drugs in informal settings and ambivalent from the public health perspective (Global Commission on Drug Policy 2011; 2012; 2013; 2015). Furthermore, the United Nations (UN) drug conventions, the dominant international drug-regulatory framework, is hindering clinical research into the medicinal properties of scheduled substances, as well as challenging constitutional rights, such as the right to privacy and health (Miró, 2014).

As drug use entered the domain of medicine the perception of the drug user as a delinquent shifted to the drug user as a patient. New variables were added to the researcher's toolbox, all directed towards drug-related harms and responses such as prevalence and demand, treatment demand (prevention, specialized treatments, outpatient setting, substitution treatment), HIV outbreaks, HCV prevalence, treatment and prevention of infectious disease, prison health, hospital emergencies, and overdose deaths (EMCDDA, 2016). Since drug use is considered an illness within the medical paradigm, the drug user (just like any other patient in western medicine) receives a predefined treatment composed of diagnostics, prescriptions,

detoxification, rehabilitation, and social reintegration as an “(ex)addict” (Romaní, 1997: 44). The dominant discourse about drugs in medicine now is that of drug dependence, drug tolerance, drug abstinence etc., which was introduced by Lewin (1924). His basic premise was to classify and understand a drug in terms of chemical action, rather than of people’s reaction to it. The understanding of drug dependence as a result of chemical action entered into the scientific sphere, dominating it and leaving little room for reflection on psycho-social reasons for drug use. Concepts such as “drug addiction” were introduced to represent a biological state, a chronic pathology in which the individual is perceived to be powerless to abstain from continuous and harming drug use. Such understanding is enforced by pharmacological, psychological, sociological and certain anthropological studies, which mainly focus on compulsive use or addiction (Weinberg, 2011).

The relation drug use–addiction–disease has been criticised considerably. For Blumer and colleagues, who studied young people engaging in heroin use, which is believed to be one of the most addicting substances, drug dependence was rather a product of various complex social factors than a pathology (Blumer, Sutter, Smith, *et al.*, 2000). Drug use is not necessarily equivalent to dependence and abuse. Similarly, also Lindesmith (1968) argues that the shift in the person’s mental and motivational state is key in the development of a dependency and that the exposure to opiates solely does not ascertain dependence. In the prologue of the novel *Junky* (1977), William S. Burroughs asserts from his personal experience that

it takes at least three months’ shooting twice a day to get any habit at all. And you don’t really know what junk sickness is until you have had several habits. It took me almost six months to get my first habit, and then the withdrawal symptoms were mild. I think it’s no exaggeration to say it takes about a year and several hundred injections to make an addict (1977, xv).

In contrast to studies on rats that were investigating the addictive properties of the drugs itself, Alexander and colleagues (1981) demonstrated in the “crucial” (Comas Arnau, 2019) Rat Park experiment that the apparent addiction observed in caged laboratory rats is rather a result of their living conditions than the effects of the drug itself. Their research findings were kept in a locked drawer for decades by government agencies before it got public. Recently another compelling experiment has been conducted in Cracolândia (Crackland), the oldest and most densely populated drug areas in São Paulo, Brazil. In 2014 the municipality implemented the project De Braços Abertos (With Open Arms) to deal with the area’s criminality, drug issues, homelessness and unemployment. The idea was to provide housing, food, employment and access to health services to homeless crack users in the area. There were no conditions on maintaining abstinence while taking part in the program, which was perceived somehow controversial in public opinion (Ribeiro, Duailibi, Frajzinger, *et al.*, 2016). After the implementation of the project, a significant reduction of crack use and crime rates (e.g. theft) were recorded in the area (Hetzer, 2017). However, reviews of “open drug scenes” that have been observed across Europe (Huber, 1994; Bless, Korf and Freeman, 1995; Waal, Clausen, Gjersing, *et al.*, 2014) maintain a fair amount of ambiguity and restrains towards such practices including De Braços Abertos (Ribeiro, Duailibi, Frajzinger, *et al.*, 2016). Nonetheless, these experiments

show that socially accepted drug use can have, contrary to popular and expert beliefs, positive effects on the individual and society, if the user has a supportive environment and his basic needs met. On the other hand, if the availability of psychoactive substances is restricted, as it is by prohibition, it creates a strong economic incentive for drug trafficking and an added meaning for the user and fixation on the substance. The individual focuses on the acquisition of the substance rather than control and safety. Sufficient availability creates space for rituals and rules to develop that induce stable use patterns (Grund, Kaplan and De Vries, 1993).

The body of evidence on drug use and harm reduction measures is large and illustrative enough to make us aware of the shortcomings of statistical analysis and the biochemical interpretation of drug addiction, which is also challenged by the fact that not everyone who uses drugs becomes addicted (Müller and Schumann, 2011; Volkow, Wang, Fowler, *et al.*, 2012). It is only a small fraction of people who get addicted, while most people use drugs regularly without developing an addiction (Sullivan and Hagen, 2002; Wadley, 2016). People learn from their social environment about the properties of the drugs and how to use them to achieve particular effects or goals. Thinking about drug use in such a framework begins by assuming that drug use is not a problem and that people use drugs to achieve goals that are important to them. What research can and should do is to identify these goals and investigate how people use them to achieve their goals (Wadley, 2016). One such study has been done more than half a century ago among people who use cannabis for pleasure (Becker, 1953). Becker emphasised that a person is only able to use cannabis for pleasure when the person goes through a process of learning how to use it in a pleasurable way. The use of cannabis for the pleasure he defines as non-compulsive and casual. He states: “No one becomes a user without (1) learning to smoke it in a way that will produce real effects; (2) learning to recognize the effects and connect them with drug use (learning, in other words, to get high); and (3) learning to enjoy the sensations he perceives” (1953: 242). Only by completing this process a person is willing and able to use cannabis for pleasure. In any other case, the person will cease to use cannabis either because he or she cannot experience its effects or ceases to enjoy in the experience. The person re-engages in the use of cannabis only if he or she starts to perceive the effects as pleasurable again. Becker’s theory is emphasising the importance of the motives and dispositions in the course of the experience, as well as questioning the theories which ascribe behaviour to antecedent predispositions for the use of cannabis.

The phenomenon of drug use can only be fully understood by considering both quantitative and qualitative data (Bourgois, 2002; Rhodes and Hedrich, 2010). When investigating drug use from a health-care perspective it is also necessary to consider the concepts of self-care and self-medication, as well as incorporate the concept of pleasure into the equation. Such an approach enables us to understand the use of psychoactive substances as inherent to humankind and consequently shifts the contemporary cultural and political discourse about drug use in general (Llort Suárez, 2017). The socio-cultural paradigm puts forward the personal dynamics of the health and disease process and the self-medicating aspect of drug use present in

all human societies (Comelles, 1985; Menéndez, 1990; Levin, 1983). It is one of the basic forms of healthcare besides professional medical care, alternative care and self-help groups (Haro Encinas, 2000). Such “medical pluralism” (Singer and Baer, 2012) is occurring across all cultures (Menéndez, 2005), but is especially prominent in communities where health services are scarce or in cases where the biomedical model failed to provide relief (Apud and Romaní, 2017). The agents in a pluralistic healthcare system are not only biomedical professionals but also religious institutions that are supporting the care or traditional and alternative practitioners that intervene in the care. Self-care or lay health care occurs in all societies but is not always directly related to health. Self-care begins with daily routines and habits, work and rest patterns, social relationships and protective behaviours of health such as prevention and self-treatment in case of illness. Self-care includes the activation of family members and social networks and, in certain cases, that of self-managed and organized groups independent of the professional medical sectors (Haro Encinas, 2000). Haro Encinas (2000) distinguishes between two forms of self-care. One is *autocuidado* (self-care) that refers to daily practices such as hygiene, contraception, sports and similar, and *autoatención* (self-attention) as a collective practice involving informal social networks that refer to the behaviour generated against the disease such as self-medication, which involves autonomous treatments based on plasters, herbs, concoctions and medicines of different types including drugs (Romaní, 1999: 54). The western medical system considers traditional and alternative health care practices as well as self-care as subordinate and antagonistic to biomedicine (Menéndez, 2005), therefore, the use of psychoactive substances (legal or illegal) that are not under medical control are considered as deviant or pathological by biomedicine and need to be changed (Llort Suárez, 2019). However, the use of psychoactive plants and pharmaceuticals are both processes of self-medication, which should be understood as part of the same self-care phenomenon and recognizing people’s capacity for self-regulation of substance use (Llort Suárez, 2019).

The sociocultural paradigm of drug use developed from ethnographic and anthropological work, which interrelates the individual and the substance in a concrete social context (Romaní, 1997: 44). Drug use is investigated in terms of personal biographies, techniques and forms of use, occasions in which drug use occurs, subjective effects, dosing, attainment strategies, etc. Such an approach contributes to the normalization of the drug use discourse, advances the understanding and practice of harm reduction methods, and has a critical stance towards the disease model as an explanation for drug use. Ethnographies are depicting all the complex nuances of drug use in the world such as the cultural contexts that determine harmful consequences, perceptions and representations of drugs, reflections on prevention, health practices and clinical interventions, insightful observations of clandestine groups, and gender perspectives of drug users. One such pioneering ethnography was portraying the life of a young female heroin user (Hughes MacGill, 1961).

One of the first structured studies on the cultural and ritual use of psychoactive plants has been made by Weston La Barre in the late 1930s when he was conducting fieldwork among 15 native American

ethnicities investigating the social origins, beliefs and practices of peyote utilization in rituals, which he published in *The Peyote Cult* (La Barre, 1938). La Barre devoted his professional career to studying religious uses of peyote and became one of the first advocates of the traditional use of psychoactive substances (Llort Suárez, 2017). Another pioneer doing fieldwork in Mexico and the Amazon, at about the same time as La Barre, was Richard Evans Schultes studying plants that are used by the indigenous for medical purposes. By collecting and documenting more than 30.000 plants mainly from the Colombian Amazon he created a valuable compendium combining the biochemical effects with ethnographic insights on cultural meanings, rituals and other aspects of the human versus plant interaction (Schultes 1938; 1940; 1963; 1977 and 1988). He popularized ethnobotany as a discipline for a systematic study of these practices (Schultes and von Reis, 1995). A later generation of researchers was investigating the ritual use of psychoactive plants as cultural and/or religious practices and in the context of folk healing and witchcraft (Aberle, 1966; Chagnon, Le Quesne and Cook, 1971; Dobkin de Rios, 1968; 1970 and 1971; Harner, 1974; Feeney, 2016; Furst, 1972; Luna, 1984a; Myerhoff, 1983; Schultes and Raffauf, 2004) and ritual use of ayahuasca in Brazil (Fábregas, González, Fondevila, *et al.*, 2010; Bouso, González, Fondevila, *et al.*, 2012) and Spain (Apud and Romani, 2017; Bouso, Palhano-Fontes, Rodríguez-Fornells, *et al.*, 2015; López-Pavillard, 2008; López-Pavillard and De Las Casas, 2011). In these studies, large samples of regular ayahuasca ceremony participants were compared with non-practitioners for several variables that assess mental health and neuropsychological functions, and the results showed no differences regarding mental health or even scoring better on some of them. A recent study assessing 380 regular ayahuasca users in Spain concerning public health indicators concluded that using ayahuasca in communitarian settings could be incorporated into a modern society with public health benefits. One of the most compelling findings is that more than half of the sample stopped or reduced their use of prescription medicines after starting to take part in ayahuasca ceremonies (Oña, Kohek, Massaguer, *et al.*, 2019; Bouso, Jiménez-Garrido, Oña, *et al.*, 2020). These results are reflecting results of other research groups where ayahuasca ritual attendees (Grob, McKenna, Callaway, *et al.*, 1996; Barbosa, Tófoli, Bogenschutz, *et al.*, 2018) or peyote ritual attendees (Halpern, Sherwood, Hudson, *et al.*, 2005) were compared with non-attenders.

The first ethnographic study among cannabis users in Spain was Romani's *A tumba abierta, Autobiografía de un grifota* (1983a), an in-depth inquiry into the Barcelona cannabis culture of the late Franco period exploring the emergence and meanings of new lifestyles and habits surrounding cannabis use. More recently, researchers have investigated organized recreational and therapeutic contexts, such as Cannabis Social Clubs (CSC), which represent a closed circuit of cannabis cultivation, distribution and consumption (Feldman and Mandel, 1998; Decorte, 2015; Belackova and Wilkins, 2018; Coomber, Moyle, Belackova, *et al.*, 2018; Jansseune, Pardal, Decorte, *et al.*, 2018; Decorte and Pardal, 2017; Decorte, Pardal, Queirolo, *et al.*, 2017; Pardal, 2018; Pardal, Decorte, Bone, *et al.*, 2020; Parés-Franquero, Jubert-Cortiella, Olivares-Gálvez, *et al.*, 2019). While the ritual use of ayahuasca is well known, the ritual, spiritual or

religious use of cannabis remains a less common and less researched phenomenon (for a brief overview of spiritual use of cannabis see Dos Santos, 2016; Bouso, 2019; Mahmud, 2008).

In Catalonia the use of ayahuasca and cannabis is widespread. Outside the Cannabis Social Clubs or some Santo Daime churches⁷ new practices are being invented by people who use them. Living with some of these people in remote places of Catalonia I learned about their worldviews, values and personal transformations evoked by the ritual use of psychoactive plants. I have met several dozens of people that form part of this phenomenological community and many of them had prior experience with different psychoactive substances, using them for recreational purposes in the past. Since they started using them in a ritual context, they were able to have more control over the use and generally ceased to use substances like amphetamines or cocaine. Regular and long-term use of psychoactive substances is not equivalent to misuse or dependence. In the case of Wonderland, it is not a matter of substance use, but participation in rituals. Some individuals in the Wonderland community who were polydrug users beforehand stopped taking other substances and now use substances like cannabis exclusively in ritualistic or ceremonial settings, and occasionally go to ayahuasca or Santo Daime ceremonies, or peyote ceremonies, which corresponds with the findings in other existing literature (Fábregas, González, Fondevila, *et al.*, 2010; Grob, McKenna, Callaway, *et al.*, 1996; Halpern, Sherwood, Hudson, *et al.*, 2005; Barbosa, Tófoli, Bogenschutz, *et al.*, 2018; Talin and Sanabria, 2017). Besides controlled use of substances, many individuals gained important insights that helped them to find life purpose and improve their psychological, physical and spiritual well-being. The individuals engaged in regular physical activity maintained a healthy diet and cultivated good relationships with relatives and friends. As I describe below, the use of psychoactive plants in a ritual and group setting facilitates personal well-being, prosocial and pro-environmental behaviour by teaching people how to take care of themselves, about the roles of women and men in a community, as well as the importance of taking care of the environment.

While biomedicine does give us answers on the effects of psychoactive plants in the human body, the context in which these plants are used has a significant influence on what kind of benefits we will obtain from them. Relating the use of psychoactive plants to practices and beliefs helps us to apprehend the everyday life of the users, their reality, interactions, spaces, structures etc. This lends an understanding of consumption practices outside of the questionable discourse of deviant behaviour or disease model and brings into forefront the self-regulating, ritual and community aspects of psychoactive plant use.

Throughout this work I do not consider the use of psychoactive plants (or any other substance) neither as a disease nor a deviant behaviour, as the biomedical model of addiction would suggest, but as a "practice of the self" (Foucault, 1985), which examines physical, psychological and sociocultural perspectives of drug

⁷ Only the CEFLURIS line following Padrinho Sebastião uses cannabis (Santa María) in the rituals. In the classic lines of Santo Daime following Mestre Irineu the use of cannabis is not accepted. According to Estela, most spiritual lines (not only Santo Daime) disapprove and stigmatise the use of cannabis including those that use other currently illegal plants and substances in the rituals themselves.

use in the context of self-care and self-medication processes. I also tend to avoid the word “drug” because of its negative connotation and the understanding of the term by the inhabitants of Wonderland themselves. While I was doing the fieldwork in Catalonia, I was collecting data for another study about ayahuasca and public health. For this second study, I was doing questionnaires with people who have long-term experience in using ayahuasca. The questionnaire was a compilation of questions that are used to assess public health among the general population. After asking about their use of ayahuasca, a question followed that seemed particularly problematic: Have you used other drugs in the last six months? [*¿Ha consumido otras drogas en los últimos seis meses?*] In most cases, I got a surprised, if not outraged, response that ayahuasca is not a drug. Pharmaceuticals are drugs, synthetic substances are drugs, but ayahuasca or other plants are not drugs, but medicines. Gloria, one of the facilitators of ceremonies, told me in the interview:

[Ayahuasca] is not a drug, it is not bad for your health, nor any lie of this kind. These are political interests and interests of other beings that, God help them, are doing their transition. We are building something that has been covered and locked up with thousands of keys in a kind of inquisition, which we have allowed to happen.

Gloria wants to avoid using the word “medicines” because it implies curing, and prefers the word “sacrament”, which changes the discourse from a medical one towards a religious one. The word “medicines” is used to signify psychoactive plants by everyone I met during fieldwork. That is, in my opinion, the consequence of a broad understanding of health and the process of healing where there is no strict separation between spirituality, medicine, and even art, common among the researched group and which I discuss in a later chapter. It also comes from the discourse that is being used by the indigenous people, where many of these plants are come from, and where they refer to them as “medicines” as well. In this work, I use most commonly the term “psychoactive plants” when referring to cannabis, ayahuasca, peyote, and tobacco. The term “drug” [*droga*] is used by community members only when talking about pharmaceuticals and other substances that are not used as sacraments or medicines. The term “drug” still holds a negative connotation in the eyes of many Wonderland’s inhabitants, which is why they use the term “medicines” to signify various plants, such as cannabis, tobacco, ayahuasca, peyote and coca. They do not differentiate between them in terms of biochemical differences, pharmacology, toxicology or mechanisms of brain action. When I am referring to psychoactive plants, I do not suggest in any way that all of them have the same pharmacological properties and effects.

Evidence-based policy in a biomedical stronghold: the need for real-world evidence

The use of psychoactive drugs is a multidimensional phenomenon and involves a multitude of disciplines, such as morals and ethics, medicine, neuroscience, public health, epidemiology, law, psychology, economics, political science, sociology, anthropology, environmental studies, statistics, international relations,

criminology, geography, agronomy, chemistry, and biology. To comprehensively understand the phenomenon, we need to use a methodological approach that allows us to surpass the differences and insufficiencies among the distinct scientific disciplines (Thoumi, 2014). There are two main critiques in the field of drug policy and health sciences that need to be addressed if we want to develop functional approaches. One is a critique of the hierarchy of evidence and the other is the critique of biomedical hegemony. At last, intercultural translation and bridging science with indigenous knowledge deem necessary when considering psychoactive plants such as ayahuasca, peyote, or cannabis.

1. Critique of the hierarchy of evidence

The medical discourse is promoting particular types of evidence such as randomized controlled trials (RCTs) as the most relevant evidence to base treatments and policies on. This is the result of the notion that scientific evidence can be categorised into hierarchies and a dispute about the nature of science, the scientific method, and the inductive and deductive approaches to the establishment of scientific knowledge that we are witnessing for several centuries (Gower, 1997). RCTs and observational studies both have advantages and disadvantages or strengths and weaknesses that should be understood and taken into considerations by decision-makers to make reasonable and reliable conclusions (Rawlins, 2008). Since the RCT's introduction in the middle of the 20th century, they count as the “golden standard” for evaluating the benefits or harms of a particular treatment, activity or intervention. However, the golden standard has several limitations that are being systematically neglected such as the null hypothesis, probability, generalisability, and resource implications (Rawlins, 2008). The null hypothesis is questionable because it assumes that there is no difference between treatments which, according to Rothman (1990: 45), “suspend[s] belief in the real world”. The probability value (*p*-value) is often misused and interpreted incorrectly, which has been warned about “for decades, to little avail” (Wasserstein and Lazar, 2016: 130). The issue of generalisability is another limitation, which is not given much attention when designing study samples and protocols. RCTs are usually conducted for a relatively short period in a selected population of young white males, while women, older people, and ethnic minorities are under-represented (Bartlett, Doyal, Ebrahin, *et al.*, 2005; Heiat, Gross and Krumholz, 2002). Actual clinical practice, however, is done in a heterogeneous population of patients and frequently for much longer periods. There are several parameters (concerning the patient, the treatment and the setting) that are not taken into consideration in RCT study designs and can adversely affect generalisability of results of RCTs such as age, sex, the severity of the disease, risk factors, comorbidities, ethnicity, socio-economic status, dose timing of administration, duration of therapy, comedication, comparative effectiveness, and quality of care (Rawlins, 2008), as well as provide missing information on placebo (Moerman, 2002; Jefferson and Jørgensen, 2018). Prior to the establishment of randomized controlled trials (RCTs) in medical research, the chemists and the doctors were experimenting with the newly developed pharmaceuticals on their own bodies. With the development of RCTs safety and efficacy was

based on the universal biological body and determined statistically by administering the drug to a large population (Marks, 2000). In contemporary RCTs social and environmental conditions, placebo effects, user expectations and practices, etc. are being completely ignored (Adams, 2016; Moerman and Jonas, 2002; Saethre and Stadler, 2010; Brives, Le Marcis and Sanabria, 2016; Hardon and Pool, 2016), while it is clear that it is not enough to know the molecule to know how it acts and what effects it has. From experiments with psychedelics, we learned that the set and setting does influence the effects of a substance as does the person who administers it (Winkelman and Roberts, 2007). Last but not least, the amount of money, time and energy spent on RCTs are substantial due to increasing regulatory and other requirements (Califf, 2006) and clinical study reports are more often than not commercial documents (Jefferson and Jørgensen, 2018) that give an advantage to those with financial resources, such as pharmaceutical companies, and limits those without. Qualitative observational studies are mainly criticised for having a bias, being completely subjective, and lacking methodological rigour, however, analysis shows that when a scientific approach to discovery in social sciences is adopted, “they differ from the natural sciences only by a matter of degree” (Fanelli, 2010: 1) and that “categorical criticism of social sciences is excessive” (Fanelli, 2010: 7).

Evidence-based medicine has adopted a hierarchy of evidence where RCTs are on the top of the list and dominate the development of clinical guidelines and policy measures, while observational studies, which are practice-based and can assess long-term harms, are on the bottom of the list and therefore often overlooked (Fanelli, 2010; Rawlins, 2008). Such a hierarchy contributes to a distorted perception of the researched phenomenon and can have serious real-world consequences. Hence, it is essential to synthesise experimentation, observation, mathematical descriptions, and ethics to create relevant and reliable evidence to base our policies on (Jefferson and Jørgensen, 2018; Rawlins, 2008). The reliance of evidence-based medicine on journal articles needs a redefinition not only due to the sheer bulk of information but also because of bias that is a consequence of the radical selection of the information. This can be done by ceasing to produce reviews based only on articles and look into the data sources or data sets, which allow alternative explanations and conclusions (Jefferson and Jørgensen, 2018), as well as considering causal mechanisms and the context in which evidence is obtained, interpreted and applied. Multiple methods and various types of evidence should be used to add value (Anjum, Copeland and Rocca, 2020) and to provide clear information on the benefits and harms of medications and treatments for patients (Bowdler, 1998). Medical intervention and its effectiveness cannot be understood solely by RCTs and systematic reviews but depend on, as mentioned above, on various factors including psychological and social factors. Patient narratives are particularly useful tools to look beyond symptoms or outcomes, and to elucidate the patient’s experience of the treatment and core causes for chronic or unexplained conditions (Martínez-Hernández, Masana and DiGiacomo, 2013; Anjum, Copeland, and Rocca, 2020).

Biomedicine and pharmaceutical science have taken “a wrong turn in its relationship to human disease” (Horrobin, 2003: 151) and are failing to develop effective and individualized therapies and losing

touch with the patients. The “scientist-priests” (Horrobin, 2003) are part of a complex organisation and being financially supported but have largely abandoned the interaction with real medical problems. Science and medicine became part of the basic fabric of democracy “just as the Church was once part of the basic fabric of society” (Feyerabend, 1978: 77). Medical and pharmaceutical research is focusing the research into cell culture and *in vivo* function, into animal models and genetically modified mice and the molecular biology of the genome (Horrobin, 2003). These approaches are cost-expensive, technologically demanding and questionably congruent with the complexity of a whole human organism and the real world of medical illness. If we want to achieve progress and further our understanding we must study human disease in human subjects (Horrobin, 2003) and give a greater emphasis “to the social, environmental, digital and behavioural determinants of health” (Jones and Wilsdon, 2018: 5) by engaging a diverse public and stakeholders; supporting interdisciplinary health research; undertaking an independent evaluation of policies, funding schemes and long-term goals; encouraging research of mental health, injuries and accidents; exploring cost-effective interventions (Jones and Wilsdon, 2018); and prioritising societal goals over economic and market conditions (Canals Sala and Romaní, 1996).

2) Critique of biomedical hegemony and the need to consider evidence from other disciplines

In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1970 [1962]) Thomas Kuhn argued that there is no rational criterion that would lend a unique choice of better or more advanced paradigm. Ann Oakley (2000) stressed that researchers imply their own ideologies, interests, aspirations and values, therefore, a critical and ethical approach to all types of methodologies needs to be taken. In *Against Method* (1993 [1975]) Paul Feyerabend discussed the history of science and thinkers who went against established methodological rules and dogmas to achieve novel scientific discoveries. According to Feyerabend, there is one principle by which novel scientific discoveries have been made and termed it the “anything goes” principle. He did not agitate against conventional rules but argued that all methodologies have boundaries, which sometimes need to be crossed or pushed if we want to advance scientific knowledge (1993). Perhaps the scientific and medical community in the West should consider these appeals from philosophers of science for a paradigm shift (Kuhn, 1970) or an epistemological break (Bachelard, 1986 [1938]) in the field of medical research, especially when basing policies on quantitative research and evidence, which is being increasingly questioned.

In the case of drug use, the evidence on which treatments and policies are based and enforced is misleading and often inaccurate, as I explained earlier. The current addiction paradigm of drug use, its causes and its consequences, is considered “as ‘true knowledge’, or is thought of as representing reality by virtue of being scientific” (Mahmud, 2008: 442). More than truth, it is a belief that is validated to be true. There is no consensus on the process of validation across disciplines and each one has a different way to determine what proof is. Subsequently, there is no absolute proof, answer or solution other than within each paradigm. Therefore, a belief that is true within a specific scientific paradigm can be false in another (Thoumi, 2014).

These dominant regimes of truth (Seidman, 1996) are authorising specific rules that are generating and validating knowledge, institutionalising specific practices of knowledge production, giving institutional authority to specific agents with socially validated ‘expertise’, grant legitimacy to specific social practices connected to dominant knowledge, and generate subjugated, subordinated and marginalized knowledge and identities. Each culture generates its “truths”, which become common knowledge and can obstruct the understanding of the world or social phenomenon and the seeking of solutions (Thoumi, 2014). Science sets boundaries and defines what counts as knowledge and discredits other discourses (Seidman, 1994) as it is in the case of drug use and addiction.

Health sciences along with medical doctors and related organisations have greatly influenced drug policy. Medicine mainly researches the negative effects drugs have on a human body. Since medical doctors are accustomed to making decisions for their patients, they inherently also maintain the power to decide whether or not people can use psychoactive drugs for non-medical, recreational, ritual, experimental, or self-medicating purposes (Thoumi, 2014). The medical perspective, from the stance of the superiority of “hard” sciences, does not take into account the social costs or benefits of drug use or drug policies. Thus, every time medical professionals make policy recommendations, they assume the role of social scientists for which they have no training or education. Moreover, there is inconsistency in the prohibition of some substances and not the other. If the medical paradigm is the only one policy is based on, substances such as tobacco, alcohol, coffee, sugar and other should be prohibited too (Thoumi, 2014). Ultimately, large amounts of water are deadly for the human too. It appears that there is a fair degree of moralism, intuition and emotions involved in decision making, formation and implementation of drug policies.

Medical scientists and other experts tend to study, analyse and comment on addiction and drug users without having a dialogue with them, as if drug users are unable to represent themselves, thus need to be represented by scientific authority (South, 1999). The knowledge of “the individual citizen is of less value than the ‘knowledge’ of science” (Illich, 1975: 101). Medical professionals, policymakers and other professionals take it as an obligation to “rescue those who engage in regular use of substances and are thought to be ruining themselves, even if the correctives require coercion and repression” (Mahmud, 2008: 444). Contemporary discourse on drug use is historically, socially and politically constructed and is being perpetuated by policymakers who “justify laws against drug abuse in terms of medical evidence, but the medical experts frame their definition of drug abuse in terms of laws” (Reinarman, 2005: 312) or as Cohen states: “Modern man needs the concept of addiction, and its evil, as Medieval men needed the devil or the heretic” (2000: 597). Wolff emphasises the damage that science and medicine caused by the non-acceptance of different kinds of knowledge and eradication of indigenous and ancient ways of knowing:

Science is so sure that it is the only truth that it has become incapable of accepting other ways of learning about reality. Medicine, as a scientific discipline, for instance, is certain that all other forms of healing are quackery and are not to be tolerated; they must be rooted out, destroyed. Such arrogant insistence has eradicated much knowledge and wisdom in the world (2001: 5).

In the complex case of illegal drug use, the involved disciplines involve only a partial perspective in which the issue is understood. Medical professionals know the effect of drugs on the body, epidemiologists on public health, environmentalist about the deterioration of the environment, criminologist about criminal organizations, and so on. Each discipline has its priorities and assumptions (from which it is unlikely to obtain generalised conclusions since each one fails to capture some important truth of the phenomenon), a constructive dialogue between them is, therefore, difficult to achieve and the validity of the conclusions made has to be empirically verified each time (Thoumi, 2014).

By incorporating social sciences into the discussion about drug use and drug policy, we need to acknowledge that all societies have used some tools to alter their perception of reality and their moods and in many of them, psychoactive plants had (and still have) important social roles. On the other hand, we learn from decades of prohibition that it does not eliminate drugs or drug use. On the contrary, we see today an explosion of novel psychoactive substances (NPS) that people use for recreational or experimental purposes. The efforts to extinct drug use and create a drug-free world is therefore futile. Hence, social sciences are not trying to eliminate drug use, but explore ways how to use them with the most benefits and least harms possible. The drug policy reform has to take these so-called “soft” sciences into careful consideration if it aims to implement efficient and evidence-based policies.

3) Necessity to bridge indigenous and scientific knowledge

The worldview of Wonderland’s inhabitants is animistic in the sense that they believe in the existence of spirits within many natural objects. In their view everything is alive. Even the stones, which they refer to as grandmothers who contain in themselves the whole history, are alive. The fire, which they refer to as grandfather, is alive. In this sense, their worldview is similar to the people growing up and living in indigenous communities across the world. While these beliefs have a positive influence on issues such as environmental protection, they are in grave conflict with modern scientific knowledge concerning the notion of spirit and its understanding among other. In the case of mental health, a similar misunderstanding exists in which biomedicine explains mental disorders as biochemical imbalances, while indigenous medicine explains it as spiritual forces that are being at work (Bouso and Sánchez-Avilés, 2020).

A popular example that tries to explain indigenous knowledge in scientific terms is the “trial and error” theory, which is trying to reason how indigenous peoples discovered and learned how and for what purposes to use certain plants in the forest. While Carl Sagan does acknowledge the enormous potential of “folk knowledge” for modern medicine, he still uses the rational scientific method, such as long-term experimentation and systematic elimination of failed attempts, to explain the discovery of plant’s medicinal properties:

Quinine comes from an infusion of the bark of a particular tree from the Amazon rain forest. How did pre-modern people ever discover that a tea made from this tree, of all the plants in the

forest, would relieve the symptoms of malaria? They must have tried every tree and every plant – roots, stems, bark, leaves – tried chewing on them, mashing them up, making an infusion. This constitutes a massive set of scientific experiments continuing over generations, experiments that moreover could not be duplicated today for reasons of medical ethics. Think of how many bark infusions from other trees must have been useless, or made the patient retch or even die. In such a case, the healer chalks these potential medicines off the list, and moves on to the next. The data of ethnopharmacology may not be systematically or even consciously acquired. By trial and error, though, and carefully remembering what worked, eventually they get there – using the rich molecular riches in the plant kingdom to accumulate a pharmacopoeia that works. Absolutely essential, life-saving information can be acquired from folk medicine and in no other way. We should be doing much more than we are to mine the treasures in such folk knowledge worldwide (Sagan, 1997: 239-340).

Wolff (2001) on the other hand questions the “trial and error” theory and offers a different explanation, which is based on the indigenous concepts and ways of knowing:

The explanation Western scientists give for how people all over the world discovered the healing qualities of plants without the benefit of our sophisticated science is always the same: trial and error—as if primitive people tried this tree bark, or that leaf, and perhaps experimented with cooking it, eating it raw, shredding it, baking it until, in the end, they kept what worked. In reality, the preparation of many native foods and medicines is often so complicated, requiring so many steps, that it is hard to imagine how people would use trial and error to learn what is good and safe to eat, or which herbs prepared which ways prove to be medicinal. How would people discover through trial and error that *curare*, a quick and deadly poison that can be applied to blow darts or arrows, must be prepared by collecting the sap of the plant and cooking it down to a thick paste, being careful, the whole time, not to touch it with their hands? (Touching often means ingesting, for those who do not frequently wash their hands.) In some parts of the world the staple food is made from a root vegetable (cassava, in South America) that contains very toxic prussic acid. The root must be washed, peeled, shredded, soaked in water, wrung out (using great pressure), washed and squeezed again, dried to a powder, then mixed with water and cooked. All those steps through trial and error? One wonders how many thousands of people must have died from trying the wrong thing, or the wrong sequence of steps in the preparation. Did people discover edible mushrooms through trial and error? All through history there have been people who knew with an inner knowing (Wolff, 2001: 173-174).

Another example is that of ayahuasca, which is most often made from a combination of two plants from the Amazon rainforest. One contains the psychoactive substance N, N-dimethyltryptamine (DMT) and the other contains beta-Carboline alkaloids which turn off a liver enzyme and enable the absorption of DMT in the human body. Many people are wondering how the indigenous peoples knew which two plants to combine, among several tens of thousands that grow in the rainforest, to produce the psychoactive effect. Through trial and error? Using mathematics to calculate the number of combinations, by assuming that there are about 40,000 different plant species in the Amazon basin, we end up with 799,980,000 possible combinations. If this would be done by experimentation or trial and error, we would probably not know ayahuasca up to this day. Perhaps then the “inner knowing”, a deep knowledge that is a result of experience, intuition and total identification with the surrounding environment, is something to consider as plausible or relevant. Consequently, several scholars argue that there is an urgent need to generate new epistemologies and ontologies that will include the “epistemologies of the South” which are based on two premises (Santos, 2016). One premise is that the world is much broader than the western understanding of it, and the other is

that the diversity of the world (including thinking, being, feeling) is infinite. The key concepts of the “epistemologies of the South” are deep listening, sharing and helping, which represent a basic response to what is occurring in our society.

Medicalisation of the human body and the romanticisation of the “noble savage” contributed to the elimination of traditions and omittance of valuable knowledge that might reform modern science (Fotiou, 2019). Scientific knowledge is just one among many other forms of knowledge such as religious, spiritual, everyday, and so on (Demmer and Hummel, 2017: 612). The drug use paradigm needs a redefinition and an extended community of stakeholders, consisting not only of medical professionals, scientists and policymakers but also other legitimate participants have to be involved in the debate. Such an approach implies “a decentralized notion of expertise and the multiplication of authorized voices” (Casas-Cortés, Osterweil and Powell, 2013: 202), which directs the discourse towards a more democratic process of knowledge construction. In the past century, Feyerabend pled for a free society where “all traditions have equal rights and equal access to the centres of power” and “where there is room for many strange beliefs, doctrines, institutions” (1978: 9 and 77). He acknowledged the excellent contributions of science in our understanding of the world and its practical achievements but cautioned that “most rivals of science have by now either disappeared or have been changed so that a conflict with science (and therefore the possibility of results that differ from the results of science) no longer arises” (1978: 101).

Fotiou reiterates that the paradigm shift in psychedelic science needs to “acknowledge the validity of Indigenous worldviews as equal partners to scientific inquiry” (2020: 16). To revise the biomedical model and decolonise (psychedelic) science the indigenous peoples must be included in the construction of the new paradigm and their knowledge recognised as valid (Nicholas, 2018 and 2019). It is time to stop regarding biomedicine as objective and factual and ethnomedicine as subjective, symbolic, or constructed, and start regarding them as equal and equivalent to each other (Good, 1994; Taylor, 2003; Romani, 2020). We must start to ask new questions and serve new goals (Fotiou, 2020: 20). How do the indigenous peoples understand and practice health, sickness and healing? What role does the community play in these processes? How can we translate indigenous knowledge into the western culture? How can we avoid imposing western concepts onto indigenous traditions and yet again colonise them? Us westerners need to show some “cultural humility” (George, Michaels, Sevelius, *et al.*, 2020) and “acknowledge how little we know especially when we tread into conceptual territories that native peoples inhabit” (Fotiou, 2020: 20).

I have been alluding earlier that psychedelics and cannabis are on its way to being devoured by the medicalisation machinery, which will commercialise these plants (or better their active ingredients) into standardised capsules and other products used to “cure” what is incurable by biomedicine (Fotiou, 2020). Such an appropriation is in direct opposition to the indigenous peoples’ understanding of these plants and is completely neglecting the holistic mind-body-spirit perspective of the human being as well as disregarding the social role and meaning of these plants (Feinberg, 2018: 40). The question is how to consolidate such

opposing worldviews and different types of knowledge? The answer is not in the abandonment of one or the other, but in “intercultural translation” (Santos, 2016) that will bring both sides closer to each other without compromising their specificity. Science is important, yet it is just one kind of knowledge – although a very important one – and it needs to work together with other ways of knowing. Intercultural translation enables us to confront knowledge diversity without the need to create a general theory and makes us aware of the incompleteness of knowledge (Santos, 2016). For example, indigenous ways of looking at nature as a living being and the inseparability of nature and the human being, which the inhabitants of Wonderland also share, is a foreign notion to the Cartesian paradigm of nature. In the field of global mental health, we witness another interesting phenomenon whereby traditional medicines are gaining popularity and travelling the globe incorporating into ritualistic settings (same or similar than in indigenous contexts) also in the western countries. According to some authors, this may imply the global expansion of traditional forms of healing instead of the western one, which could transform and expand the mental health model as we know it (Bouso and Sánchez-Avilés, 2020).

THE MULTIVERSITY OF WONDERLAND

*I was told to be in charge of my life, rather than live it.
I must fight to survive, they assured me.
They said the world is a jungle but when I again knew the jungle,
I knew that the jungle of wild Life is not at all like
the jungle of Western civilization, and certainly not as dangerous.
For many years I had to work so hard to do the things I was supposed to do
that I became deaf and blind to what is important inside me.
My luck was to find people who were human in an ancient way.
My luck was to recognize and reclaim a humanity rooted in the earth.
All who are in touch with the natural world can sense energies,
emotions, and intentions of people and animals.
If we listen, we can know – all we need to do is give up being in charge.
Knowing inside is not something unusual; it is how we are.
All humans can have that connection with All-That-Is.
The connection is within us.*

– Robert Wolff, *Original Wisdom*

Multiversity is a term Estela is using to refer to the Stone House. She explained that the Stone House is not a university, but a multiversity where people can learn about a multitude of subjects. Many houses in Wonderland have their doors always open. The key is always found in the door and everyone who wants to come is welcome. A person who lives in the Stone House is subjected to different cultural traditions and influences that shape the way of living in the house. There are no clocks and calendars in the house, only a planting calendar. What might be the first challenges one encounters there is to live with a limited amount of electricity that is just enough to light up a couple of light bulbs and charge a phone on a sunny day. The second challenge is living without running water and flushing toilets. Living in the Stone House is basic and is probably closer to how my grand-grandparents were living over a hundred years ago, than how we are living now in the West. We did have some modern commodities such as a chainsaw, cars, mobile phones, and a small solar panel system. Running water was introduced very recently, a couple of months after I finished my fieldwork in late 2019. However, the house does not have unlimited water supply because the only source of it comes from the rain. When I was living in the house, we had a 10-litre bucket to shower with. The water was heated in a cauldron above the fire pit (see Photo 2). Today there is a water tap in the shower and gets heated by a gas heater. Luxury! The hot water from the cauldron is still used to wash the dishes. The living room, where the fire pit is, is the warmest room during winter. The rest of the rooms and the kitchen are heated with gas heaters. Once you lie in bed covered with layers of blankets it is nice and cosy, but in the morning, when I had to get out of bed with sunrise (or preferably before sunrise), that was not something I was looking forward to⁸. Each morning after waking up we were walking for five minutes from the house up

⁸ The Stone House is situated in a natural park close to the Pyrenees mountain range at an altitude of approximately 800m above sea level and around 30 km air distance from the sea. The winter temperatures can drop a few degrees

the mountain to the chapel [*ermita*] for the morning prayer. Depending on the situation the prayer was dedicated to a person from the community who was sick or in need, to ask for protection and guidance during the day, to ask for strength, wisdom and success to fulfil a task or more general prayers for peace and understanding among people. An hour later we were done and returned to the house to prepare breakfast. During breakfast, we discussed what needs to be done and made a plan for the day. Getting firewood from the forest, cleaning the house, preparing the chapel for a ceremony, gardening, repairing things, cooking, descending to the town to get groceries and other essentials like drinking water from a spring, handcrafting, helping a friend, babysitting or just socialising. There is always some kind of activity, always something to do. However, these activities are done out of self-responsibility, because people want to do them, not because they are obliged to do them. The motivation to do something is not to earn money, but to do what you like doing. This already makes a key difference in how they approach life.



Photo 2: The fireplace with the cauldron in the living room of the Stone House.

People of Wonderland strive to survive outside the western consumer society while living right in the middle of it. They strive to break free from the *kakotopia* where humans

below zero in the night and around 10° Celsius during the day. The summer temperatures go over 30° Celsius during the day and around 20° Celsius during the night.

live in a plastic bubble [...] confined from birth to death in a world-wide schoolhouse, treated in a world-wide hospital, surrounded by television screens, and the man-made environment would be distinguishable in name only from a world-wide prison (Illich, 1975: 115-116).

In their everyday life, they seek to recover a lifestyle that is closer to the living of traditional peoples across the world, who are (or were) connected to their immediate environment and live(d) their lives in accordance to it. For example, Robert Wolff writes in his book *Original Wisdom* (2001) about the Sng'oi tribe of Peninsular Malaysia:

Some people – and they are the people we think of as the poorest – live well without doing much of anything. They do not have jobs, they do not work nine to five, they certainly do not work for anyone else. They do not farm; they do not have to take care of animals. They spend their days doing what they do best. Some like making things – they make canoes, or cloth, or pots, or carved objects. Some like hunting or fishing. Some people have a talent for staying in touch with another reality; they are priests, shamans, or healers. Some have a talent for making other people feel good. People who live very close to the earth or the ocean, with very few of what we think of as necessities of life, live well. Sadly, it is no exaggeration to say that as soon as we come and bring them civilization, they plummet into abject poverty and ill health. [...] They lived off the land or the ocean. They did not have to rely on the outside for any of their needs. They could find all the food they needed to sustain themselves, they could find or make material for shelter and clothing. [...] And beyond what they could find and make in their environment, they did not need anything, nor did they want anything more. They lived life. Life did not live them, as it does us. They enjoyed each other and constantly reinforced the bonds they had with each other by touching: They huddled around a little fire, they slept in a big ball, they often fed little tidbits of food to each other, and they combed each other's hair. [...] They did not slave in gardens; they did not work to get ahead; they were not stressed by keeping office hours or schedules. There was nothing they had to do. They enjoyed living; they smiled a great deal, and laughed, and made jokes. This led me to throw away as well my idea that people who do not have the advantages we have – our many choices of education, infinite forms of entertainment – would have to work so hard that they had no time for fun. They sang almost all the time – little tuneless tunes. [...] What remains most vivid in my memory of the Sng'oi is their contentment, their joy. [...] The aborigines were obviously not interested in getting rich, but they cared deeply about their world. They could not imagine being party to a scheme that would kill the soil. [...] Nobody in the village seemed to work hard, or to work long hours—except perhaps during the short, intense days of planting and harvesting rice. The activities that kept the people in this village alive—getting firewood for a little cooking, hulling rice, planting, tending the rice fields, fishing occasionally, growing some vegetables—all these were not thought of as work; it was what they did each day. Together these activities made the rhythm of their lives, a pleasant routine, essentially unchanged for many generations. They felt no need to change (2001: 80-184).

In an interview about degrowth, Serge Latouche described a tribe in Laos that he discovered in the mid-60s, where people were happy, despite poverty, and surviving due to relations and solidarity among them:

There I discovered a society that was neither developed nor underdeveloped, but literally 'adeveloped', that is, outside of development: rural communities that planted glutinous rice and dedicated to listening how crops grew since, once planted, there was hardly anything else to do. A country out of time where people were happy, as happy as a people can be. But you could already see what was about to happen and is, in fact, happening at the present moment: that the development was going to destroy this society that, although it was not idyllic (there is no idyllic society), possessed a kind of collective well-being, an art of living, refined as well as

relatively austere, but in each case in balance with the environment. [...] Although, in economic terms, Africa is not significant, it represents less than 2% of world GDP, however, when we visit the continent we are surprised to find a little bit everywhere, an extraordinary capacity to produce happiness, that we are increasingly unable to manufacture. They manage to survive thanks to solidarity, sharing what little they have. They succeed, after all, to produce wealth because they have great relational wealth. This gives us clues about a possible way out of growth or about a society without growth, with less material goods but more relationships, capable of generating happiness. But to tell this in the North, in the eighties, was like to preach in the desert. [...] The values on which growth and development are based on, and especially progress, do not correspond at all with deep universal aspirations (di Donato, 2009: 160-162).

As each day goes by the original people are disappearing, ancient knowledge is dying with the dying elders, ancient languages disappear with new generations. The forests – the natural habitats of not only animals, fungi, and numerous species of plants, but also human beings – are declining in diversity and disappearing, and being replaced by huge areas of monoculture and megacities that respond to the wants of the modern human. The appearance of epidemics such as COVID-19, that we are facing right now on a global level, is just one more consequence of the current state of the planet. The increased probability of pandemics is one of the immediate consequences of climate change because destroying habitats makes viruses and other pathogens more likely to infect humans (Scientific American Editors, 2020). Among the indigenous societies, the individual, the community, the ecological environment, and the physical territory are all the same thing and coexist with the spiritual world that individuals can enter for example by ritually taking psychoactive plants. The preservation of the territory in which they live is crucial for their survival and preservation of their cultures and their spiritual worldviews. Thus, if pandemics are related to the degradation of ecosystems, the traditional worldview where individual, community, ecology, and territory coexist and are manifested in the spiritual world can offer us important lessons (Kohek, Oña and Bouso, 2020). The deep ecological knowledge of traditional cultures could prove to be one of the most important fields of collaboration between indigenous people and scientists (Mantyka-Pringle, Jardine, Bradford, *et al.*, 2017; Mistry and Berardi, 2016).

What do humans need?

Human thinking, feeling, and the practice of life are inseparably connected. The human being “cannot be free in his thought when he is not free emotionally; and he cannot be free emotionally if he is dependent and unfree in his practice of life, in his economic and social relations” (Fromm, 2008: 265). Each human being has physical, psychological, social and spiritual needs. All of them are basic needs or, in other words, the need for nutrition and shelter is as important for the normal functioning of the human being as the need to be creative, to have meaningful relationships with other people, or the need to feel one with the environment and so on. These are fundamental and universal values that human communities were based throughout history. In our technological, industrial and consumer society, it is becoming increasingly more challenging

to satisfy some, or all, of the basic human needs. It seems as if the capitalist society is increasing comfort at the price of decreasing social bonds and happiness. Spiritual and social needs are replaced for material ones that don't bring us satisfaction so we want more and even more, while we feel as if something is lacking in our life, we feel alienated from ourselves, each other and the environment that is being depleted in the process.

Herbert Marcuse wrote a critique of the modern affluent industrial society and consumerism as a form of social control, a totalitarian (not democratic) and exploitative social system, where false needs are being created by way of mass media, propaganda, industrial management, and modes of thought. According to Marcuse, there are few essential, true human needs which should be met in every society. Those are "nourishment, clothing, lodging and the attainable level of culture" (1964: 8). However, the one-dimensional man is unaware of his/her true needs because false needs are being superimposed upon him/her.

'False' are [...] the needs which perpetuate toil, aggressiveness, misery, and injustice. Their satisfaction might be most gratifying to the individual, but this happiness is not a condition which has to be maintained and protected if it serves to arrest the development of the ability (his own and others) to recognize the disease of the whole and grasp the chances of curing the disease. The result then is euphoria in unhappiness. Most of the prevailing needs to relax, to have fun, to behave and consume in accordance with the advertisements, to love and hate what others love and hate, belong to this category of false needs. [...] The distinguishing feature of advanced industrial society is its effective suffocation of those needs which demand liberation – liberation also from that which is tolerable and rewarding and comfortable – while it sustains and absolves the destructive power and repressive function of the affluent society. Here, the social controls exact the overwhelming need for the production and consumption of waste; the need for stupefying work where it is no longer a real necessity; the need for modes of relaxation which soothe and prolong this stupefaction; the need for maintaining such deceptive liberties as free competition at administered prices, a free press which censors itself, free choice between brands and gadgets (1964: 7-9).

In a contemporary affluent society, individuals are constructing identities and relationships through material commodities. False needs trigger compulsive consumerism that leads into frustration rather than well-being by "suppressing self-expression, creativity, and critical thinking [...] and contributes to waste, obesity, environmental pollution, excessive materialism, and social inequality" (Patsiaouras, 2014). According to Illich, almost all consumers in rich countries are destructive and are subject to amorphousness and meaninglessness while the institutions of the industrial society only perpetuate this state in which "[e]ducation turns out competitive consumers; medicine keeps them alive in the engineered environment they have come to require; bureaucracy reflects the necessity of exercising social control over people to do meaningless work" (1975, 60). Progress in such a society does not increase self-care or social bonds, it distorts basic value judgements and increases dependence to the never-ending progress. The dependent individuals are willing to pay an increasing price of decreasing satisfaction. "When maddening behaviour becomes the standard of a society, people learn to compete for the right to engage in it. [...] They are blind to deeper frustration because they are absorbed in playing for always mounting stakes" (Illich, 1975: 94-98). The promise that progress brings well-being and security is misleading, rather it is the major adversary of a

happy life. Economic progress is being achieved at the expense of society and the environment. The economy of growth does not produce the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people, but creates helplessness and multiplies the *disgraziati* (unfortunates) (di Donato, 2009: 166-167), while the few who get richer become

less likely to give up time to simple idleness and to apparently non-productive pursuits. The joy of listening to the neighbourhood finch is easily overshadowed by stereophonic recordings of 'Bird Songs of the World,' the walk through the park downgraded by preparations for a packaged bird-watching tour into the jungle (Illich, 1975: 95).

To satisfy our needs each individual is dependent on 'negotiation' and 'active intermediation' with other humans to establish living conditions within 'positive networks of social relationships' (Seppilli, 2011: 908). According to Seppilli, human beings have four major needs: the need for nutrition, sexuality, bodily techniques, and the health-disease process. All of them have great symbolical and emotional implications, secondary functions, and are culturally determined (Seppilli, 2011: 909). Maslow constructed a hierarchy model of human needs where the basic ones are physiological and safety needs. Once those are secured psychological and social needs (such as belongingness, love and feeling of accomplishment) and cognitive and aesthetic needs have to be met to reach the final needs of self-actualization (achieving one's full potential and creative expression) and transcendence (needs beyond the personal ones e.g. mystical experiences, connectedness to nature, service to others) (Maslow, 1970a; 1970b). Later research confirmed that these human needs are universal across cultures, however, it was found that the hierarchical structure of human needs is unnecessary (Tay and Diener, 2011). Humans have to have all universal needs met and maintained to some degree to experience well-being.

Erich Fromm elaborated on the idea of basic human needs 15 years earlier and postulated multiple basic psychic needs that humans have, regardless of the social context in which they live, which "must be satisfied in one form or other, unless man is to become insane, just as his physiological needs must be satisfied lest he die" (2008: 66). According to Fromm, human beings need caring and meaningful relationships (relatedness), we need to express ourselves creatively and develop a loving and interesting life (transcendence), we need to develop a feeling of belonging in the world (rootedness), we need to perceive ourselves as unique persons and as parts of a social group (sense of identity), we need to understand our place in the world (frame of orientation), we need to be actively striving for goals in life (excitation and stimulation), we need to feel a sense of oneness between oneself, others and the environment (unity), and we need to feel accomplished (effectiveness). There are different ways how to satisfy the basic needs, but if one of them is not fulfilled the result is insanity or, if it is fulfilled in an unsatisfactory degree, the result is neurosis (Fromm, 2008: 66). Western culture creates many false needs and distractions that are responsible for many ailments of contemporary society.

The emotional and psychological problems that millions of people are suffering from on a global level are, according to Fromm, Illich, and Marcuse, the consequences of the consumer society where the basic

needs of people are not met. The people in capitalist societies are suffering from depression, anxiety and suicidality (WHO, 2017), obesity (Finkelstein, Khavjou, Thompson, *et al.*, 2012; Swinburn, Sacks Garry; Hall, *et al.* 2011) and loneliness (Ong, Uchino and Wethington, 2016) among other epidemics such as opioid overdoses (CDC, 2019). According to the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies (2019) loneliness and the loss of community ties is a public health problem of such magnitude as smoking or obesity and a cause of physical and mental disorders. The individualistic way of life in capitalist societies is degrading our social ties, which leads to (mental) health problems. In this sense, communities such as Wonderland play an important role in tackling these public health issues by emphasising the importance of good interpersonal relationships and by facilitating and nurturing social ties between people.

The western lifestyle was a common topic in discussions I had with the inhabitants of Wonderland. I extracted here some of the reasoning and views that, on one hand, express a critique of modern society and, on the other hand, reflect the mindset and lifestyle of the inhabitants of Wonderland.

People don't buy with money; they buy with their lives! The system takes care that you cannot live from what you work. 90% of people are working on things that they don't like. Tired and stressed they come home and with whom are they going to fight? With the one next to you. And since you have children, you have to pay for school. The system is very smart. First, it gives you everything, it makes your life easier, you can live well, work, husband, children and such. And little by little it tightens the circle. So, you can no longer live on one salary, you need two, you cannot take care of grandparents because you are working, you cannot raise children because you are working, all to have something you will never achieve. This is the donkey's carrot. It's always there and you are always going after it, but you never get it. Because it is made in a way that you never get there. First, they give you everything so you can experience how well you are. You have light, you have water, you have armchairs, you have a sofa, you have houses, cars, everything. And then the circle tightens. To sustain it you have to give your life. They say, 'you earn a living', but this is how you lose it. Life passes by. The time we are incarnated is sacred, it is a gift that we have a body. We have a vehicle to enter into a relationship, to enter a global frequency. So, of course, if you can never reach, enter this frequency you are going to be mentally ill. Your state is always altered, you take sleeping pills, you are in a world that... oh my God. The same as animals on farms. 500 chickens there in a... laying eggs to feed you. What are we feeding? All in the same chicken coop. Comfortable? That you can sit exhausted on a sofa after working 12 hours. Listen, work for a while for your food and sit on a stone. That's how you are going to be fine. [...] All systems are a hoax and spirituality is the way out. But first, you have to want it. Many people have never had an opportunity to see that there is something else. When we were children, we were lucky, we had a way of life that is more tribal. Nowadays, the way of life is separated, individual, the nucleus is broken, which is the family. The family means the group, the entire lineage, the grandparents, the uncles and aunts, the cousins, everyone. You don't have a family life because you can't be with the person you love, creating a path together. After all, there is no time. The relationship that exists is that of conflict because there is no human relationship. There is no time. There is no room to do that. This needs to stop and there is a way out for everyone. It is not just for four privileged people who have suddenly won the lottery. No. But one has to want a change. One has to ask oneself the basic questions: Where am I coming from? Who am I? Where am I going? Am I living how I want? Do I do what I like? I am creating something that fulfils me? Plants can help us to answer these questions and help us to remember who we are and connect us to our surroundings, with life itself. Sometimes we just have to dare to let go. It is good for our health. Sometimes we don't do it out of fear, but in reality, we can live in a much simpler way and without being so caught up in the cycle of false comfort. Because of course, to have three TVs and two new cars

you will spend your whole life working for it and you will retire ill. And your life? What will happen to your life? What have you done? [...] I recommend throwing the TV out of the window. I think this is the best medicine. Throw out televisions, do not buy newspapers and live well in your immediate circle. This is the only way to illuminate our world. Otherwise, we are being continuously contaminated with news that makes us suffer, that makes us feel bad. [...] The robot is more humanised and the human more robotised. We are out of our being because our being is on the mobile. The agenda, the friends, the photo, everything is there. [...] It is very comfortable to sit on a stone. You tell your body to adapt and it doesn't hurt, itches, or anything. Everything depends on our capacity of adapting to the place where we are living. [...] A very important thing that is missing in our lives is that we are being disconnected from the elements, the earth, the water, the fire, the air. We are totally disconnected. It is always good if you can have a candle burning in the house because the air is contaminated, the water is contaminated, the earth is contaminated, the fire cannot be contaminated, but it is being forbidden. The fire is removed from the kitchens, candles pose a great danger, making a fire in the woods, which has always been done and there were not as many fires as now, is prohibited. Fire is the only element that cannot be touched because it is our spirit, it is us. A candle helps to remember. Lighting a candle, at any time when you are at home or arriving from work when you look at it the connection is being made. That is why fire is very important, even if it is a tiny candle. It is very important because at that moment it connects you again, even if you don't realize it. Fire is very important and should be in every home. In the past homes had a fire and people gathered there. In our house, for many years we had no electricity. When it got dark, we were all next to the fire, telling stories, sometimes we sang together, did a meditation, or prayed. It also helped us to live together well. Sometimes in silence, only looking at the fire suddenly you enter in another sequence. You know, it is a catalyst. And a candle can connect you again. We all get disoriented. The whole world is crazy, so logically, we become disoriented. But there is always something that brings us back. When you find your mechanism, then that's it. I always talk about the fire because I think it is very important. The earth represents our body, the water our blood, tears and sweat, and the air our thoughts. All this is contaminated, and we get sick. The only thing that cannot be contaminated is the spirit, the fire. He is the one who feeds everyone else. A candle at home, apart from cleaning the aura of the house, helps us to connect. So, it is very important to keep the fire alive. ESTELA

For me, the most important thing in my life is my family. To live with my family, as long as possible. Money is not important. We are never missing anything. When I needed money, I always got a job. I'm confident. The most important thing is my family and the time I spend with my family. I do not believe that money will bring happiness to my children, nor security that they need in their lives. The foundation of your life is going to be your relationships, which is your family and, if that is not well established, you cannot grow. I'm a person who wants to spend the last days of my life alone in the mountains. You have to learn to feel free in something where you cannot feel free because there is always something that prevents you from doing what you want. In the end, you recognize your individual happiness is not as important as the happiness of the group, of the family. Currently, we have to really prioritize what life is, and that's the development of our children. What I want for my children is that, if one day their ideal dream or their life that they imagined is dismantled, then they know that with a plate of rice, a small fire and under a tree they can live. With that security, you do not have to earn a living because you earned it when you were born, you simply have to find your livelihood and your way of relating to the world. We are living in a society where there is no humility. We lack spirituality to be able to feel humble and say, 'thank you for putting me in my place'. I would not change the world much; we must change the perspective and not try to feed the ego. They sell us a world where we cannot be humble, 'if you have money, you are happy, if you do not have money, you are unhappy'. It is not like this. We don't have to compete with each other for things. When your time comes, you don't even take your body with you. CARLOS

I was working for 13 years. Until I had enough and said goodbye. There's a comedian from the 70s who said something like: after a lot of work, I got to rest in the highest corners of misery. I

was working in a company where I was just kept repeating one and the same day. Although I developed different things, I did nothing but repeat the same day 200 times a year. [...] My parents came to Barcelona in the 60s to find a better world where they could create a family. Back then the main salary of the household was one of the men, the women would help with a lower salary. But hey, with my father's salary they were able to buy an apartment, a weekend house, they raised three children and financed the studies that the children wanted. Today, in a society that we think is evolved, this is practically impossible. Today many people working cannot reach the end of the month. In the 80s I earned what many people earn today. How much more expensive is life today? [...] In the end, we all want the same thing. We all want a decent life, to work, be healthy, have a house to live. That is not an impediment to live. [...] What needs does a human being have? A coat, food, house, work, balance, an environment where he/she can develop and expand as a human being. At the end when a human being has a stable economic situation and a circle of relationships, what he/she seeks is the relationship with God. But we can hardly find a relationship with God in our world if we have a child who is starving. The governments are making this place difficult to live. They keep us entertained. LUIS

I had a very powerful experience that changed my life. The appendix ruptured inside me, peritonitis, and, of course, it was a near-death experience. In other words, I felt that I left this plane, this planet. It is something super deep. Leave this body, leave this planet and I went to a very beautiful place where I received a very precise instruction to be able to return and to get a second chance. I am very aware of this gift, a second life, a second chance in this body. That's why I am always very grateful for everything we have because life is very fragile, you can go so fast. I returned to my body and everything changed because the medicines came into my life after this experience of death and life, of being reborn, without looking for it. Until then I did not know what a plant of power is [*planta de poder*], what a ceremony was, I did not know, nor did I want to know. Where there is disinformation, of course, there is prejudice. I thought it was all esoteric, tarot, weird magic. It was a very difficult operation, and it was a miracle that I survived. I was hospitalized for a long time, like a month, and then I was starting to walk again, starting to speak again, eat and drink. It was a rebirth with all its expression. I was reborn like this, little by little. I was in my body again, but I didn't understand why. What did I have to do here? I was looking for answers, eternal questions and, without looking for it, the plants came into my life in a very easy way, with a lot of instructions and in a series of causalities. [...] I work seasonally. I can work as a social educator and as a primary school teacher. I have two professions. I have often been offered permanent jobs, that is, I could retire at a well-paid job. But whenever they have offered me fixed places, I have rejected them to maintain my freedom. No one can pay it, no one can buy it, it is not for sale. This is very clear to me. When I had that second chance to be reborn in this life, one of the great realisations was 'I own my time and my energy.' To give who knows how many years of my life to some company while my life passes by? It's my energy, it's my time. There is only one life. This is very clear to me. I was always subjected to a temptation to have a super good salary, a job forever as they say, for as long as I want, I could retire there. But I've always rejected it. What I do is I work intensely for months and then I go travel for months. Now I did not have any contract for several months, but I have been in England for two months accompanying a traditional doctor, a Mexican healer, which also generates an economy. I had two very intensive months and when I finished, I was able to go to South Africa. Before I had been working as a teacher. I work hard for months and I try not to spend the money. I don't have luxury; I save the money so I can travel. Of course, sometimes when accompanying elders, I do not earn anything, financially speaking, but I don't spend anything either. I give my energy as an exchange for food and accommodation. It is flowing. EMMA

If you have basic things, food and a place to sleep you have the possibility to relax and really see where you want to go in your life. [...] The purpose of money has to be changed too. It is a means, not an end. [...] Nature is the great teacher because just by observing it can already give you a lot of answers to many things. I don't know much about nature because its mysteries are enormous. From what little I see it shows me the cycles, the changes, there are seasons, and it is

circular, and everything comes back again, and each moment is a new opportunity. It makes me understand myself. Start respecting yourself in these cycles. Not taking everything so personal. It regenerates you. Only by walking you regenerate; you create a symbiosis in your magnetic field that cleanses you. It is magical and we are right in the middle of this magic. I feel bad because it is not being respected. I hope it will be preserved because [...] it gives us food, it gives us everything, it gives us sleep. It is such an abundant space but, as always, so poorly distributed. It is a lie that there is hunger. It is not that the earth does not give, it is because someone is manipulating and says that there is none, but there is enough for everyone. [...] We know we have power. We have to experiment with our power as children and understand that if there is an ant here you have the power to crush it, but this ant has a function. So, power is to recognize that ant and let it make its process its life and become part of the world. That is the power and that's it. LEILA

It is difficult to live in this society and, in my opinion, it's even more complicated if you choose to live a life like the one we have, not being 100% involved in the system. Almost all the people around me are already thinking about having children, they already have their apartment, their partner, they have a stable job and a retirement plan. Thinking about that is suffocating me because I think that life is moments and stages, and everything can change in an instant. In an instant, something happens that changes your life completely, so I don't like the way life is organized and to be told how to live life when there are other ways. Of course, always respecting everyone without doing evil. The situation with the environment is horrendous, the world's political situation is horrendous. I believe that we are in a moment where something has to happen. In Spain many years have passed since the transition to democracy, so something has to happen. I would like new ways of thinking to appear, young people wanting progress. I think an important movement of people exists already, some things are changing. OLIVIA

The inhabitants of Wonderland do not identify with the capitalist lifestyle and consumerism of western society. Their defiance manifests in different ways and manners. Only a few of them live “off-grid”⁹ by choice, which demands a different lifestyle from what average Europeans are used to nowadays. The majority of Wonderland's inhabitant live in modern residencies in villages or cities. Material things do not have much value for them. Much more important in their view is to have a sense of freedom, to be able to choose how they spend their life and what they dedicate their time to, and the quality of the relationships they have. Most of them, therefore, try to live a humble life, keep their expenses low and generate the little economy they need to take care for their family or to travel by having temporary jobs or by self-employment in a sector that corresponds to their interests. One of the worst scenarios for most of them is to work in a job they do not like, that does not fulfil them, where every day is the same and where they give their life for a company, while time is passing by and they do not have time to be creative or to travel, spend time with loved ones, or develop their spirituality because they are too tired and stressed. They value good relationships, health and respect for nature more than anything and money is not buying them any of these. They like to explore different ways of living as well as new ways of thinking and psychoactive plants assist them in this endeavour.

Politics was discussed regularly in Wonderland. When people came together or when we were just the three of us at the Stone House in the evening the conversation would lead to the current political situation. I

9 Living in remote rural areas, not connected to or served by publicly or privately managed utilities such as electricity, gas, water, sewage, etc.

came to Catalonia just four months after the independence referendum on the 1st of October 2017, where the Spanish National Police Corps and the *Guardia Civil* intervened and raided several polling stations. It was an intense time, and Catalan independence is still an ongoing question. While I was conducting fieldwork there were still small-scale protests going on and the villages and towns were full of *Esteladas* (Catalan independence flags). We would often talk about politics in the Stone House and elsewhere, although most of the people I talked to about it did not declare themselves as being *independentistas* nor being against the independence. Even if most of them are apolitical, it was the fierce reaction of the Spanish state that made them sympathise with the independence movement to some degree.

All these movements that we are witnessing are meant to awaken people's consciousness. Like the one that is happening in Catalonia. It makes it possible for us to see other ways. You see peaceful demonstrations, demonstrations with lights, in silence. There are many ways to show that we don't agree with violence. This is showing that there is an awakening, that there is already a level of consciousness to take a step further. People come together, even neighbours who didn't talk to each other are suddenly standing side by side. On October 1st, 2017 a lot of people united, it brought them together. All this is the beginning of a change and we are adding our grain of sand to it. [...] We can live in peace on this planet. Although everything seems very messy. What can we do about it? The only thing we can do is to be well. This is not a thing of selfishness or egoism. If I'm well everything around me is going to get well, and everything I see will also look good. So, it is a way to radiate this energy that is forming at this time.
ESTELA

Politics is a useful thing. I am an *independentista*. For me, independence has to do with the use of the language, the fact of having the freedom to use the language, the administration of resources, the tax issue. This is fundamental, then comes sovereignty. This trial of some politicians... how can they be in prison? And they are going to serve perhaps 10 years in prison simply for carrying out a referendum that the Catalan people asked for. What I believe is that there is an injustice at the social level... The most absurd thing in the world is this court ruling.
SUSANA

Independence is a symptom of a conflict that was not resolved, and it is simply expressed to transcend it. I like that Catalonia's response is mostly peaceful. Humanity has to understand that we are much more than a body or a nationality. So, all this independence conflict is one more reflection of all the work that we have to do as humanity. I consider myself universal.
ISABELA

I pray a lot because politically I don't understand much. I just have a feeling that all people have a right to their dignity. I think that needs to happen in a good way because they are simply asking for respect. They don't ask for separation but dignity, the recognition of people and their culture. There are people (at least a part) that remind us that we want to live well and that we are good people and want to reach good agreements with people. I think that everything that is happening is a great learning curve for the whole world not to put power or attention to certain stories that are being created precisely for the purpose of separation.
GLORIA

Just few Wonderland's inhabitants consider themselves *independentistas*, most of them are not interested in politics. However, what happened in Catalonia after the referendum, made even the most apolitical inhabitants sympathise with the *independentistas*. The Catalan independence movement is seen as an important moment not only for Catalonia but for the whole world, in which people peacefully united to ask for the right to dignity and recognition of the people and their culture. For Estela, the peaceful protests

that followed the violent response of the Spanish state to the referendum represent the awakening of people's consciousness.

As a response to the political crisis in Catalonia, Estela decided to make pilgrimages to Montserrat and ask the priests and the abbot of the monastery to take the black virgin Mary (*Moreneta*) (see Photo 3) out of the church, so she can illuminate the land and the people and bring peace to Catalonia and the world. Estela believes that Montserrat is a powerful place not only religiously or culturally, but also politically and the act of taking the saints to the streets so they can be closer to the people and asking them for help is an old tradition still practised in different parts of Spain.



Photo 3: The statuette of the black virgin Mary (*Moreneta*) in front of the Cross of Caravaca used in the Santo Daime religion.

For the inhabitant of Wonderland, the black Virgin Mary also represents the feminine energy, which has been suppressed for a long time, so the request of taking the *Moreneta* out of the church has a double meaning. Since the first pilgrimage, Estela also incorporated the image of the Virgin Mary of Montserrat into the altars and rituals in the Stone House and in every ritual, the hymn dedicated to her, *El Virolai* (see Annex 1), is being sung. The first pilgrimage was done approximately one month after the referendum, the second one approximately one month after I arrived in the Stone House and the third one, which I joined, in April 2018. Since then we also did short hikes in Montserrat and after I finished my fieldwork, they went for another pilgrimage from the house to Montserrat. The pilgrimage takes about eight to nine days and we walked for around 160 km through forest, passing by inactive volcanoes, crossing rivers, climbing and

descending hills, passing by villages and towns until the last ascend to the monastery of Montserrat. Each time upon arrival, Estela went to talk with the priests, the secretary and the abbot about our request and each time so far, she has been turned down for one or the other reason. Estela is determined and will persevere until the request is met.

Montserrat is a very powerful energy point. It is one of the earth's chakras and thus connected energetically to several places. In Montserrat, there is a black Virgin that was found by some shepherds long ago. She is the one who is commanding the mountain of Montserrat. We are walking from the house to Montserrat to ask to take this image of the virgin Moreneta to the square. There is a tradition in Catholicism where saints and virgins are taken to the streets in times of emergencies or crisis. In other places of Spain, when there is an epidemic, a drought, a crisis the pastor goes out to take the saint out on the streets, sing to the saint and ask for help. You have to ask. It can be to images, it can be to nature, to the sun, to the moon, to galaxies... you have to ask. Because there are some forces, there is an energy that accompanies all this. And if we don't ask, this can't be opened. So, we are asking the priests to take out this image because here in Catalonia, whether you are from the right or the left, if you are a believer or not, everyone who knows Montserrat loves it. We go there with the prayer because, at least, I'm a believer and I believe in superior forces and I believe in the feminine force. The feminine force is a force that we all have, but it's a force that must be awakened. Because she is the one who radiates and protects and accompanies all that is happening. So, we are asking this from the abbot of Montserrat and all the monks. We are asking that they take out the image of Montserrat, the virgin of Montserrat. We have a great time doing this pilgrimage. Apart from the fact that we can get our feet sore and sometimes we get tired; we are walking to awaken the feminine force in everyone. There is a massive awakening of this feminine protective force of the mother which can protect us in the time we are living. ESTELA

In the future, several issues, not only political but existential such as biological degradation, pollution, epidemics, climate change, exhaustion of natural resources that make the planet increasingly uninhabitable for humans. Increasing poverty, systemic racism, pandemics, wealth centralisation and monopoly paralyse the ability to work, which challenges mental health and polarises the society. Overprogramming destroys creativity and devaluing or erasing traditions break all connections to a normative past. All that upsets the balance of life and is the result of a system that is made for "indefinite expansion and the concurrent unlimited creation of new needs" (Illich, 1975: 60). As a society we should question unlimited production and the never-ending progress of the consumer society and its foundations, recognize what is destructive not only for humans but for the whole ecosystem, and recover or relearn a healthy way of how to live in the world, which includes freeing ourselves from workaholism and rediscovering the connection to oneself, the others and the environment. This does not mean to return to some "lost mythical past", but to invent renewed traditions (di Donato, 2009; Illich, 1975). People need to voluntarily reduce their dependence on the market and consumerism, they need the freedom to express themselves, to create things according to their ideas, and to create justice and better living conditions for everyone. According to Illich, these are fundamental values of a convivial society (1975).

I choose the term 'conviviality' to designate the opposite of industrial productivity. I intend it to mean autonomous and creative intercourse among persons, and the intercourse of persons with their environment; and this in contrast with the conditioned response of persons to the demands made upon them by others, and by a man-made environment. I consider conviviality to be

individual freedom realized in personal interdependence and, as such, an intrinsic ethical value. [...] What is fundamental to a convivial society is not the total absence of manipulative institutions and addictive goods and services, but the balance between those tools which create the specific demands they are specialized to satisfy and those complementary, enabling tools which foster self-realization (1975: 24-37).

Illich's concept of conviviality became, among others, an important element of 'degrowth' (*decroissance* in French), an emerging global social movement that advocates for a socially just and ecologically sustainable society where well-being is used as an indicator of prosperity rather than GDP (Demaria, Schneider, Sekulova, *et al.*, 2013). Degrowth is an autonomous society project of the 21st century that advocates for self-transformation of society and modification of mentalities. It consists of "the 8 Rs": Re-evaluate, Reconceptualise, Restructure, Relocate, Redistribute, Reduce, Reuse and Recycle (di Donato, 2009: 168). Degrowth is a critique of, and an answer to, the consumer society and the "working more, earning more, selling more and buying more" lifestyle that is gradually decreasing the meaning of life and well-being of millions of people all around the world (Demaria, Schneider, Sekulova, *et al.*, 2013: 197) causing unhappiness (Easterlin, 1974; Helliwell, Layard and Sachs, 2017) and emotional disorders (Kasser, 2002). In the spirit of Thoreau's *Walden* (1854), the idea of degrowth strives for a simpler life, which is voluntary and not perceived as restraining, but liberating. A different world is possible, not only in novels but by recovering consciousness of the deep structure by which decisions are made (Illich, 1975: 107) and by recovering the "power of individuals and of communities to choose their own styles of life through effective, small-scale renewal" (Illich, 1975: 88) as suggested recently also by Ryan (2019). Based on her experience, Estela phrased it as follows:

Things are done by small tribes. In this time that we are living now, the way out is to form small groups, but all connected between themselves. How can you govern – I don't like the word 'govern' – a place with millions of people? To take care of a place, to be a good boss, a good leader, what you have to do is take care that people are well. Currently millions are being governed without the leaders knowing what is happening to them. Therefore, the solution lies in small groups, tribes, joined by ideas, ways of living, ideology, various things.

Conviviality, or degrowth, is possible only if it is done by people "who have chosen to set boundaries to their tools for the sake of conviviality" (Illich, 1975: 125) and those who, as Estela would say, do things because they want to and not because they are obliged to. Creating a different society starts with each individual. It starts with the choices we make; needs we identify and what values we nourish. The individual has the power to consciously and deliberately limit personal consumption and take a step towards conviviality, whereas psychoactive plants might prove helpful to assist this process by enhancing pro-environmental behaviours (Forstmann and Sagioglou, 2017) and relatedness to nature (Kettner, Gandy, Haijen, *et al.*, 2019), stimulating healthy lifestyles (Oña, Kohek, Massaguer, *et al.*, 2019), and improving psychosocial wellbeing (Bouso, González, Fondevila, *et al.*, 2012; Bouso, Palhano-Fontes, Rodríguez-Fornells, *et al.*, 2015; Jiménez-Garrido, Gómez-Sousa, Oña, *et al.*, 2020).

As I am writing this, end of May 2020, the world reminds of some dystopian films where a virus is threatening mankind, where unrest and violence is part of everyday life and where we are poisoning our only habitat ourselves. As a global society, we are currently in an important stage, which has the potential to change how we think about the world. We need a great paradigm shift. The western way of thinking and being in the world based on Descartes' mind and matter came to dominate the world and disposed of all the myth, magic and the sacred that always existed in human society before. The only way to reintroduce the sacred and the magic back into our lives, to see the cause and consequence of our actions, and to restore reciprocity of human beings and the planet is by taking psychoactive plants who make us see and feel the beauty, the sacredness and the miracle of life, as Wade Davis suggested in an inspirational talk about the state of the planet and humankind that he gave in the World Ayahuasca Conference Online micro-event on 30th May 2020 organised by ICEERS:

The operative dynamic, the transactional dynamic between almost all human cultures living today and living in the past has always been reciprocity. The idea that the earth owes me, but I owe my fidelity to the earth. Now, this extractive, exploitative model is literally unique to this western paradigm. It's scarcely 300 years old and it's kept alive because we've been stealing for those three centuries the ancient sunlight of the world. We, who are raised to believe, in fact, that the mountain was just a pile of rock, that the forest was just trees that existed to be cut, mere cellulose, this belief system, that metaphor, has determined the ecological footprint of our society and is also how we think as westerners about the world around us and because of the accident of our power, our fleeting economic dominance, which we have achieved by basically mortgaging future generations by compromising the earth, by viewing the sky, the earth, the seas as some kind of commons that we can compromise with impunity. Only by doing that we have achieved this dominance and those of us born into that world have to struggle to break out of it. [...] So how do we come to understand, as Europeans, as North Americans, as westerners, anyone who has been inculcated in this modern ideology of secular materialism, how do we get back a sense of the sacred? Well, it's hard, unless you take the sacred medicines and then in an instant it is revealed. In a single instant of affirmation, everything you have ever doubted is, in fact, affirmed in stunning glory. The world is that beautiful, it is that connected, the flight of that bird does have meaning, that blade of grass coming out of the desert is in fact miraculous, that photosynthesis itself, the fundamental formula of life is sacred verse, the fact that plants can eat light and transform it into food that allows sentient live to exist. It is this sense of awe, this sense of experiential engagement with the miracle of life itself. It cannot be spoken about it, it cannot be written about, it can only be experienced and once experienced you never go back to the old way of thinking. That's why psychedelics are so frightening the power structure.

In his early work, Aldous Huxley wrote about the use of psychoactive substances such as *soma* as a means of manipulating and controlling human society in his well-known dystopian novel *Brave New World* (1932). Several years later he had his own experience with mescaline, the active compound of psychoactive cacti, and described it in a short publication called *The Doors of Perception* (1954). By the time he published his last novel *Island* (2005 [1962]), Aldous Huxley radically changed his view on psychoactive substances as tools for manipulation towards tools for educating people. Huxley presented his idea of how the use of a psychoactive substance called *moksha* can be deeply interwoven into the fabric of society and used to educate people and give them direction in life. The Pala island has no centralized government but is a federation of self-governed geographical, professional and economic units with plenty of small-scale

initiatives that provide enough of everything for everybody. Only under such conditions, the inhabitants of Pala can become who they really are, discover their true purpose, actualise and turn into full-blown human beings with the help of *moksha* (2005: 202). However, in Pala island *moksha* is taken in a group setting only occasionally in adolescence as a rite of passage, as part of elementary education and is taken from then on intermittently, for example in funeral rites. Pala Island is a fictional place, a utopia envisioned by Huxley, however, that does not make it infeasible. Wonderland is a real-life example of how people with a different lifestyle and values can exist amid industrial consumer civilization with the help of, not only psychoactive plants but other rites and practices that enabled them to tap into the great mystery of life and gain insights that make their lives meaningful and fulfilled. Each inhabitant of Wonderland has a unique story about how he or she encountered psychoactive plants and why. What is common to all of them is that the plants have a significant role in their life, and they use the plants to gain the benefits they are looking for. Whether it be to discover their purpose in life, supporting a change of life they were longing for or aiding a healing process, as we will see in the continuation.

Female healers on a mission to recover femininity

In the patriarchal Greco-Roman world women and the understanding of the female body was based on myths and an androcentric medical, philosophical and social perspective in which women had two functions: giving birth and raising children: future (male) warriors and citizens. The female body was the great unknown and the medical attention was directed into gynaecology, fertility and similar. Women would generally heal and treat each other with remedies and practices that were transmitted from mothers to daughters for generations. They rarely visited a medical doctor who was thus unable to study the female body. The ancient (allegedly scientific) view of the female and her body, its pathology, physiology and mythology were transmitted via the Arab world into medieval western medicine and used to dominate women. Some elements of folk medicine (such as the use of herbs, plants, ointments, etc.) that were practised by female healers and incorporated by Greek and Roman medical doctors were transmitted along as well (Zaragoza Gras, 2017).

In the medieval period, the Catholic church became the most powerful institution in Europe and gradually worldwide, which was intensifying the suppression of women and pagan religious/healing practices. Pagan ritual sites and temples were converted into Christian churches and the pagan deities substituted by altars and relics of Christian saints (Cuadrada, 2014a). According to Estela, the little chapel next to the Stone House was a pagan shrine before Christianisation. Official data state that the chapel dates in its current state between the 17th and 18th century, although it is possibly built on top of an earlier one that is mentioned in documents from the 13th century of which there are no currently observable traces¹⁰. In the time

10 Retrieved on the 29th of September 2020 from <http://invarquit.cultura.gencat.cat/cerca>.

of Christianisation of Europe, a belief in magic and witchcraft was well established and got especially fierce after the Great Famine and the Black Death in the 14th century that caused the death of millions of people and affected life in Europe for decades to come. *Malleus Maleficarum* (Kramer, 1487) was written in these uncertain times of hunger and diseases where suspicion and hatred between people were spreading to find the guilty ones for those maladies. Jewish people, foreigners, sick people, and many more were being blamed for the situation and killed in response. The *Malleus Maleficarum* established after one century of human disasters that; sorcery and witches indubitably exists, and that they are mainly women. It condemned sorcery to the criminal status of heresy prosecuted by secular courts. Mainly women were accused to be witches because women were regarded as more superstitious, naive, and are more likely to deny their faith, according to the *Malleus Maleficarum* (Cuadrada, 2014a). Witches were believed to have the power to heal and harm, which is part of people's imagination in communities across the world up to this day (Schnoebelen, 2009). Also in Catalonia, rich folklore of superstitions, beliefs and legends have maintained many ancestral reminiscences such as the *bruixa catalana*, an old and poor woman that lives in every Catalan town, in caves, hills and wells (Samper Prunera, 2013). Estela was telling me that in the woods around the Stone House there are several caves that only Carlos, her youngest son and herself know about. She was also telling me that Moreneta (the Virgin Mary from Montserrat) was found in a cave, that there are numerous legends about the Montserrat mountain where a secret lake and a dragon are hidden inside the mountain. These legends and sanctuaries are possibly the left-overs of pagan cults practised in the area, whereby the Catalan witch was one of the last expressions of pagan religion centred on fertility rituals, innocent cults that are respectful to nature, and which have been abolished by Christian acculturation (see Cuadrada, 2014a: 140-141). Rather than mass hysteria or a deviation from Christianity, European witchcraft was an example of the survival of secular pagan cults (Murray, 1921), which remained in Catalan folklore until the 20th century (Cuadrada, 2015).

Science and folk knowledge were coexisting side by side as methods of healing since ancient times. While science was reserved for men, women had a central role in healing other women and in domestic medicine with their broad knowledge of herbalism, preparation of remedies and ointments, perfumes and cosmetics. With the increase of university studies that were reserved for men, the knowledge of the "wise women" gradually got restricted and banned, but women continued practising medicine in secrecy (Cuadrada, 2014b). In Catalonia, home remedies used by wise women for healing were considered suspicious potions or poisons and the women were considered witches during the 15th and 17th century. It is estimated that more than thousand of them were executed in Catalonia only, while two centuries later (during the 19th and 20th century) in the same area of Pyrenees, these natural remedies, resins and ointments were appreciated particularly in places where medical services were difficult to access (Cuadrada, 2014b). The healing approaches of these women were a mixture of therapeutics, cosmetics and nutrition; a shared knowledge that circulates from generation to generation or between equal women, in contrast with the knowledge of power or hermetic knowledge that is closed and only learned within the institutional

framework which is reserved for men. Contrary to scholastic medicine, wise women used personalised medicine that was based on empirical wisdom, home-made natural remedies, rituals, prayers and invocations, a great degree of attention dedicated to each patient, high-quality relationships with the patients, mutual trust, and faith in recovery (Cuadrada, 2014b). Their healing activities were limited to the private sphere, as a form of help to relatives, neighbours, acquaintances, townsmen, rather than a paid profession or trade. These women were perceived as authorities because of their specific knowledge, but they were “ordinary” women that did not stand out socio-economically and applied their knowledge as part of their daily life, without bragging about it or asking payment for it (much like shamans, *curanderos*, *bomoh*, or other traditional or indigenous healers across the world). They would usually subdue their practices and their successes due to fear of retaliation or censorship because their activities were in confrontation with medical and/or religious authority and power (Cuadrada, 2014b). Up until the mid-1950s, *trementineras* were walking through the towns and villages of Catalonia loaded with medicinal plants and medicinal oils that they made with turpentine (pine resin) but then western medicine, pharmaceuticals, and complex treatments became accessible to the people, which decreased the demand of natural therapeutics, and intensive agriculture got introduced to the area, which brought new economic and survival opportunities. These changes discontinued the trips of the *trementineras* and with it endangered the preservation and transmission of knowledge (Cuadrada, 2014b).

Besides increasing medicalisation, the interest for spirituality, natural and alternative health practices, fairs of medicinal herbs and crafts, workshops for the elaboration of home remedies, ointments and natural cosmetics, workshops on recognition and preparations of wild plants, is again growing not only in Catalonia but across Europe and further. In the 21st century in Catalonia, women have also taken the lead in facilitating the ritual use of psychoactive plants, as I observed in Wonderland. Are the guardians of Wonderland modern witches? Are they modern herbalists and wise women continuing the practices of our ancestors? Undoubtedly. In my view, their knowledge as herbalists or plant alchemists goes beyond helping individual people to heal injuries or mental states. As I elaborate in continuation, their “ecological self” (Plumwood, 1997) strives to improve interpersonal relationships and with it contribute to the healing of society from injustice, domination, colonialism and ignorance that harms not only humans but everything around us.

Despite a long tradition of herbal and healing knowledge which was transmitted among women orally through generations, there is a significant absence of female healers documented in scientific literature and little written evidence left besides some recipes (Cuadrada, 2014b: 232). Even if women did publish serious medical work, it would frequently be under a male pseudonym. In indigenous traditions that use psychoactive plants such as peyote and ayahuasca, the absence of female healers is even greater (Métraux, 1973) and possibly related to the understanding of menstruation, which is believed to incapacitate the plant spirits to approach women (Beyer, 2009; Luna, 1986). There are few exceptions of female shamans reported such as María Sabina from the Mazatec people (Estrada, 2016) and women healers among the Shipibo in

Peru. Women are also priestesses in African diasporic religions such as the Afro-Brazilian syncretic religion Candomblé and Umbanda in the north-east of Brazil (Landes, 1947), Afro-Cuban syncretic religion Santería, and Haitian Voodoo. Rather than exceptional, the lack of reports on female shamanism might be the result of the indifference of western researchers in these matters (Colpron, 2005).

In Wonderland women are the ones guiding and facilitating the ceremonies. The female healing work in Wonderland is a response to the recuperation of the ancient women's role in society and is using several psychoactive plants for that purpose. The plant these women identify with the most is cannabis. Women in Wonderland are the caretakers and guardians of the cannabis plant, which they refer to as Santa María. The plant represents feminine energy and the inhabitants correlate the destiny of the plant to the destiny of women throughout history. The emancipation of women is seen as a process that goes hand in hand with the liberation of the cannabis plant:

For many years the plants are carried by shamans, by men. Santa María is a different energy, it is a feminine plant. It came to open universal motherhood, to give birth, to care, to love... because it is softer. [...] The use that has been made with the Santa María resembles a bit what happened to the women. That is to say, it is a plant that has been misused. It is a plant that has been prostituted for many years and it is just now that it is regaining its place. The same happened to the women too. The path of the woman goes parallel with the path of the Santa María. [...] In Europe and especially in Catalonia women were oppressed for a long time, but little by little women have reclaimed their place. Because of the work we have been doing here, more women are working with medicine than, for example, in South America. Women here have put more effort into recovering their origin. For me, a fundamental thing is when the woman started to recognize her [menstrual] blood as something sacred. From this point on there is a change. SOFIA

In November 2019, after I just finished fieldwork, I received a document via the mobile phone group chat (that is used for communication among the inhabitants of Wonderland), which was entitled *Sacred Manifesto of the Cannabis Plant*. It was a call from women to women to unite forces in the fight for the liberation of the cannabis plant. The manifesto was a call for action to campaign for the freedom of cultivation, educate about cannabis' positive effects, promote discussion about cannabis within the family and in society, support research and other activities contributing to the regulation of the plant. It is also a call to prayer and spiritual use of the plant to activate the inner light of each person. The Manifesto was sent to us by Estela but the authors of the document remained anonymous. For the inhabitants of Wonderland cannabis is a sacred plant that has healing properties, if it is used in the right manner. I discuss, what is considered correct use, in a separate chapter of this work. At this point, it is interesting to see how women form a group which is using cannabis ritually but also defend it in society, and are calling for action to legitimise its positive role for humanity.

MANIFESTO OF THE MOVEMENT¹¹
“CIRCLE OF WOMEN UNITED FOR
THE UNIVERSAL LIBERATION OF CANNABIS”

In the name of the spiritual rescue of the
Ancestral Traditions and Ceremonies,
as legitimate defenders of the
nature as a giver of health,
we declare that this is a,
Sacred and Healing Plant.

We express our commitment
To defend its correct use.
As an Entheogen Plant, it connects with the inner being, the Divine being.
As a Power Plant, it awakens the spiritual force.
As a Plant of Light, it permeates us with its vibration.
As a Healing Plant, it heals by giving oxygen to the body.

Its plane is the spiritual and its channel is the heart.
It connects with the cosmic sound.
The plant is healing, liberating and connecting with the feminine,
returning self-awareness, generating goodwill.
The whole plant is used: its root, the stem,
the branches, its leaves, pollen, its flower, smell and smoke.

Its good use brings a willingness to attend, to silence oneself,
To listen and perceive. That results in understanding
To help we can: educate our family, activate prayer groups,
groups of connection with the body and spirit, academic groups and action groups.

Cannabis Sativa is the most universal of the Sacred Plants.

Being marginalized by the laws, it falls into unscrupulous hands,
making it difficult to educate on its proper use. Only under the protection of the law
we can protect it. We reject the laws that penalize the use of this plant.

We ask the governments of the world not to restrict it.

We call for its liberation.

We call to live and spread the culture of PEACE.

Let's install the flag of PEACE in our houses
We summon all the women of the planet,
to take care of the good use of this Sacred Plant together with their families.
With this manifesto, we launch the movement:

“Circle of Women United for the
Universal Liberation of Cannabis”

11 The English translation of the manifesto is my work. See the original document in Spanish language in the Annex 2.

In general, cannabis is rarely used as a sacrament in most contemporary spiritual lines or traditions. Although it has a history of ritual use in different cultures around the world (see Dos Santos, 2016; Bouso, 2019; Mahmud, 2008) it is negatively received and considered a harmful "drug" even in traditions which ritually use other psychoactive plants and consider them "medicines". This attitude is probably the result of prohibition, the widespread recreational use of cannabis, and, according to Estela, the feminine energy that cannabis is supposed to have.

All medicines are more or less accepted. Even though they are illegal they are recognized as medicines, the Santa María is not. You go to a ceremony of an old man from anywhere, a chief who leads a ceremony, and they put the San Pedro, the peyote, the ayahuasca, the mushrooms, I don't know what... but if you put the Santa María they take it away. I asked: "Is it because she's female?" And they say: "No, because it is misused.", "But tobacco is also misused and for you, it is a sacred plant. Where is the problem?" It has a lot to do with women because it is a plant that is despised, commercialized, punished by the law. All the same things that are happening to women for a long time. ESTELA

The cannabis plant and women are closely linked in Wonderland. Women are growing it, taking care of the plant, harvesting it, drying it, making cookies, cosmetics and extracts out of it, and distribute it in the community. Occasionally the dried buds or the cookies are given for free to the inhabitants, who are knowledgeable about its ritual use, for their personal spiritual use at home. Most often the plant is utilised in rituals and ceremonies facilitated by the guardians of the plant (generally Estela and Sofia). The rituals using the cannabis plant are described in the continuation of this work. At this point, I would like to shed light on ceremonies in Wonderland that are dedicated to women and the awakening of the feminine energy.

Celebrating femininity and masculinity

Gender roles and femininity have an important place in the Wonderland worldview. They are being discussed frequently inside and outside ceremonies. Some events, rituals or ceremonies are exclusive for one or the other gender. One of such is the Moon Retreat [*Retiro de Luna*] that takes place every year in the Water House. It is an event that lasts for about one week, and the central ceremony is a four-day vision quest augmented with peyote and San Pedro cacti before the departure to the forest. In the days before the ceremony workshops and lectures are organised where different subjects are discussed, and after the ceremony, integration circles and closing ceremonies are organised with tobacco rituals. Men stay in the camp as well for support and help to conduct *temazcal* rituals, but they do not actively participate in the ceremonies and other activities, only women do. The Moon Retreat is an encounter to awaken the relationship with Mother Earth and transmit the cyclical energies of Grandmother Moon, the luminous energy of Father Sun and the women's wombs. The Moon Retreats represent a time for prayer and receive blessings. It a space to seek a deep understanding of the mystery of life, space where women are safe and protected, a place that allows women to experience their physical, emotional, energetic and spiritual bodies

and gives them strength and confidence to be themselves. The women retreat for four days and nights in the silence and stillness of the forest, sustained and protected by Grandmother Fire lit day and night. The Moon Retreats take, similar to vision quests, four years to conclude the ceremony and to receive the necessary instructions to become a custodian of a Moon Pipe that is used in tobacco ceremonies.

When I was participating in 2018, María, a female spiritual leader from Ecuador was facilitating the main ceremony. On this particular occasion, Sofia was in the role of the participant, thus Estela replaced her in daily rituals, facilitating *temazcals* and Santa María ceremonies held during those days. María held a workshop on how to track our menstrual cycle, how to determine when ovulation takes place, how to keep a diary, what details to pay attention to and why. It was very basic knowledge, which however is not being taught with much detail in schools. Sofia explained that it is important for women to track their menstrual cycle to truly know themselves and be aware of the changes happening in their body.

If you want to know yourself, you have to know your cycle. You have to know where you are every day. I realized that I can use my cycle to work. There are days when you are super clear and there are days when you don't want to know anything, everything is difficult to do. Why? Because we are changing all the time. It is constant movement. So we are as we are. Cyclical, changeable. When I was recording my cycle, I began to realize that two days before my period I was unbearable, I could not stand myself. Knowing your cycles will make you know yourself. If not, you will be experiencing all these changes and won't know what is happening to you. A lot is going on. If you know your cycle you know yourself a little better. If you are going to record your cycle you will be surprised. SOFIA

Sofia also invited a Catalan gynaecologist and midwife to have a lecture and a workshop. All the women gathered in the Temple of the Moon [*Templo de la Luna*] – a circular shape wooden construction, a space dedicated exclusively to the work with women at the Moon Retreats / Initiation School – where we first listened to a short presentation about her personal history and the history of women in Catalonia, especially during the last decades of the Franco regime when she was growing up and becoming a young woman. She was talking about the abuse, mistreatment and restrictions that women were subjected to (such as sexual harassments, rape, the punishment for adultery, etc.) during the dictatorship supported by the Catholic church. The socio-political situation she was living in, motivated her to become a political and feminist activist, so she stopped studying medicine and re-engaged the studies 15 years later. The feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s in Spain enabled access of contraception in pharmacies, started to organise circles of women to educate about the menstrual cycle and sexuality, fought for the legalisation of abortion, equal salaries, equal opportunities, etc. Later on, after she finished her studies, she dedicated her life to gynaecology, parenting groups and particularly natural childbirth, as a response to medicalisation and the excessive use of anaesthesia or unnecessary interventions (WHO, 2018; Johanson, Newburn and Macfarlane, 2002) and with the motivation to preserve pregnancy and childbirth as completely natural physiological processes. She pointed out that there is a great gap when it comes to the knowledge of one's own body, the female menstrual cycle, contraception, pregnancy, abortion, childbirth and so on. Which is why she is organising workshops for primary and secondary students, and which is why she came to the

Water House to share her knowledge with us. In the workshop we learned about anatomy and physiology of the female sexual organs and, for those who wanted, we had the opportunity to explore our uterus. So for another hour or so, the women present in the circle were looking at each other's cervix and exploring the uterus using a speculum with fascination and curiosity.

Another activity dedicated exclusively to women is the "sowing at the Moon Tree" [*siembra en el Árbol de la Luna*]. It is an act of offering menstrual blood to the earth. Sofia explained that there are two reasons for doing it. Blood is full of iron that provides nutrients to mother earth and by putting the blood in the soil we connect with her and close a cycle. A more spiritual reason is that sowing menstrual blood is to grow roots, to thank and heal our mitochondrial lineage, to recognize the energies of our mother, grandmother and great-grandmother that we carry inside. Menstruation is part of the physiological rhythms of life and is the sacred expression of the female connection with the earth and with life. It is an act of surrendering the highest energy, it leaves the body to glorify life and it should never be thrown away because it is our (female) power. Offering menstrual blood is a ritual of spiritual awareness so, according to Sofia, it is necessary to get rid of taboos and overcome stigmas, forget about disgust and negative ideas towards our body and our blood. This teaching came from grandmother Rosa and has been integrated into the encounters of women at the Water House. Since 2005 Sofia is "sowing" her blood to the cherry tree in the garden of the Water House, where she made an altar (see Photo 4) and which she named the "Moon Tree" (see Photo 5) and became a guardian of this altar. Women bring their menstrual blood in a closed bottle or glass container. They can bring rose petals, if they do not have menstrual blood, and thus make a symbolical offering. Sofia explained in the interview how the sowing of the menstrual blood started:

Here in Europe and especially in Catalonia, we grew this collective of women that were so oppressed and somehow little by little women have put themselves in their place. You saw that there is a very big movement. I started here with women's circles fourteen years ago when grandma Rosa started coming. She was the one who started telling us that our blood is sacred, that our blood is our power. She asked, "What does each one of you do with the blood?" I said, "Well, when I have my period, I take off the pad, I wrap it well so nobody can realise that I have a period, and I throw it away." She said to me, "I am going to repeat the question: What do you do with your power?" That shook me and stayed with me until today because I realized that it is not someone else who takes my power, but I'm the one who gets rid of something as valuable as my blood. What are you going to do with your power? What are you going to do with the most sacred of you? I realised that it is not the man's fault, the fault is mine because I believe I am less. What am I doing with the most sacred of me? Throw it away. I realised it was my responsibility, not someone else's. That's where my work with women started. There is a very strong movement. [...] There is much more feminine work done than masculine. Women have put more effort into recovering their origin, their memory. For me, a fundamental change happens when the woman begins to recognize her blood as something sacred. From then on there is a change. You put your blood in a sacred place you do not throw it in the garbage. This changes a lot of things, and from there you start to have another relationship with yourself, and this will make you feel better about yourself too. This act of putting our blood to the ground... What we are doing in the first place is to re-establish the link with the mother. After that, you re-establish your own sacred bond with yourself. Because when you stop seeing your blood as something dirty, as something that smells bad, as something to hide, you start to see your blood as something sacred, which is what it is. No? Then you start giving yourself another value, too.

From the moment when you stop throwing your blood in the trash, which is what we all did at some point, and you start putting the blood to the plants, suddenly you start to have other types of relationships. [...] First I started putting it on some plants around the house until one day, while working in the garden, the cherry tree suddenly called me and I said: “it’s here”. So I started putting the blood there and, little by little, I built an altar, which is the one you see today. First, I spent one year putting only my blood until I opened it to other women too, and I am the one who guards this space. SOFIA



Photo 4: The “Moon Tree” altar.

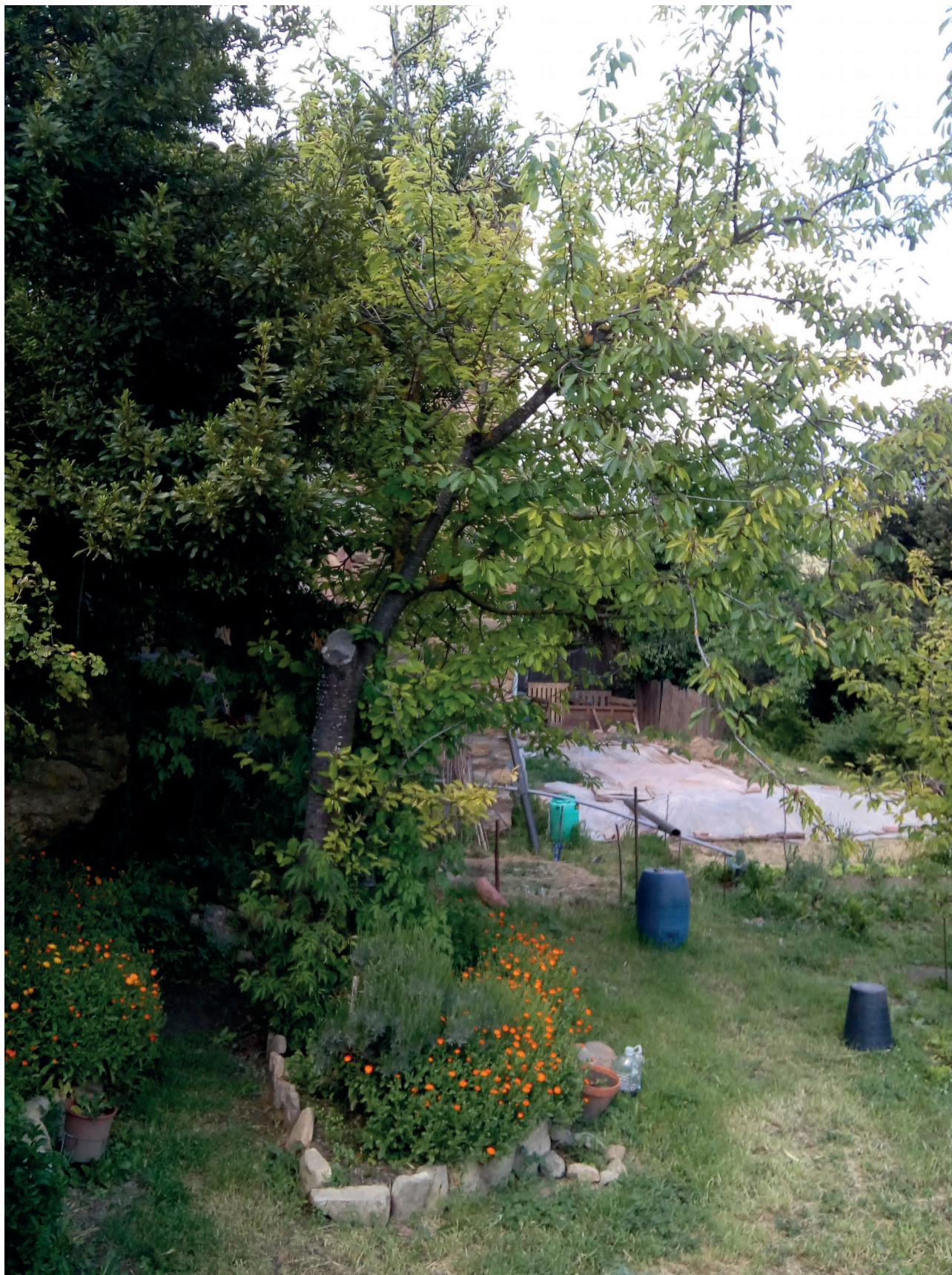


Photo 5: The “Moon Tree” in the garden of the Water House.

The Stone House and Water House are for Sofia the result of all the emancipatory work women did in Europe throughout history. The spiritual and healing work Sofia and Estela (and other women) are doing in Catalonia (and Europe in general) is to keep alive a link to ancestral wisdom that survived through past centuries of repression. In Sofia's opinion, the long history of environmental and spiritual destruction in Europe is starting to be recognised and repaired by the emergence of different movements, including feminism, alternative healing and environmentalism. Sofia is of the opinion that women in South America are just now starting to get aware of these issues, which is also the result of their work with psychoactive plants or medicines like ayahuasca and re-establishing the link with the sacred.

The same thing that was happening here for two thousand years is happening now in South America [...] they now realized that their own country has been destroyed. Here we have already destroyed it and have now permaculture movements or garbage management. There they didn't reach this yet. I feel that human evolution is everywhere the same. When you go there to a ceremony the woman has her place in the house and when you come with your European culture you are very shocked. Here we have exploited the planet, the human being is at a point of evolution, which feels to me more like an "involution". Here we have much more movement with everything ecological, to return to the earth than in South America. Here they burned us, but some little seeds remained, which is us, and this has not yet happened there. There the woman is just now starting to enter a sacred place and begins to take ayahuasca that they didn't take before. I feel that more women are working with medicine here than for example in South America. SOFIA

Sofia is not only working with women in Europe but exchanging with indigenous women from Brazil she came in contact with through her work with ayahuasca. By organising ceremonies in the Water House, representatives from several tribes from the Amazon rainforest come each year to facilitate conduct ceremonies. In one of those visits, Sofia met Yara from a Brazilian tribe to whom she introduced the act of sowing blood at the Moon Tree. When Sofia was travelling to the jungle with a group of Europeans for the first organised stay at the tribe, she transmitted her message to the women of the tribe. She described her experience and thoughts about it in one of the interviews.

When Yara came, I told her about the blood, I talked about the pads, I told her about the cups and everything about this concept, also from the health point of view. We have two mouths, the top mouth and our vulva. They both breathe and when we put on those plastic pads our vulva can't breathe. In other words, the connection to the earth is cut by plastic, it's covered. Depending on where you live, it can generate many infections, which is what is happening in the jungle where the women have many infections. This is a health issue. Another is the economics issue. I have cloth pads that I'm using for the past thirteen, fourteen years. Are they old? Yes, but they work. You make an investment, but then you have them for a long time. Ecology is another issue. How many pads do you use when you have your period? Every month, multiply it by one year and multiply by all the years that you are menstruating. It is contamination that mother earth does not undo, it stays there. You can see from the thousands of studies how long it takes plastic to disintegrate. Another important point is the reconnection with the earth. Suddenly you re-establish the link with mother earth. I spoke to Yara about all this and the following year, when we went to the jungle, she told me that she was putting the blood in the earth for the last eight months and that she had felt a brutal change. She felt more connected, she felt better about herself, her cycles were regulating, she felt a change that made her feel very curious, she was excited. I told her to share it with other women and she said: "They won't listen to me. You have to be the one to explain it." All the things that are done in

the jungle, absolutely everything, go through the *cacique* [chief or headman]. Nothing is done without his approval. In his own observations, he realized that in the last time something was happening, because many women have infections, whereas before this did not happen. The information that I brought him was the missing link to what he has been trying to figure out for a while. The *cacique* wanted me to talk to two older women of the tribe, who are the ones running a health post before I did a presentation for the women. The day I did the presentation was the same day we cooked the ayahuasca in the village. We all had our faces painted, and then we went to the *maloca*. Of course, I was a bit reserved because I speak a lot about it, but I was in a different context. How do you present it? There are still many taboos among them. To me, it seemed super curious that it's a white woman who brings this information. I'm not transmitting anything new, I'm transmitting a memory as well. We started by singing the song *Mulheres de força* [Women of power] and *Força Feminina* [Feminine force] and then I started to talk about the menstruation and the pads. It was very beautiful to awaken the memory of what women, especially older women, had lived when they were little. An older woman recalled that she never had an infection and she never used any kind of pads or anything. They just used a cloth, which they would wash and put in the sun to keep them white. Then I talked about the spiritual part, about the re-connection with the mother, about not putting your blood just anywhere, but in a sacred place, an older woman said: "I remember when I bled my grandmother used to tell me not to throw the cloth in the jungle because a jungle critter will eat my spirit." [...] We brought 80 washable menstrual pads, moon-cups¹² and a Do-It-Yourself kit with all the necessary materials and tools to make cloth pads, so that they can do them themselves and be autonomous. They can generate an economy from it if they like. It's something they can share with women from other villages. It gives them a point of union.

Another important moment during this journey that made an impact on Sofia was the preparation of ayahuasca. Ayahuasca was considered a devil by Catholicism and during colonisation and Christianisation, all the tribes were forced to disengage practising their rituals and renounce their culture. Just in the last decades, the tribe recovered their language with the help of recordings that were made by foreigners, relearned the dances and sacred songs, and revived many other elements of their culture that were prohibited for several generations. Until recently, women in the Brazilian Amazon also did not drink ayahuasca or participate in its preparation. Sofia, on the other hand, comes from the Santo Daime tradition where the male and female roles are clearly defined and where both women and men drink Daime and have specific tasks in the preparation of it. This occasion was the first time the tribe was preparing ayahuasca with outsiders, with the white men, and women participated in the process and the ritual.

When we did the *feitio*¹³ the women went to pick the leaves [*Psychotria viridis* or *chacruna*], as it is done in the Santo Daime, where I'm coming from. The masculine part is done by the men and the feminine part by the women, it is the union of the two plants. But they were not doing it in this way. Only men were preparing ayahuasca. The *cacique* said nothing and I didn't know about it. It was the first time that they prepared ayahuasca with the white men and in this way. After we drank it in a ceremony we made a circle, where they were sharing what difference they felt in this ayahuasca compared to the one they used to cook. The conclusion was that they felt that the two energies, the masculine and feminine, were balanced. Yara was the first woman to take ayahuasca. Women never used it there. SOFIA

12 Menstrual cups made of medical silicone.

13 The ritual of preparing (picking the plants, processing and cooking) ayahuasca or *Daime*. *Feitio* is a term used in the Santo Daime religion.

Exploring gender roles is an important part of any community and these roles differ not only in different cultures but even within a single culture (Mukhopadhyay and Higgins, 1988). It is also a field of study that is still full of stereotypes, assumptions and generalisation even in science (Martin, 1991) that are ultimately based on ancient myths (Zaragoza Gras, 2017). Upon my arrival in the Stone House, I have been confronted with a view on gender roles that initially seemed to be a bit “old-fashioned”. In a public presentation, mentioned elsewhere in this work, Estela was talking about the role of women and femininity in a community and a family:

If each one assumes her/his energy, her/his work everything goes well. A man's job is to care and protect that the family is not lacking anything. That they have food, that they are cared for, that they have firewood, that nothing is missing. The job of the woman is to care for the family and create future generations. To feed, to take care, to be loving, to beautify, to sing and laugh... all this is feminine. Everything that the feminine brings is simply this joy, well-being, making things beautiful, making people feel good because women have this gift, this quality of being able to transmit all this. It seems as if women would have to be directors of companies or rulers of the world or... We can also do it, eh! But I think that we do not need to enter these roles because they make us lose our origin, our true essence. Sometimes, when I talk that the work of women in the family's nutrition is very important, many people tell me: “Are we going back to the kitchen now?! Now that we are liberated, and we are here, we have our prepared meals and we don't have to wash dishes.” I don't mean that. Women have the gift of knowing how to feed well. We can all buy food at the supermarket, but not everyone knows how to make good food. Grandmothers still do and many other women who are into nutrition not as an obligation but as food that gives health to the family. It's a different understanding. It's about taking great care about what they eat, where it comes from. How do you take care of what you are doing for the well-being of all? It is another way of doing the feminine, but feeling it from the heart, not because we are obliged. We are not obliged to do anything. We are not here to compete. We are here to share. Women share. So everything that has to do with well-being, food, joy, beauty... That's what we have to share. This gives life another quality, another quality of life. ESTELA

Estela told me many times that a woman can govern a country if she wants to, but it is not her task to do it. All human beings, male or female, have a feminine and masculine energy inside us. The one we nurture the most is the one that will manifest the most. According to Estela, there is a lot of separation, violence and fighting in today's relationships, which emerges because both men and women are being confused and have to find their true role in the society again. That is not to say that women have to be housewives and men have to start hunting, but recognise each one's potentials and qualities to support not battle each other. Estela emphasises that the basis to change society is to change the relationship between men and women and function as a tribe. Only when there will be mutual respect and collaboration between us, there can be equality and growth.

The world has gone wrong when the fire has been taken away from women. I assisted the fire-keepers in a ceremony and I asked them: “Aren't women those who make the fires?” Some do ceremonies too, but most are men. He told me: “No, they take care of the fire in the house.” It seemed like a despicable thing to me at that point, but later I understood the importance that is given to keeping the fire of the house burning. It is what keeps the family together. The woman is in charge of uniting: to unite the children, the grandparents, the parents. The woman is the one in charge, she is the catalyst, she is the fire. The removal of fire from the homes is de-valuing food, care, fire, altars, and sustains society descend. Only a few houses in the countryside still

maintain fires. All is super modern. What should be done? We, women, have to return and take over the reign of our home. I do not mean to say that we stay at home washing underpants and scrubbing. Only if we do it with ease and like to do it. To take care of a home is not to be dusting constantly, but to make it beautiful, make everyone who comes into the home feel at ease and feel well. Unite again all the fire from the heart of the families. This is the most important thing that women are confusing in my opinion. There are many courses and talks for women, meetings of women, circles of women, dances of the goddesses, but we all continue living in the same way. We must make a profound change to find what it means to be a woman, what is our gift, our quality, our service. When we find this, that's it. But we are confused, both men and women because we do not know our role, our purpose. In the tribes it is very clear, the man takes care and protects the family, brings the food, goes hunting with the other men of the tribe... The man is more individual, he is a warrior, he has more direction, like an arrow. Women are more changing, as the cycles of the moon. The man needs the woman not to become rigid and the woman needs the man not to get lost. It is not a war against each other, it is forming a balance. [...] The same fight that exists between men and women, is the same conflict that generates world wars. It is a repeating cycle. Until the circle turns into a spiral that grows, the circle will repeat itself, generate the same. It is the same deception. In the hippie movement women got the freedom to be women, to experiment. This opened up a whole different space. There came the anti-conception [pill]. The free woman makes love with whoever she wants and doesn't get pregnant. There the sexual relationships began to change. The woman began to take her power. In the past, the feminine was to live in the countryside, the man brings the firewood, takes care of the house, sustains the family and the woman takes care of the coming generations, takes care of the house, the animals, the food and raise the children in well-being and understanding that is linked to nature. But this ended and the woman became so self-sufficient that she did not need the man at all. On the contrary, she rejected him and the man got affected by this. He is sick because he was attacked like this. The man's mind was set against the woman, against life, against nature. So when this whole feminist movement happened, the man has lost his place. The system takes care that whenever there is an opportunity for a change, it just turns it around and remains the same. First men against women, then women against men. It doesn't create brotherhood, it creates rivalry. [...] Many women in women's circles are against men. Not all, but many. More than circles these are sometimes squares because the people are square-minded. There are a lot of deep wounds. There are a lot of things that don't lead anywhere because women's circles should be about finding the gifts of the feminine and men's circles to find the gifts of the masculine. Why are we here? What is our gift? How can we collaborate to be well? We are tribal. The human is a social being. How to have a good relationship between men and women? Because what we have now is rivalry, it's a battle, and that doesn't lead anywhere. On the contrary, it is sickening us more and creates conflict. I think the most important thing is, what I told you before, to live in tribes. The men go hunting, they bring the food, they take care that there is no danger in the house, in the town, and protect the space. The women take care of the family, they cook food that is good for the health, they bring joy, laughter, singing... All that feeds. [...] That doesn't mean that all women have to have children, but they all have a maternal instinct inside, whether or not they have children. The woman is changing all the time and the man is more fixed. We have the period, a strong hormonal change, then comes motherhood, which is an important initiation to generate a life within you, having two hearts, this whole process. Later when you raised the children the woman enters menopause and that outward energetic power you had to give life, to make children, all this energy internalises, so that you can enter into a higher stage. Spirituality comes most of the time when the woman has completed the circle of motherhood, upbringing and detachment from the children. [...] It is very important to work with older women because it is a glorious time. From a very external time of relationships, children, couples, sexuality you enter a time of a lot of internal power. The woman at that time is changing, inside you feel an energy that is complementing your sexuality, affection. Like your body calms down but your internal... When you have your period the energy goes to the outside when the energy is withdrawn from all movement it goes inside. You have to take advantage of this energy to be able to connect. That's

why grandmothers and grandparents are important. The uterus is the bridge of connection. At one time it goes outside and another time inside. Many women are getting lost with 60 years wanting to look like 40 with breasts up, super pretty. For what? You have to like yourself.
ESTELA

In Wonderland women and men are considered equal but (biologically) not the same. The female and male roles differ and are depended on subsistence activities and tasks. Many Wonderland's inhabitants live in rural areas where the tasks assigned for women and men are traditional, however, there are exceptions and variations to this pattern as we see in continuation. For example, Carlos lived in various communities where equality between men and women has been a priority. In one conversation he remembered and reflected on his experience of such community living:

I understand that there are different types of communities, but in those where feminism is misunderstood and we are all equal, instead of trying to take advantage of the potentials that each one has so that the whole community works, no, we want to make everybody same. In other words, a woman who lived with us with four children had to make firewood. This can't be. I prefer to make firewood and this woman can do something else. Why do we have to equate everything? I don't believe this because it doesn't work. It is not real. We all want to be equal, but we are not the same. That we have equal rights, yes, but we all have our potential. I felt very comfortable making firewood and I didn't feel comfortable cooking for others. CARLOS

Lucia complemented Carlos' thinking on another occasion when we talked about gender roles. She emphasised how important it is to surpass the dualistic way of thinking and problematised the emancipated woman who is competing with the man and wants to take his place in society. These are the issues that Val Plumwood (1997) points out as crucial in the quest to achieve equality between men and women, as I elaborate later.

I think we are at the risk of going back to the same thing: going against instead of understanding why it was done this way. The woman takes the place of the man to feel empowered. We want to reach unity from duality. That is to say, for me the role of the family (physical or spiritual) is one of respect, of a balance where each one has a place, where one can flourish, give and receive, and taking the place of the other is not substantial. I feel that it comes from how we are as a society, we want to change so fast that everything that has been done so far is not well done. I remember very much the phrase of grandmother Rosa: the separated circles of men and the circles of women are necessary and they are good because it's a space where everyone can express oneself freely, but now we can make mixed circles. It is time to take a leap further. I feel like we are again polarizing and creating imbalance. LUCIA

Lucia was working up until the point she became a parent. To take care of her family is currently her priority. At this point in her life, she is happy to "just" take care of the children. Due to her active engagement in her children's upbringing, there is little time left for any other activities she might like to do. Now and then Lucia expressed the need to have a break from the children and asked Carlos to take them with him or to watch over them, which is what he did.

Leaving my job to be at home with the children in this society is not perceived well, but I'm happy taking care of the house and with [Carlos] it took me years to understand that he is maybe not washing the dishes, although he also does it, he is making firewood so that we are warm and

that is not to say that I can't do it. I believe that, if we each take our place we can create a group and a community without entering into that polarization. LUCIA

Most inhabitants of Wonderland maintain that there is a biological component which differentiates the woman from the man. This is not to say that women and men are not equal in terms of human rights, but certain undeniable physiological differences should be respected not neglected. Moreover, the fact that a woman has a paid job does not necessarily put her into an equal position to that of a man, as pointed out by Sofia.

Feminists have their beliefs, but, naturally, the woman is caring, however, it does not mean that she cannot do other things. Same goes for the man. We must not devalue, but each one has their nature. The men now are denatured. This does not mean that a man has to take care of you because you are incapable of doing it. What kind of thought is that? Who gives birth? Who conceives? The father has his part. It is true that women were abused for a long time, and continue to be, but the woman can also decide to leave. We are always seeking for the guilty ones. Observe nature. GLORIA

Grandmother Rosa told me one thing. Since the woman started fighting for equality... We are not equal. A man is a man and a woman is a woman. OK, we are all one, we are all equal, but genetically we are not the same. Of course, I can go get firewood and work with the chainsaw, but when you live in a place like here, it is natural that I take care of the house, the garden and [my partner] is going to do firewood and do construction. It's not because I can't do it, of course, but there is like a natural order in things. Nowadays women in the city work like men and on top of that, when they get home, they have the house, the children, the washing machine, etc. that generated an imbalance again. Equality, but up to a certain point. It depends on your habitat. The right to vote, of course. Before 50 years women did not vote for example. In this sense, of course, we are the same, we have this right. SOFIA

First, there is a biological basis. We have two different bodies and two different capacities depending on the body. For example, a man has a penis to the outward, well, a woman will never be able to have that outward sexual energy, but an inward one. Physiological and biological characteristics determine the energy that moves one body or the other. Morphologically, the body of most men are perhaps more prepared at the level of the muscles to do firewood, physical work. Well, for some reason we have different muscles. This is at the physical level, empirically verifiable. That these differences result in inequalities does not make any sense for me. The root of injustice begins there. The base should be respect, being able to recognize the qualities of each one, their goals in life. For me, everything extreme lacks something, it's not healthy. The extremes are communicating the same. Those very feminist and those very macho are doing the same, it is so radical that it does not have a balance. Respect and peace. That these differences may be potentials, not inequalities. So many times we failed in wanting to be the other. Deep down it is about being human with the gender that you are. It is about being able to live in peace and respect the others. Being in peace with yourself and respect your temple, your body. EMMA

I am an advocate of equality, but true equality. Not that women have more rights than men. No, equality in everything. It is true that in practical life, here in the house you see it a lot, there are things that men or women don't do well. If I want to chop wood, they won't tell me: "don't do it because you're a woman." But in general, women are the ones who cook, we do the smaller manual jobs, we clean the house, but not because somebody forces us, but because we like it. The work that men have is more physical, but at the same time, if a man wants to do the woman part or vice versa, everyone should be free to do it and that's how it is. [...] Nowadays, with all this gender violence, men are suffering a lot too. Some men are mistreated by their women, especially psychologically. So if a man is going to denounce a woman, you are a faggot, you are not a man. OLIVIA

Some inhabitants are questioning the assumptions that women are more caring and men are more protective. Tomas, Isabela, Leila and Susana are emphasising that the most important thing is to have respect for every human (or non-human) being. Isabela emphasises the personal freedom each person has to decide for themselves how they want to live their life. Leila acknowledges that women have been (and still are) mistreated, but it is not only women who experience violence and it is not only men who are the perpetrators. Susana points out that in contemporary western society women and men are reversing the roles and experiencing parts of themselves that they were not able to do before. The women are externalising and discovering the world and the men are internalising and discovering themselves. How would gender roles develop in a society where there is no war and no struggle?, wondered Susana.

The first thing is respect for life. The people in front of you, whether of one sex or the other, have the same needs as you. They need to be loved and to love. TOMAS

It may appear traditional, but it has to do with the nature of things. What is feminine and what is masculine. The *jin* and the *jang*. A woman does not have to be feminine, she can also be masculine, but by nature, we have more feminine characteristics than a man. Each one has its quality and each one decides where they want to be. If there are women who want to care for the house, food, the community, well, then we can do it. If there are women who want to do a more masculine work, then do it. Important is that we respect each other. That we don't label ourselves. That each one can do what he or she freely feels. ISABELA

Above all, man, woman, child, dog, cat, living being... Respect. That's the basis of everything. Respect. Biologically, women give birth, they are more caring and men are less. I'm in the phase to question all this. And if you don't give birth? Men are also caring. This is expected of you if you are a woman and this is expected of you if you are a man. There are men who want to be fathers and women who don't want to be mothers. If humanity would have had values, well then we would not talk about men, women or machismo. The violence which is perpetrated against women is evident. The men between themselves are also violent. Gay and lesbian couples are also violent. There are people who mistreat people. LEILA

It is presumed that the woman, for being feminine, has this role [of a caretaker] naturally, since I don't know when, and the man is protective due to his physical body. What happens is that we are getting closer to being androgynous. In reality, the woman is developing her masculine part by going to work. The woman needs to go out, face the world because the woman needs to know herself. Of course, the man has gone out a lot. It's the opposite. The man is protective because of this image of strength, of being able to fight when the enemy comes. In a new world where there are no longer struggles, where there are no longer wars, where there is no longer conflict, well, there is no longer any need for someone to have the strength to protect anyone. So maybe these beings who have to be protectors can dedicate themselves more to the family, to get to know more about their interior that is unknown to them because they have always been outside fighting and looking for food and all this. And the woman, who has always been locked in the house with the family, taking care and feeding, well, it is also good that she comes out to get to know the world that she has not been able to know because her role did not allow her to do it. SUSANA

Although there is a degree of variation in the understanding of gender roles among the inhabitants of Wonderland, they emphasise that women and men should be collaborating, respecting and supporting each other instead of competing and fighting. An opinion, that the current relationship between women and men in western society is that of rivalry, is relatively common among the inhabitants, as is the conviction that men and women are distant from nature. While it has been said many times by several inhabitants that women

take care of the children and the house and the men do hard physical work, in reality, what I observed during fieldwork, both men and women were sharing tasks, taking care of children and community members, earning money, chopping and gathering wood, cooking, cleaning or gardening. The tasks of men and women in the community are not strictly related to the gender of the person but are the result of cooperation between men and women that ought to be complementary and based on one's strengths or interests.

Reciprocity is the key to human social life and to survival in small-scale societies in which gender relations appear more egalitarian. Women's societal and economical equality and contributions are recognised in all spheres of tribal life among various communities across the world and throughout history (Fedigan, 1986; Estioko-Griffin, 1986; Lee, 1979; Ward and Edelstein, 2016; Boserup, 2007; Landes, 1947). Whereas in industrialised societies, where housework is degraded and devalued (Illich, 1975: 87), women's existence in, and contribution to society is largely invisible (Downie and Gladwin, 1981; Perez, 2019). The social environment plays an important role in gender equality. Positive social relations and the absence of hostility or warfare result in relatively egalitarian relations between genders, while militarised societies benefit men more than women by giving them more access to economic and political resources (Kottak, 2013). The belief that women's positions have improved in western civilisation compared to traditional communities may be wrong since anthropological studies have suggested that civilisation, colonialism, and progress in a globalised world brought more harm than good for women across the world (Harris and Young, 1979; Gunewardena and Kingsolver, 2007). In this regard, ethnography is a valuable tool that has the power to transcend different opinions and show what is happening in reality.

Undoubtedly, the female emancipation movements brought more personal and professional freedom for women in western culture, but we are still facing a great gender gap on a global scale. Gender gaps related to employment, salaries, and professional opportunities are still existing even in the most developed countries worldwide. According to the latest Global Gender Gap Report (World Economic Forum, 2020), Spain is among the top ten countries in the world with the lowest gender gap. The most substantial improvement, in comparison to previous years, is in the area of political empowerment. Spain counts as the world's most female-centric government where more than half of the ministers are women and has an approximately equal share of female and male parliamentarians. Despite a large representation of women in Spanish politics, the country's leaders have so far always been men. In case of economic participation, Spain still records large gaps in labour participation, wages, income, and the presence of women in managerial positions, as senior officials or board members of companies, suggesting that there are still barriers to grant women the same opportunities as men (World Economic Forum, 2020).

The feminist movements of the 20th century were on one hand attempting to liberate women from the oppression, while on the other they were struggling to let go of the dominator structures themselves. The first wave of feminism of the 1960s and 1970s, also referred to as liberal feminism, was a "feminism of uncritical equality" (Plumwood, 1997: 27), which did not question the masculine pattern of life and culture, but attempted to fit women into this supposedly gender-neutral system. Women were expected to adapt to

masculine and dominant institutions in which central ideals were those of domination of nature. Liberal feminism tried to demonstrate that women were just as men capable of reason and are distant from nature. It supported a social organisation that was male-dominated, one that valued the human being, culture and rationality over nature, one that saw the human being as exclusive of nature, and one that perpetuated supremacy in all of its aspects. To expect women to attain equality within a system that is defined by exclusion and devaluation of women, femininity, otherness and areas of life which have been construed as nature, is illusory (Plumwood, 1997: 28).

As a response to liberal feminism, the second wave feminism spread worldwide in the 1970s rejecting patriarchal identity and masculine ideals of reason. Plumwood refers to it as “feminism of uncritical reversal” (1997: 31), which was in her view equally problematic in perpetuating women’s oppression since it perpetuated dualism and the underlying ideology of subordination, but just reversed the values. The place of patriarchy was taken over by gynarchy and the domination model remained intact (Mathews, 2017). While some second-wave feminists have seen the link between women and nature as politically fabricated to exercise power relations or rejected the definition of the woman in general (Alcoff 1986; Butler 1990), others embraced the feminine nurturing and caring capacities either from the biological (Daly, 1978; Griffin, 1978) or historical-materialist perspective (Salleh, 1984 and 2005; Harding, 1986; Hartsock, 1985).

Ecofeminism emerged as part of the third wave of feminism, which tried to tackle persisting issues of inequality not only between men and women but place it in a larger context of racial, environmental, economic and social justice. The feminist struggle became a struggle not only for female emancipation and equality but also a struggle for subordinated groups in general and a struggle for the environment. The current fourth wave of feminism deals with the issues of violence against women, sexual harassment, body shaming, and other kinds of discrimination. Each wave makes a step further to open up issues that are deeply embedded in the western culture including certain western ethnocentrism, and anthropological perspectives including political ecology allow us to face and expose them. The position of women in contemporary society is the result of social changes and achievements of more than a century-long female struggle for equality in all spheres of private and public life such as the right to education, the right to equal employment, the right to vote, the right to own property, freedom of movement, reproductive rights, sexual liberation, social justice, and so on. Female emancipation is an ongoing process and it should go hand in hand with the emancipation of men. Equality between men and women can only be secured only if both aspire to achieve it (Coronado, 2017).

According to Val Plumwood (1997), the only way to overcome gender inequality is by dismantling the Cartesian dualism present in western thinking and the need to drop the assumption that humans alone possess reason, which is what distinguishes us from, and makes us superior to, nature, while any lack of reason represents a failure to rise above nature and become fully human (Mathews, 2017). Plumwood (1997) emphasises that we have to, as a society, question the dualistic superior/inferior apparatus to attain equality

between women and men. Otherwise, the sole thing we are doing is broadening the dominating and privileged class without questioning and challenging domination (not only male domination) itself. We have to redefine the concept of the human itself, which has been “constructed in the framework of exclusion, denial and denigration of the feminine sphere, the natural sphere and the sphere associated with subsistence” (Plumwood, 1997: 22) and argues that the feminine ‘closeness to nature’ has hardly been a compliment to the women in our society. On the contrary, affirmatively to Estela’s words, (hu)man identity is defined in opposition to nature.

Similarly, as women were excluded and devalued throughout history, also nature has been seen in contrast to reason, as something primitive, non-human, and irrational. The western culture has systematically inferiorised and denied dependence on environmental processes, considering humans as apart or outside of nature. Nature is seen as a limitless provider of resources without the needs of its own. This denial of human dependency on nature is a major factor in the perpetuation of the non-sustainable modes of human living that cause environmental and public health issues we are currently facing on a global level, and according to Plumwood (1997) contribute to the inequality between men and women.

The historical inferiority of women and nature in western culture has been based on the dualism of reason and nature. In western society several dualistic assumptions are creating a “master identity” (Plumwood, 1997), which is much more than just male identity, rather it is a dominator identity, the embodiment of the dominant forms of reason which are opposed to nature. These dichotomies between civilised/primitive, superior/inferior, public/private, rational/irrational, reason/emotion, mind/body, science/superstition, human/nature, man/woman, masculine/feminine, self/other, are schemas that legitimise and naturalise domination in general, and which replicate itself across major discourses, such as gender, race, class or species, to rationalize regimes (Mathews, 2017). For Plumwood (1997) the only way to create equality between women and men is to reject the master identity and create a non-dichotomous human identity where both women and men are both emotional and rational, and part of both nature and culture (1997, 35). She does not opt for abandoning reason, but to attempt “to install another, less hierarchical, more democratic and plural identity” (Plumwood, 1997: 189), which she termed “the ecological self” (1997, 182). The ecological self is a sort of relational identity, based on virtue-based concepts such as empathy, respect for others, care, gratitude, sensitivity, reverence, friendship, love, concern, community and compassion, rather than a rationalist-based ethical concept (1997: 183). The new human identity should aim at “the cultivation of consciousness rather than discourses” (Mathews, 2017) and allowing all individuals to become fully human, which will make oppression cease to exist (Freire, 2005). When gender inequalities dissolve, the partnership model (Eisler, 1995) can truly be invoked in society.

In this context, the Wonderland community can be seen as an attempt to create a partnership model of society; as a society that cultivates consciousness and sees humans as part of nature; as a community that strives to surpass dichotomies, however, not by omitting but accentuating male and female qualities; a

community that values concepts of empathy, respect, care, gratitude, friendship, love, community, compassion, and so on; a tribe in which egalitarian principles are applied, and in which men and women feel responsible for different tasks, and where the contribution of both is recognised and celebrated.

The children of Wonderland and the transmission of knowledge

In indigenous communities' knowledge is equally shared among most members and easily understood by everyone, what differs is the degree of skill one can acquire only through a long apprenticeship. Knowledge is self-initiated and transmitted freely among the people, while in modern society education is an institution, which is obligatory, systematic and relatively rigid. In the first case, the people learn and in the second they are taught. The schools took over the task of teaching children and redefined learning into education (Illich, 1975). In Wonderland learning from each other and learning by doing is important for the community, but so is going to school. I was interested in how parents think about the educational system and what experiences they have with their children. Most children I have met during fieldwork were preschool age. Some parents organised among themselves and opened a nursery in a village for the youngest ones. The older ones were all going to public schools in villages that the parents chose according to proximity, costs and level of curriculum flexibility, only one is being home-schooled. Most of the young families live alone without the extended family, there are also some single-parent families, therefore the support of the school is generally welcome. The children are growing up in rural areas, they play in the forest and spend a lot of their free time with the larger community, not only their siblings and parents. If grandparents are not present, then elders of the community are fulfilling that role. Such cohabitation is important to the inhabitants because they believe that children need not only a father and a mother but a tribe where children can grow up by having diverse personal experiences, visions, and contact to people with different energies and rhythms. And all this enriches the lives of children and their growth.

Sofia went to a private Catholic school. She believes that there is a fundamental part being learned at school, but there is another part that is learned at home. The child needs both to develop. In a conversation she explained what was important for her when choosing the school for her daughter:

When I got pregnant, I thought, 'I won't put my daughter in school, I will take care of her'. But that's the theory, practice is something else. I realized that my daughter needs more than I'm able to give her. The first two years I was only with her all the time. [...] I was searching for a school and found one, an alternative project, but it was too far away, and it was not cheap. So, I looked for options in our proximity. I found a rural public school in the neighbouring village, which is functioning a bit differently than most of the public schools. 50% of the curriculum is set by the *Generalitat* and the other 50% the school itself can decide what projects they want to develop. In this school, the classes are mixed, for example, 5th and 6th grade together. I liked the philosophy of the director, it's nearby, it's a small public school, and all the children know each other and grow up together. They do a lot of activities outside. It is also a school that is open for

suggestion from the side of the parents, or even, asking for our collaboration. So, now we are organizing some workshops on sexual education, menstruation, masturbation and such. I think it is very important to teach our children about it in school. SOFIA

Sofia's daughter Luna was ten years old when I met her. She was the oldest child in the community I have got to know during fieldwork and the only one I could potentially make an interview with. Luna is a very open young girl, very curious and social. She is growing up in contact with people from across the world, tribes from the rain forest, she was visiting the rain forest herself with her parents, and she is being surrounded by psychoactive plants for her whole life. In Wonderland the use of psychoactive substances is not sanctioned or being hidden from the children and they generally take part in the rituals although usually without ingesting the substances. Luna was, therefore, an interesting informant since she tried a low dose of ayahuasca a few times and her parents teach her about psychoactive plants and how to use them. I asked her parents if they allow me to do an interview with their daughter about how it is to live in the Water House and the use of psychoactive plants to get an insight into how a child is growing up in such an environment. There is a fear of losing custody of their children always present among the parents, because of the activities involving psychoactive plants and the legal consequences they might suffer due to current drug policy. Luna was therefore taught early on about the legal issues and is generally not talking about it outside of her family circle. Nevertheless, I got consent from Luna's parents and Luna herself agreed to the interview too.

M: Can you tell me what you know about plants and ayahuasca?

L: Ayahuasca is a plant that is used to heal, you take it to heal. In some countries, it is not legal, but it is a good plant. The Santa María too, but this one I have not tried. I have tried ayahuasca the first time when I was born my mum told me. I have taken it many times. I usually fall asleep, but when I went to Brazil, I really felt it there. I remember that they were painting me, and I saw as if everything was falling. It was like... I don't know... like a very strange feeling. In the ceremony we did in Brazil I remember that I saw some hands that told me that at six I have to be in a place, but I did not know where that place was. I also noticed that the *cacique* of the village, who was the one guiding the ceremony... I noticed that everything he said was what I was thinking first, you know? Then I drank one more time and fell asleep right away. [...] I believe that, if it is used correctly, it would have to be legal, but some people use it in a bad way, so I don't know. Well, I have been told that always... for example, mum and dad always want to know where the medicine comes from because sometimes it has more intentions, so they want to know exactly where it comes from.

M: How is it to live here [in the Water House]?

L: Well, I have a great time, but sometimes when my parents have a lot of work, I always get overwhelmed because I don't like to be around many people either. So, yes, I have a good time, but... I don't know.

M: How do you get along with other children in school?

L: My relationships with other children at school are normal. I'm not talking about these things, only with my two best friends, who also come here [the Water House]. They know the plants, but they did not take them.

M: How do you like school?

L: I have a great time at school, I like it. I mean, we have exams but, you know, they are not done as exams. It is different and it also goes by projects. So, we are making projects throughout

the course. For example, now we are doing a project on ecosystems and we have to make a model and a poster, and we have to present it. We also do two conferences, one in Spanish and one in Catalan. We must present our work orally. I also learn English at school and go to extra classes of English. After school, I ride a horse and go to cooking lessons.

M: Do you like to travel?

L: I like to travel, but later when I return home, the school... I mean, it is a bit difficult for me to integrate because I have lost quite some classes, but I always get a good grade and I work hard to get a good grade.

M: Do you intend to use these plants in the future?

L: I think so, but I don't know.

M: And cannabis and alcohol?

L: I guess so, but I don't know. I tried a sip of beer and wine.

M: Do you eat junk food?

L: Once in a while, yes, but I don't eat it all the time.

M: What are your hobbies?

L: I do sports, I go horse riding and swimming in summer. I like to read adventure books and intrigue. Always when I go to sleep, I read because it helps me to fall asleep. I like to read it and imagine everything. I also wonder what happens once you die? When you are born you are so close to life and death that it's like... I don't know.

Isabela has two sons; one is going to secondary school and the other to a college. Particularly her youngest son was struggling in primary school, which made her look for alternatives. Due to financial constraints, her options were limited, so the best she could do was to choose public schools with some degree of variation in the curriculum and extracurricular activities.

My children started going to nursery when they were two years old. Until then they were with me. They did a year of nursery and then they already started with a public preschool. The preschool here in Catalonia is generally quite good because they do symbolic teaching and a lot of play. So, it's very nice, but when they entered elementary school, things started to change. Especially with my youngest son, who happened to run into harsher teachers. We had a specifically tense moment with one of the teachers because she became physical with him at some point and that was enough for me to say, 'I have to do something about it'. My children also started going to bed super late, procrastinate homework. They were small. So, I set my mind to find information. I went to a congress on education, a congress about the third-millennium education and there I came into contact with free [alternative] education. In other words, I discovered a whole world of education parallel to official teaching. People who had been working on other ways to educate children for a long time, and I said 'I want this for my children.' So, I got in touch with the Xell, which is the free education network, and told them I did not have the financial resources. Of course, almost all such projects have to be paid for. They helped me a lot and referred me to a school in the area that was free education, and it was also a public school. At that point, I was already separated from the father of my children, so I explained to him that we had to change the school, that the children were suffering. We went together to see it and decided to go for it. So, they did 5th and 6th grade, two years in this school, and when they left primary school, I had to find another school. It's a blow because you have to put them in a mould factory again. I did the best I could at that moment and enrolled them in a secondary school that aspired to do different things, where part of the curriculum was done in projects, something different, and after school, they even had some Gestalt activity. They were

there for two years. Right now, the oldest goes to university in Barcelona, overwhelmed but doing well. The younger one is finishing secondary school and has a moment of crisis, burdened with an education that does not motivate him. Well, that's where we are now. ISABELA

Lucia was working as an educator of children with autism before she became a parent. Then she dedicated all her time to raising her children, but she never considered home-schooling them mainly due to the unclear legal status of home-schooling in Spain. When I was visiting the family in April 2019, we talked about their plans of whether or not to inscribe the eldest daughter in a school. The closer the decision, the more Lucia and Carlos started to think to just keep on home-schooling her. I spent a couple of days with them and could witness how they do it and how their children respond to it. Carlos' daughter from his previous relationship, who is going to a public school in a nearby village, was also present. In the morning I was woken up by the children before eight o'clock. We had breakfast together and then Lucia prepared different materials for the children to play with. A table with marbles was intended for learning basic operations of arithmetic. Another table was dedicated to learning telling time and read the clock. In another room was a big sheet of paper on the floor with crayons and pencils where they could write and draw. Beside the couch were books about astronomy and a globe. On the side table were a magnifying glass and a box of various kind of insects. The children were moving from one thing to the other as they pleased and Lucia was there to motivate them, asked them questions, or helped them if they needed help. In the afternoon Carlos took the children to the garden and was teaching them how to plant and water tomato plants. After that, the children played outside, and I used the opportunity to talk with Lucia about what I have witnessed and her opinion about the educational system in Spain:

[My daughter] does not go to school, for now, she has ballet lessons two times per week and violin lessons once per week. Home-schooling is neither legal nor illegal. I would like to do it at home, but it bothers me to do it outside the law and puts me in a situation that I don't want to be in. I'm not against schools. I think many things can be questioned, improved and changed, but I believe in the education system and that all children have a right to it. But for me, a right is not an obligation. That is, any human being has the right to have an education and someone who is accompanying him on this path, but it doesn't have to be a school. If I work in education, why do I have to send my children to be taught by someone else, while I teach the children of the others? We are looking at all the options. [My daughter] has now 5 and a half years and she would need to go to school in the coming year, but the truth is that we are fine as we are. [She] knows how to read, how to write, she does not have difficulty integrating with other children, on the contrary, she goes with self-confidence. She also participates in the ceremonies very naturally, if she hears the word *temazcal* she gets excited. When she gets together with her friends to play, they pretend to do a *temazcal*. This is all part of life and when they are older, they have a wide range of options to choose from. The way we live is what we offer them, but without excluding other options. That's why I'm not against the school, nor the system. I have my way of perceiving it, but I don't want to transmit that to [my daughter] either. I want her to be able to decide freely. [...] I'm not going against the educational system, but I do think that it is time to question ourselves why we cannot learn from other people and other ways of doing? It is not necessary to generalize, nor to learn in the same manner. I have been working with kids for many years. I have been working in a public school as – here we call it – integrator. So, with kids that have supposedly some different needs or conductive issues, or some strange stigma they put on them. I had a lot of training as a conductive therapist. It is a very strict and fixed framework to change conduct and I was teaching autistic kids. That was my specialization. But

then, when I got pregnant, I decided to put this aside because I didn't want that it would affect me being a mum. So, that's my background, I have all of that training. With my older one I was convinced she will be at home until she's six and then starts school, but during that time I kind of look at other kids, look at schools around here and look at families who are taking them to special, different, open, alternative school, paying loads of money to take them there. So, I was looking at options. We were talking with [Carlos] and we weren't really convinced by any option. I never thought of [home-schooling] as a good option for me to be honest, but seeing how [my daughter] is, how she is learning, how we are and where we live, it didn't make sense to send her to school either. The kids... I don't see them happy. As we say, life brings you things. So, I start to meet families who are doing home-schooling and I look at their kids and I was like 'wow, you know what, if I imagine [my daughter] growing up, I want to imagine it like that.' Free, relating to others with security in herself, enjoying and running and writing... this curiosity for life. Not just waiting for someone to tell you what to do or how to do it. So, from that point, we both decided that the best option is home-schooling.



Photo 6: Learning to tell the time.

Again, if I have problems, or I could get legal problems, of course, I take her to school. I don't want any risk. I also don't know if [home-schooling] is going to be the option for all her life. I'm not sure if for [my son] it will be the best. Because I believe every child has a different way. Once we decided that [we are home-schooling our daughter], I started working a lot on myself because in the home-schooling approach there are two main lines. One which is doing some kind of basics, so in first grade you have to learn that... the way they learn is different. Or you have 'unschoolers' where the kids are just exploring and living a normal life without having any kind of routine. Most of my friends were pro unschooling, but I don't feel good with that. I have

my background. I really love to learn with them and share and I think it is important for them to learn how to write and to read. And I'm not saying that doing it the other way they don't. They will, I'm sure. But I don't have much trust in that. So, I started trying things, just small things because [my daughter] is not even 1st grade yet, but then I realized my expectations. I like things well done and I was putting that on [my daughter]. That was putting a lot of pressure on her because she already is quite like that, even though she is small. So, I realized that it wasn't a good way for us, because it was more pressure, rather than fluid, self-flowing, natural, organic. And then I started the other way around. [My daughter] is very curious, she wants to know things. So, I ask her 'What do you like to know?', 'I like to know why frogs can jump and the other ones they can't', or like yesterday 'Why is the sun turning around?'. She is very curious about things and she really wants to learn.



Photo 7: Learning about lunar phases, the movement of the sun movements and planet earth.

There are basic things such as language, you know, reading, writing all that which has to be, mathematics which I believe there are basics that I want her to know. English of course and an artistic side. Those are the three lines that I'm mainly having always present. And then we have loads of material ready. With these three things I can feed her interest and what she wants to learn. This is the starting point. Rather than being only with paper and things. Like you saw today, I try to put different, we call it ambients, spaces in the house where she can find things that she's interested in with different materials. Mainly something to experience with, so something she can touch. If it's mathematics she can play with flowers or balls or sticks or whatever we have to play with. Then she has books for writing and where she can find anything she wants to know. It is not mummy who teaches her, she can find it everywhere in life or anyone. That's my main value that I want her to learn from this experience. Not only those basic

things, which I think are important, but the main thing is that she has the resources to find herself what she wants to learn. [...] I look at her and I see her happy.



Photo 8: Observation kit for learning about animals and insects.

Every week she has three evenings of activities she loves, dance and music in a group with another teacher, discipline and all this kind of things. Usually, I organise one extra evening where we go with friends to play and she chooses with whom she wants to play. So, next week, for example, on Monday morning a friend is coming. We go for lunch and then go roller-skating with her, after that she's got ballet, so it's a full day. On Tuesday we are going to another friend's house. On Wednesday she's going to the neighbours' birthday party. On Thursday... [laughing] it's like that every week. Sometimes people are concerned about social abilities, but then again like I tell you, every kid is different, and [my daughter] doesn't have any problems, on the contrary. But there might be kids who do, that's why I say I don't think that it is THE way. No, that's the way for [my daughter], for me and Carlos, for us at this moment of life. [...] I also feel that the medicines, or the ceremonies, that 'spiritual', more emotional part is not addressed by the educational system. It doesn't exist. I don't know how to do it, but children should have a way to access all these states. It seems that now, thanks to the new fashion, yoga began to occur in schools and, well it is a way to enter these states, meditation, or mindfulness. The doors are opening, I see that these changes are taking place. But I would also like the medicines or the use of entheogens, of the plants that we speak of, the Santa María, but it can also be parsley or any other plant that we have in the garden, to be taught, that these plants also have those energies and can be used. I would like this to enter the educational system, not only as part of biology or the negative side of it but to access this information more broadly. LUCIA



Photo 9: Painting and writing corner.

The parents I have met during fieldwork try to offer their children the best possible life they can, according to their financial capabilities, values, needs and beliefs. Whether the children go to public school or are home-schooled, the parents try to engage with them as much as possible and encourage them to actively learn different skills that they are interested in or might use in life. The children are brought up to think independently, to question things, and to learn alongside each other (not only teachers or parents) that is resembling Freire's problem-posing model of education, where "people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation" (Freire, 2005: 83).

Sofia and Lucia believe that children need to learn about the use of psychoactive substances besides all other things they are being taught, which is what was done historically in many communities where psychoactive plants played a major role in the "transformation of adolescent boys and girls into fully participating members of adult society" (Grob and Dobkin de Rios, 1992: 122). Scholars assert that contemporary drug education should rather aim at encouraging sensitive and empathic parenting, at building childhood self-esteem, at fostering interpersonal relationships and promoting involvement and commitment to meaningful life goals (Shedler and Block, 1990) instead of promoting the "just say no" approach. It is only

in the western society that psychoactive substances are being considered problematic and misused especially among adolescents, which is a symptom of personal and social factors rather than a cause of it (Shedler and Block 1990; Grob, 1986). Scholars argue that the western society has lost a sense of personal meaning and spiritual guidance because of the loss of community and tradition, which leads to declining self-esteem, values confusion, alienation and estrangement, loneliness and isolation, hopelessness and helplessness. In western society, we have lost the “webs of significance” (Geertz, 1973), the tools that constitute a cohesive narrative of existence in traditional cultures, such as stories, songs, beliefs, rituals, ceremonial objects and rites of passage. We try to combat this emptiness and fragmentation on the surface level by consuming goods like comfort foods, promiscuity, drug misuse and similar (Cushman, 1990). This is however only deepening the sense of meaninglessness and creating new problems. What we can learn from non-western societies is to reintroduce “integrative rituals at adolescence to deal with the societal problems of alienation, economic disenfranchisement, social status ambiguity and meaninglessness” (Grob and Dobkin de Rios, 1992: 122). In Wonderland a rite of passage to enforce community bonds was adopted from the spiritual line called the Red Road (*Camino Rojo*). It is done in four stages in the life of every individual. I never witnessed one during fieldwork, but Carlos explained to me how it is done and when:

It is the wheel of life in four stages, one every 13 years. The first stage is from 0 to 13 years. The second one from 13 to 26 years. The third one from 26 to 39 years and the fourth from 39 to 52 years. It is a wheel of life, the cycles that are also the solar wheel, well, the cardinal directions we work within *Camino Rojo*. Each stage of life is identified with a specific cardinal direction. The first the east, then the south, then west and last is the north. The cardinal directions are identified with these thirteen-year stages. The first stage from 0 to 13 years is divided into two stages which are from 0 to 7 years, and from 7 to 13 years. Because that is the time where there is the most change. Then perhaps they are more stable, but in the first years, there is the most change. So, there are four ways to celebrate these transits into the new stage. When a child is born, we do like baptism, the name is sown, and it is like presenting the child to mother earth. There is a ritual where a godfather and a godmother are chosen, and four people who are going to go to the four cardinal directions plus the representatives of sky, earth and spirit. Flower petals of different colours are obtained and thrown while the godparents take the child in their arms and introduce it towards the seven directions saying the child’s name and surname. At the age of 7, an important step is made when the children stop to being completely depended on the tribe and begin to be more self-dependent, they do not impose a burden on the tribe and begin carrying their food, their things and start to collaborate with the tribe. They do some easier tasks such as taking care of their siblings. It is an important stage. A ritual is performed where the child is given a bag with things he or she needs for his or her life, for his or her existence. Among them is water, some food like dried fruits, a candle and a box of matches or a lighter to light it on the altar, and a little toy that always reminds him or her of childhood, a toy that he or she likes. A *temazcal* is done and upon leaving the *temazcal* the bag with the goods is given to the child. Then the child goes alone in the forest and spends the rest of the day there. Also, at the age of 13, a *temazcal* is made, the word is withdrawn as it is done in the vision quest, the child goes to the forest and spends a day and a night there. With their tobacco, they make a circle around them for protection, and when they come back, they go in the *temazcal* where the word is returned to them. As of last, they shoot an arrow with the bow, which is going to mark their life, bring focus to their new life. This is a stage where the children already want some more importance. They are no longer small children but can participate. If they know how to shoot the arrow, boys can help hunting and girls get more integrated with the women. The same ritual is done for both genders. At the age of 26, you climb on a rock of a

medium height and shout your name and 'I am God' at the seven directions. At the age of 39, you climb on a tree and shout your name and 'I am God' at the seven directions. At the age of 52, there is a ritual in which you have to go find 52 sticks to put in the fire. When you collect 52 sticks a little fire is made and you are putting stick by stick into the fire while remembering each year of your life. CARLOS

Rites of passage have a critical role in any society for personal regeneration and the process of growth and maturity, which all people require (Zoja, 1989). Psychoactive plants were used in various traditions in rites of passage to enculturate and educate the adolescents about the goals and values of the community and enable bonding of the individual as an adult member of the community. Altered states of consciousness produced by psychoactive plants (or other initiatory practices) are a didactic device managed and guided by the elders of the community in a set and setting that provokes culturally expected visions, revelations, healing and blessings (see the comparison of Australian Aborigines, the Chumash Indians, and Shangana-Tsonga in Grob and Dobkin de Rios, 1992). Among Fang in Gabon, who use the psychoactive shrub *Tabernanthe iboga* in initiation rituals, the plant is given to the neophytes in increasing doses until they have the culturally desired visions. It has been reported that some youth died because they failed to meet the expectations of the community (Fernandez, 1982).

Health and well-being

Health is a basic human need and biomedicine is just one of many ways people use to heal themselves. Usually, people use a combination of practices to treat pain or improve well-being as I explained elsewhere. To understand how people, choose one or the other practice I was first interested in what the inhabitants of Wonderland think about western medicine.

Allopathic medicine is not medicine in my opinion, it is poison. In some way we are subdued in the cartel of the pharmaceutical industry, mafia groups much more powerful than the cocaine cartel. It is in control of the media and people consider it is the right thing to poison the population with pills that have side effects, which are sometimes superior to the symptoms. That is to say, they can be very, very, very harmful because they are going to disrupt your liver, your kidneys. The body must be seen as an entity that has to function properly. When any part of that union is disrupted, the whole is disrupted. LUIS

Allopathy in my opinion is not bad, but it's misused. You immediately get a pill, while natural medicine provides more reflection on what is happening. I use mainly natural medicine. I think to use plants, in whatever form, is more active work. You heal yourself. It's like you put it in your consciousness to heal yourself. Allopathy removes the symptoms, but you are not healing, just taking away the pain or anxiety. The medical personnel also has a fairly large ego and they believe that they know what is happening to you because they have studied, but that vision is wrong because I'm in my body and, with a little awareness, I know better what is happening to me. You can know about diseases, of the consequences, of what can be done, but I also have consciousness. NINA

I see everything as machinery, a plan that is very well set up to focus health on pharmaceutical companies. A fitted business to take away some of the power we have, of empowerment. When all our senses are awake, we can actually heal ourselves and others. What a medical doctor says is irrefutable, that's the truth. Most of society is working like this. Blind trust in those drugs, in those chemicals. Sometimes, of course, there are disease processes that need that drug that attacks the virus or bacteria or whatever and kills it, and that's fine. But sometimes a dependency can be created and perhaps this drug was not necessary because there is an emotional blockage and the body could heal itself if we would unblock it. It's about finding a balance and knowing how to identify what energy we are working on and to what extent. I'm not radical in saying one is bad and the other is good. I think it's good that we are developing both and identify what serves best in each case. EMMA

For us, in the West, it is difficult to unite the ancestral philosophy and knowledge, something that in the East does not happen with Chinese medicine and all that. We have been taught that to heal we need remedies. I know that in the past natural remedies were not used much, it was not a thing that was used every day. If people ate from the earth, they were strong and, even if they fell ill, they were cured by working, sweating. We have linked health to the pill. I believe that the problem of the pill is to have an easy way out. AURORA

It is evident from the responses that distrust in modern medicine plays an important role in the choices the inhabitants are making when they are seeking treatment. The critique is mainly directed towards the medical professionals who are considered as pretentious, too self-assured and not paying attention or listening to the patient itself. Another point of distrust is in the treatment practice itself, which is mainly directed towards treating the symptoms, while the potential causes of the illness are neglected. Furthermore, excessive dependence on the use of pharmaceutical products is considered as needless or even dangerous due to the side-effects the pharmaceutical products can cause.

Biomedicine has, without doubt, great achievements when it comes to physiology, bacteriology, diagnostics and so forth (Quirke and Gaudillière, 2008), yet its narrow prism struggles when mental health or chronic illnesses (Engel, 1977) and addictions (Alexander, 2010) are in question. Pharmaceuticals relieve the symptoms but fail to address the cause of the problem, which can consequently lead to the re-emergence of the same or other symptoms. Due to the complex and invasive interventions in the body, healthy tissues can be stressed or damaged and significantly decrease the patient's well-being. Moreover, biomedicine is a practice that established only in the past century precisely from the folk knowledge of medicinal plants (Romaní and Comelles, 1991). These folk practices have been replaced by biomedicine to a large degree, but they didn't disappear. On the contrary, at least in Europe, we can observe an increase of diverse "alternative" health practices which range from ancient traditions (Ayurveda, Chinese medicine), herbal remedies, to meditation and yoga, and many others. The increased use of psychoactive plants as therapeutic agents in the last decades is just one more healing practice among many others.

The relationship between biomedicine and traditional healing practices (folk medicine) is a difficult one and cannot be polarised simply. Foremost it is in constant interplay, influencing each other, appropriating and revolving around the cultural, economic and political characteristics in a given time and place. Folk medicine (*medicina popular*) is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a totality of

“knowledge, skills, and practices based on the theories, beliefs, and experiences indigenous to different cultures, whether explicable or not, used in the maintenance of health as well as in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement or treatment of physical and mental illness” (WHO, 2000). One reason why folk medicine does not disappear, even if modern professional medical systems are accessible, is that it is often well effective at treating illness (Kleinman and Sung, 1979). The availability and the need for such healthcare services and its integration into health systems are even reinforced by the WHO in the Traditional Medicine Strategy 2014–2023 (WHO, 2014). Furthermore, herbal remedies used in folk medicines are, as stated by the WHO, “well established and widely acknowledged to be safe and effective” (WHO, 2000) and used also in modern medicine for developing phytochemicals into biomedical products (Gilani, 2005). As a concept and object of scientific research, folk medicine was introduced in the late 19th century by a Sicilian medical doctor and folklorist Giuseppe Pitrè. He was the first to elaborate a methodology for the description and classification in folk medicine and created an epistemological shift by stressing the need for recognition of its practical efficacy in the publication *Medicina Popolare Siciliana* (1986):

Old remedies [...] may be of scientific value. Beliefs and common practices should not be lost simply because the people who use them are uneducated. Their empiricism sometimes provides a happy ending when scientific medicine has failed... and how often have we had to abandon rational means of treatment and observe the marvellous effect of certain remedies administered by old women who were not versed in any therapeutic treatise (Comelles, 2000).

His work not only gives important insights into healing practices but represents a milestone in applied medical anthropology and as such also constitutes ethnography as essential for researching the “construction of medical knowledge” (Comelles, 2016).

Health is a basic human need, but the definition of what health is, how do we understand it, how do we gain or maintain it, can differ according to multiple factors. In various indigenous communities, it is believed that human beings have an intrinsic capacity to heal themselves and the role of the healers is to assist the person in the healing process by strengthening their immune system. In indigenous communities’ prevention is more important than healing since access to pharmaceuticals is difficult. The sick are not taken into hospitals but are being taken care of by the whole community and the native healers, who personally know the ill person, would learn about what the problem is, how, when and where it started. They would make a thorough examination without instruments and standard procedures, but personalised and specific to each individual. In the West, we developed a complicated medical system and technology, which make us believe that a human body is far too complex for a layperson (or the ill persons) to understand and that modern medicine is the best manner to treat any health concern. In western society, we developed a complex healthcare system that requires experts, technology, and other resources to function, while the patients have a relatively passive role in the treatments. Moreover, healthcare systems also perform important non-medical functions, such as social control (Kleinman, 1978). The health, disease and healthcare are processes that dominate our daily lives and constitute a universal phenomenon that operates structurally in every society and in all the social subjects that form part of it (Kleinman, 1978). Illness and disease form a substantive part

of the social processes within which the subject is developing. In all societies healthcare representations, practices and experiences are produced and reproduced. These processes are areas of collective life and community integration where the greatest number of symbolizations, representations, practices and rituals of healing are being generated. They operate within hegemonic/subordinate relationships, within social and ideological control, and within different forms of socioeconomic inequality and cultural differences expressed not only in large social groups (such as ethnic groups, religious groups) but also in micro-groups or communities (Menéndez, 2010).

The healing system, just like any other social system, is the products of how we perceive the world. It is an expression of our beliefs. Each culture has its perspectives on health, healing and disease. In some cultures, it is believed the disease is god's punishment, in others, it is an opportunity to take a break, yet another views disease as a disturbance of energies or imbalance. Wolff (2001) describes how the Malay people view disease, where it comes from and what the role of the healer (called *bomoh* among the Malay) is and how to restore health.

Malays believe that the cause of any sickness is disharmony. The particular form the disease takes may be the result of an invasion of some microorganism, but why this person becomes ill while the next person does not is a consequence of the kind and degree of disharmony in the patient's internal and external environment. Malays and others have known about the immune system all along, although they do not call it that. Healing for Malays is, above all, about restoring harmony. In a very real sense, all of Malay culture is focused on maintaining harmony among people and between people and their environment. [...] Where there is disharmony, it is often the healer who helps to restore harmony, although to facilitate this, as a *bomoh* explained to me, the healer may give a patient herbs to help him cope with symptoms. Ultimately, however, the effort of both healer and patient must be to restore balance to the patient's environment, both physical and social (Wolff, 2001, 62-63).

Another way of understanding sickness in Malaysia is as a warning signal, which alerts the person that he or she is doing something wrong and that change is needed to heal. The healer's task is to figure out what is wrong and guide the ill person towards change. The implementation of change and with it the healing itself is the task of the ill person.

The wrong may not be a behavior; it may be a thought, a feeling, or even a word. It is easier to change a behavior than it is to take back a thought, but it must be done to get well. Healing for the aborigines is almost wholly in the hands of the sick person. If you are ill, you alone can heal yourself – no one can do it for you. What an outsider can do is find out what is wrong, diagnose the illness – and perhaps open the way for healing energy to enter the patient (Wolff, 2001, 63).

In contrast to indigenous healing traditions, western medicine commonly considers disease as a result of an attack that is outside of the body and where the patient is considered a victim of, which influences the way how healing and treatment are applied. Nevertheless, the ill person can take agency and choose a treatment that seems the most suitable in the given situation, which depends on the persons understanding of health and disease, as well as access to different treatment options. To understand people's choices when it comes to healthcare practices, I was interested in how the inhabitants of Wonderland define health and sickness in the first place.

We have three bodies: the mind, the body and the spirit. Throughout our life, we have to cultivate these three bodies so that there is a balance. Normally we cultivate the physical body with food, what we eat, how we nourish ourselves. The mental part is the part of the intellect, the part of studying, your projects, your dreams, reading, all this part that feeds your mind. Then there is the spirit. I think that the evil of much of today's society is because this part is not nurtured, we live disconnected from ourselves. When the spirit is not nurtured one begins to get sick. There is no balance, you are not in the present. We are not super aligned the whole day, but you have to have something in your day, some moment to help you, be it a ceremony, meditation, yoga, walk, whatever helps you connect with yourself. If I don't do that the disease begins to generate because your body is a manifestation of your soul. If you don't listen to what your body tells you, your body presents it to you in a way that you can understand, which is usually through a disease. Of course, plants help me on a personal level to have this direct connection with the spirit because I can listen to myself. I'm giving myself this space and this moment and the plant shows you what you are, not what you think you are, not what you show, but what you really are, which is often different. So, there you have this opportunity to make a change. SOFIA

I think it is very important to perceive a person as a unity of body, mind and spirit. I believe that the three things must be in harmony to be healthy at all levels. I think it is important to take care of yourself, but it is also important to enjoy. If one day I eat a pizza and drink two beer, well nothing happens, if I'm enjoying it. Everything in life is a balance. OLIVIA

A disease is an opportunity to get back on track. It is that sign that tells us 'hey, you are believing something that is not true'. There is an increasingly elaborated and more verified understanding, scientifically corroborated, of how the disease is linked to a lived conflict of the person. The conflict lived has to do with the beliefs that one has, with all that content that makes us perceive reality as an attack, as a problem. So, it's increasingly clear that all diseases, accidents, all this has a lot to do with the perception that you have in the present moment or with the disconnection with the present moment. If you stop, if you practice, if you are here nothing happens. However, when you live with a memory of the past, with a belief, then your body purges that symptom because you are not in harmony. You are interpreting life from a place of conflict. So, the disease is just that, it is the expression of de-harmonisation, a wrong perception of reality, while health is being connected with your heart, with the present moment. ISABELA

A disease is a warning that you are not in tune with your being, with who you really are, and your body begins to do crazy things. The body is sending you a message. Your body has much more power than anything else, but of course, there is a whole industry behind, there is a whole business and doctors have an immense ego. I worked for a doctor, an ophthalmologist... I'm not saying that all doctors are negative and some people need to go to the doctor. [...] That disease or that pain comes from the deepest part of you. It means that the solution is somewhere deep down. Because the disease is simply information. We confuse the doctor with God. God is within each and every one of us. The doctor is a mediator between you and yourself. It is a mirror. It confronts you with the image of healing. SUSANA

Illness means resisting what is happening. It is that lack of dedication to what is happening and it's inevitable. This is a disease. Hiding, denying, finding allies that will believe your lies. Illness is not accepting that we don't know anything and that what they tell us is a lie. If you have natural experiences, you know that this is truer than anything you see or you are being told. I currently smoke, I don't eat properly, I also don't have much money. The body is important, but at this moment in my life, I don't have the possibility to pamper my body. If you don't do that, for whatever reason, you at least have to take care of your internal space and nourish love and not let fear be the reality of your life to transcend physical health deficiencies. PALOMA

I understand illness as an array... It can be thought patterns that are not correct that develop into an addiction or simply that you are not comfortable with your life. So, it's something beyond the physical. I believe that nowadays the majority of society develops diseases on the psychological level and mental health for me is being at peace with yourself. TOMAS

The disease comes when I'm unbalanced when I'm low on defence. And when am I low on defence? Well, when I'm not taking 100% care of myself and food has a lot to do with it. How do I take care of myself? By stopping, sleeping, fasting or dieting. Besides that, I do acupuncture, I have some knowledge of aromatherapy and I go to the doctor. LUCIA

In reality, we are not sick, just a little confused. The body is making us alert that something is not aligned, be it an emotional state, be it a spiritual state. It means to be attentive and it is a continuous work. I would not use the word disease, but a transforming process of being. GLORIA

If you know yourself, if you respect yourself, you have health. If there is no contradiction in you, you have health. We all have a disease. If there's a contradiction in what I think, what I say, and what I do, I will get sick at some point. This is a mental illness, but mental illness manifests physically. Everything that goes on in our head. The yes, the no... When you lose the common sense, that is what creates disease and manifests itself in the body. LEILA

Separation is the biggest disease. The biggest separation is from the mother [earth] and that is also separation from the self because the mother is the life, it is you. She is your heartbeat. The universal mother, the archetypal mother in the Jungian sense. We have got this detachment now or this separation from the mother. But we need the feeling of the bosom to go to the father. Understand who the father is. This is how I see it the Jungian way. JASBIR

According to Kleinman (1988), illness is an innately human experience of symptoms and suffering. It is an experience of disease (or perceived disease) and the societal reaction to the disease. Illness is how the sick person, his or her family and social network perceive, label, explain and live with or respond to symptoms, disability, daily frustrations, stress, depression, demoralization, hopelessness and decreased self-esteem. To resolve or heal the illness the person either seeks professionals or/and alternative practitioners. Disease, on the other hand, is defined as malfunctioning or maladaptation of biological and/or psychological processes. Both disease and illness are different ways of explaining sickness, they are different social constructions of reality (Kleinman, 1988). In other words, illness is related to "felt needs" defined by the actor, which can differ from disease or "objective needs" observed by the staff of health institutions (Menéndez, 2010: 308). Health, illness/disease, and healthcare are all part of a cultural system and governed by the same set of socially sanctioned rules, therefore, they must be understood in relation to each other, as experiences, tactics, and strategies of a subject can only be understood in relationships to other subjects with whom the actor is interacting (Menéndez, 2010). Seppilli (2011) gives the example of psychoneuroendocrinoimmunology, the study of the complex mechanisms through which the central nervous system is able to modulate our immune system, to show how different aspects in a human being interrelate in the health and disease process. According to Seppilli, this is the first example of scientific medicine that recovers a unifying, integrated and systemic perspective on health and disease/illness processes (2011: 911).

The inhabitants of Wonderland understand health, disease and healing holistically in contrast to biomedicine. Health is understood as a balance between the body, mind, spirit, territory and the ecosystem, a

balance between what the person thinks, does and says. The disease emerges when the person falls out of this balance, when the person becomes disconnected from the self and the environment. Disease represents a signal that the person needs a change, it is a chance for transformation. The person has an active role in the healing process, however, medical professionals are commonly consulted, pharmaceuticals are taken to reduce the pain, and herbal remedies or alternative practices are utilised depending on the situation and the (un)successfulness of the biomedical treatment.

I am from Colombia and several indigenous, ancestral cultures have influenced me a lot. Apart from plants, I participate in *temazcals* and I have done some meditation workshops. When you look at natural ecosystems everything is interconnected although we don't realize it, anything that happens in one part of the world affects what is in the other part of the world. I believe that when we speak about health, medicine is unique and all the medicine has the same intention, which is to restore the holistic and global state of health of the person. So, I am not an extreme fan of alternative medicine, natural or modern allopathic medicine of the West. I make a mix. If I break my arm, I will have a cast put on and then use plants to help the healing. I learned this when I lived in indigenous communities in Colombia. They go to the doctor and then use their traditional remedies too. I believe that western medicine has made a great effort in diagnostic techniques and techniques of how to influence symptoms at the physical level. It is a medicine that concentrated many years on this. When we focus on something, we develop tools, techniques and theories that are quite important. The traditional ones have focused more on the causes of physical manifestations. I believe that a balance between the two is optimal. Any health problem I have, I face from both points of view. MATEO

When you feel bad, it's your body telling you that there is something that is not right. The body is simply telling you to stop. If I have pain, I usually do not take medication, I will try to relax or put oil or a natural cream, put on arnica. If I have a headache I'm going to walk because maybe I lack oxygen. If I have a cold and snot, I take some baths with eucalyptus. I've always gone to naturopaths. When I am not feeling well, I go to an osteopath, I do Reiki or use other tools that can help me. I've always used plants or Schüssler's salts. [...] I have always looked for natural remedies, but if I have to take a pill, I take it. I never took contraceptives, but I sometimes take paracetamol, ibuprofen, but I don't like it. Just read the instructions, medication helps you with one thing, but screws up other three or four. I also don't like to get operated. NINA

For me, menstruation is a time when we do a very powerful cleaning of the blood which has accumulated there. Blood is a source of ancestral information, of conflicts, of beliefs, of all this. So, of course, we are in a moment where we have all the ancestry pressing everything that has been lived in the lineage. I know that it is a strong and important moment to be able to liberate, not only expel the blood but take advantage of all that DNA content, to be able to surrender it to the spirit at the conflict level and do our work with the earth when we put the blood into the ground. If we do this with the awareness that the earth is a spirit, then you do that energetic work with all the spiritual charge that your blood has. ISABELA

I don't take any medicine daily. When I have my period and I have a lot of pain, I usually don't do anything or make a tea with plants that help to relieve pain. My relationship with what is pharmaceutical medicine is practically zero. [...] My mother had a lot of chemotherapy, but she complemented it with a good diet, with hydrotherapy, homoeopathy, Bach flowers. It was her way of gaining quality of life. OLIVIA

I had a traffic accident and because of the accident, I suffered panic attacks and had to visit a neurologist. They took me to the psychiatrist to stabilize me with antidepressants and anxiolytics. Before all that, they started to do tests of all kinds, lungs, heart, to see what is happening to me with these crises. Once they determined that everything was fine, they told me

this is anxiety, due to the fairly serious accident I had, and who will help me is a neurologist or a psychiatrist. I spent a year on antidepressants that stabilized me, but I didn't feel myself, I was feeling bad. Then I started to use natural medicine via my mother, who was visiting naturopaths at this time and that's when I discovered the Bach flowers. This experience opened me to a place of tranquillity, of peace, of finding myself again. It made me go to investigate, to want to know and I began searching for my path. [...] When something physical happens to me, first I keep an eye on what my thoughts are doing, how am I living in that moment. I prepare Bach flowers to harmonize and talk with some fellow therapists because sometimes you... It is recommended that someone else prepares the flowers. Although I am sure that the practice of mindfulness will increase our capability to self-diagnose what we need because we can make this dissociation from emotion and thought. Then we can also create our formulas and our remedies. But, hey, at this moment we are still in that process towards a more conscious place and need help from a person in front of us, a mirror because maybe there is something that we are not seeing. So, I do this, I take flowers and I surrender my suffering that makes me feel bad to the spirit. Of course, if it is a physical symptom, that I have to attend to... For example, three years ago, I broke my meniscus and, of course, I had to go for an operation. When I have a bad headache, well, the first thing I do is take ibuprofen. So, blessed be the medicine that helps us restore all these things. I believe that the alliance of all medicine is important. ISABELA

If I get sick, I have a hard time going to the doctor. I'm a person who if my stomach hurts, I eat rice with broth or I drink a rosemary or thyme tea, or if my period hurts, I drink sage tea. If I have something on my skin, I use oil or something. If I have a cold, well, I let it pass. If I'm in pain I take a pill, because I'm not a masochist either. LEILA

Kleinman defined three sectors of health systems that people use and mix: popular (individual, family, social networks, community), professional (western medicine, professionalised indigenous traditions such as Ayurveda or Chinese medicine) and folk (non-professional secular or sacred healing specialists) (Kleinman, 1978: 86). In any society or culture most health issues – when to seek aid, whom to consult, whether to comply, the efficiency of treatment – are managed mainly within the popular domain (Kleinman, 1978). Each of the three health systems consists of subsystems (such as beliefs, roles, decisions, relationships and institutions) or separate clinical realities, which differ not only from society to society, but also for the different sectors of the same health care system, and even for different agencies of care in the same sector. Healthcare is a pluralistic system where explanatory models for studying pluralism in medical beliefs, choices, and treatments should be used (Kleinman, 1978; Haro Encinas, 2000).

I have selected four examples to show how the pluralistic healthcare system is utilised in Wonderland. First in a case of a myoma, second a psychotic episode, third a child's dislocated shoulder, and fourth asthma and child's curved legs. The examples show how the inhabitants treat their condition, how it emerged, what were the symptoms and how it developed. In all cases, a mix of healthcare systems is used to re-establish well-being.

I had a myoma that was detected three years ago, and the surgeon told me that he will be removing my uterus and that everything will be fine. This happened in a time when I was starting my work with my femininity because the *temazcal* had told me that 'hey, connect!', and that man tells me now that he is going to take my uterus. I said, 'no, there has to be another option', but he didn't give it to me. I told him that I'm going to try something natural to dry the myoma, reduce it, eliminate it, there are many possibilities. I started therapy with plants from the Amazon. I think it was going well, but in a year my myoma reduced very little and it was

expensive. So, a friend from work is collecting plants and makes oils and creams, she is an astrologer, she works with Schüssler's salts, Bach flowers... She told me to look for local plants to do the treatment because it's the same energy and it will be easier to heal. She told me about the minerals too, so I started treatment with the Schüssler's salts. These are the salts which correspond with horoscope signs. Each one serves for one thing, for pain, iron for blood, calcium for bones, but they also have other components at the emotional level like anti-inflammatory, relaxing. She gave me three minerals. Calcium, which is anti-inflammatory and helps to deflate because the myoma was very large, in the end, it was the size of 7 by 8 and took up the entire uterus. She gave me iron because when you have a myoma you have periods of 15 days with a very high blood loss and a lot of pain. I had contractions every 5 minutes that lasted one minute, I've been like this for days. At some point I was taking a drug called Nolotil, which is very strong medicine, because sometimes with relaxation only I couldn't get calm. Allopathy is good for some things and, surely, it saves many lives, but it should not be prescribed with such ease. I believe that in allopathic medicine many doctors do not have a comprehensive vision, they only focus on the disease, but you don't have to be treated for the disease, you have to be treated as a patient. So, if you are going to give a pill for a disease, this disease will be linked to something else, something emotional, to another organ that may not be the cause, that pain is not the problem. That is why I do not like it because rather than regulating problems they cover them. Like the antibiotics that fight all the bacteria, but we have millions of bacteria in our bodies that have a function. So, if you take an antibiotic then you will have to take a probiotic too. Sometimes it is good to avoid an antibiotic if it's not necessary. So, those salts lessen the pain, and they worked quite well for me. I also did a treatment with Indiba, which is a machine that sends electrical impulses to the cells and makes the cell electrically activated. The woman who did this is a naturopath, a nutritionist and also works with the cupping therapy that the Chinese use for thousands of years. With those two things and eating more protein to supply the lack of iron after just two years, I expelled the myoma. Instead of doing the caesarean section, which is what they are going to do to remove the myoma, they didn't even need to cut me open. [...] The surgeon told me 'you don't know what this is, removing the uterus is very easy and I know what's best to do because your uterus is not going to develop a myoma any more'. Maybe I develop it then in the Fallopian tube and then you're also going to remove those too and you take everything away from me until I have nothing left. Well, it is an option, but I think there are other possibilities for me. There is little respect they have towards the patient and his/her knowledge of himself/herself. He told me he has removed many uteri, he has done many very easy operations, that it was easy to remove, not only the myoma but the whole uterus. I do not doubt that, but this is my uterus. I'm not easily accepting you telling me that you are going to take it away from me. I will try something else and maybe if there is no other remedy, I will do this at the end. [...] It was heavy work, and besides the plants and everything, there was a lot of spiritual work to figure out what created the myoma in the first place. I went to the root of the problem. The feeling that I was not a good mother and the desire of having a second child because my partner no longer wanted more. The myoma was found by a friend of mine while meditating. He put his hands on top of me and when he passed over the uterus, he said 'what have you got here?'. It's when I went to the doctor. Meditation is a movement of energy that kind of discovers the blocks and I had a big block. This is the reason why I went to see a doctor. One day I did a meditation on what is this what I have created, this frustration of not having another child, of not having a natural birth that I always wanted to have, my frustrations as a mother and also my mother's natural abortion that she had before she got me. During the meditation, it came to me that it was my unborn brother, that his spirit stayed there when my mother had the abortion. Right after her abortion, she got pregnant with me and when I was born my brother came with me. So, when I had these feeling that caused my symptoms, he got the opportunity to be seen. I realised that it was my brother who wanted to go out, that he materialized in a myoma. I spoke to my mother, I asked her if she had chosen a name for him and, of course, my mother forgot that she had lost a son who had not been seen. She doesn't think she has three children; she thinks she has two and an abortion. I asked her what name she would have given him. So then when I had my Indiba therapies or when I was meditating, I

would speak to him. I was losing water vaginally and it was as if my water broke about one week before I expelled the myoma naturally and I did it by myself at home, here in the bathroom. I gave birth to the myoma and in the end, expelled it vaginally. He gave me the opportunity to have a natural birth. He was as a healer of many things. NINA

I don't believe in mental illnesses that are entities. I fear that a person will become food for the psychiatric hospital because of the medications... I see it, I know many people that do not raise their heads because the same side effects of the medications corroborate the diagnosis that is not based on anything scientific. When I was 23 years old, I had a psychotic episode, a loving threesome, an abortion, a series of things. More light was opening to me than I could receive, I was not prepared. I was telepathic. Seriously, I have witnesses. Because, of course, it could be that I went crazy and I was saying things that are not. I saw a person and knew what her name was even if I never met her before, or a dog, things with the church, archetypes. I could not explain, but a lot of information was opened to me that I could not channel. At that time, I was at the *concheros*¹⁴ and my partner freaked out. He saw that I had powers, psychic abilities, but if you do not sleep and things are not in order... Well, I needed a psychiatric admission, they had to stop me because I didn't sleep. I needed it and I appreciate it. I'm not anti-psychiatry. This experience had a lot of depth. When I left the psychiatric hospital and reincorporated in life, I asked myself 'and now who am I?' A stranger, I have no idea about myself, because I was my own joy and now, I don't have that. I had an emptiness, I could be anything, I have no idea who I am, how to react... I don't know. Life is strange. Later I had a partner, difficult to explain, he was addicted to me, and I also became addicted to him. I had so much sadness and depression and I took antidepressants. These antidepressants, and at that moment I also drank whiskey, caused another psychiatric admission. So, that's where I said, 'the good in the bad' and I broke free from the world of work. I was happy to work, e, but a series of things happened, they changed my workplace and my colleagues, so I followed this other path. PALOMA

We are taking the children to the paediatrician. I am not a doctor. I understand medicines, I like Bach flowers, I do Reiki, I have my way of understanding the accompaniment of disorders in the physical and mental body, but I am not a doctor, nor do I want to be, nor do I want to take the place of the doctor. My daughter has her paediatrician and nurse just like my son. We are taking them to regular check-ups. In case they detect something, we decide, if we want to follow what they recommend or what we believe is best for our children and often it's not the same. For example, the last time we were in such a situation was when our daughter fell on a trampoline and dislocated her shoulder. She is a girl who is used to mountains, falling and such and hardly ever cries. But now she cried a lot, and I knew there's something wrong. I went to the emergency hospital. They did x-rays and nothing seemed wrong. The great traumatologist told her 'you have to raise your arm if not your parents are going to leave'. I now think about how we could allow him to speak to her like this. We were so scared that we gave the doctor all the power. They put a cast on for a week and we did what they told us, thinking it was the best thing for our daughter. We gave her ibuprofen so that she would not suffer pain. We did what they told us, but with doubts, because we didn't like the manner she was being treated. The week when they had to remove it, she still could not lift her arm. They told us to come back in a month. My daughter was not herself; I never saw her like that. She was in the house, sitting on the sofa barely moving her arm. One night she woke me up screaming in pain. In the morning we got up and went straight to a physiotherapy centre in town. Of course, she didn't want to go because she was very afraid because of this experience. There they were super respectful, they allowed me to hold her on my lap while they were checking on her, instead of putting her on a stretcher. They told us that it looks like her shoulder is dislocated and cannot be seen by radiography because of its position and it's not visible in children. They had to move the bone back into the socket and they did. At that moment it was hurting her, but it improved in no time. So, we take the children to the doctors, but we do not believe them 100% either. We value diagnostics. They know, they have studied that, they are specialists in that and they know things

14 A ritual dance.

that I don't know, but I also know things that maybe they don't even want to know. If there is an alternative, less invasive things and more natural, we will go for it. But I don't criticise them either. I think they do the best they can within their knowledge. What I find wrong is that they are not open to expanding their knowledge, that they don't want to see any other way. It works, but there are things where it doesn't work. LUCIA

When I am sick... depends on what kind of disease are we talking about. If it's a basic thing like flu or cold I usually heal myself with the plants I have here. It takes a little longer because natural treatments are always a little slower, but usually, I heal myself. When I started working in this house [Water House], I had realized that physical ailments have a root in the spirit. Of course, you can cure some illnesses by going to the doctor or at the physical level, but if you don't treat the spiritual ailment it's useless because it is going to come back at you. I had asthma for many years. Due to the spiritual work, I did and observations of my crises, I realised that all had an emotional background. Everything was due to what was happening to me and I didn't have the ability to digest. [...] I always treat myself in both ways, that is, when I feel that I have something more serious that I can't heal myself, I'm always going to seek a diagnosis. I go to the doctor and from there I decide what to do. For me, it is essential to unite the two things. In any treatment, I always do the spiritual part and in reality, my health changed a lot and I improved a lot since I'm here. I didn't have asthma in these 15 years that I'm here. I had some little issues, but I didn't need to go to the hospital. I treated myself with the tools that I had. [...] I do the same with my daughter. When she started walking her legs were very curved. So much that people asked me what's with the girl. We took her to the doctor, and he said she had one hip bigger than the other and one leg shorter than the other. So, she got a corrector, but it didn't help. When Don Fernando from Mexico came, I spoke to him and he told me that everything that children have until the age of seven can be cured if you know where it comes from. He asked some questions and told me that what is happening to Luna comes from when I was pregnant with her. It wasn't really her thing; it was something mine that I had passed on to her. For her to be well, I had to realize what was the origin of all this, what happened to me. It surprised me because he told me that all of this came from me. He told me that since the girl was not yet seven years old, all this can be corrected by giving love to the girl, praying for her. Up to this day, she is fine. SOFIA

There is a gap between the patient's felt needs and the doctor's objective needs. The inner world of personal experience and the culture in which that world has taken shape is largely ignored by biomedicine that is treating the disease rather than illness. The people's stories imply that it is the cultural system as a whole which heals (Kleinman, 1978). The cultural construction of the illness experience and the criteria for evaluating therapeutic outcome form part of the healthcare systems along with institutionalized conflicts between lay and practitioner views of clinical reality and evaluations of therapeutic success (Kleinman, 1978: 87). In modern western society, these conflicts are greatest between the official biomedical healthcare system and all the rest of practices that people utilise, if and when they feel that official medicine is not succeeding in the treatment. The efficacy of the treatment is two-fold and should evaluate the felt needs of the patient (illness) and the objective needs of the professional (disease) to hold any significance.

There is a general loss of faith in the reliability of scientific knowledge in late modernity. According to Giddens individuals are forced to negotiate identity and life crises through a diversity of "expert systems" (1991: 4-5) that consist of "multiple sources of authority, frequently internally contested and divergent in their implications" (1991: 3). The decline of scientific prestige opens the way for a proliferation of new expert systems. The processes of health, disease/illness, and healthcare might signal something about and

contribute to, certain lifestyle choices as means of producing self-identity (Giddens, 1991: 141) and group identity (Menéndez, 2010: 304-305). According to Zaloker and Zaloker (2011), the use of alternative healthcare practices is associated to the person's overall change in values and beliefs about health, as well as the tendency towards a holistic view of health as a balance between mind, body and spirit where the individual's responsibility for the own health becomes more pronounced.

What is healing and how does it happen? Healing is a complex process and to understand it we must widen our lens. Besides the actual treatment other key features such as doctor-patient relationship, desirable effects and placebo effects, have to be taken into consideration (Moerman, 2002). Understanding illness/disease and healing only from the hegemonic biomedical perspective is limiting these processes to diagnose and treatment response and to applying a specific treatment to a specific disease, while missing out on many other crucial elements that play a role in healing. Folk medicine, indigenous healing practices and alternative healing systems, including those that use psychedelics, have a more holistic approach. The healing rituals involve active participation of the patient, healer and the community. They involve various senses such as hearing (music, chanting and prayer), smell, and touch "to such a degree that it is difficult to isolate the effects of one element versus another" (Fotiou, 2020: 19) and all of them together bring about the healing. Moreover, the aim of traditional or alternative healing practices is not *per se* to cure or to eliminate the disease but to heal or alleviate the person's suffering and improve well-being without necessarily curing the disease (Griffiths, Johnson, Carducci, *et al.*, 2016).

I was told the story about Serena, a ballerina who got a rare case of cancer in her 30s – one that is usually diagnosed to children, not adults – by the inhabitants of Wonderland many times. The medical doctors gave up on treating her and she asked Estela if she can come to the Stone House to die. She came there when six or seven other people were living there. Serena lived with them, participated in the daily rituals of Santo Daime, and after several months of waiting for her death, she met a man and eventually went to live with him. She recovered to a degree that the doctors asked her to share her story with other cancer patients and possibly give them a ray of hope in their battles. Serena did not get cured, but prolonged her life for several years, while her doctors gave up on her and send her home to die in just a few months. Every time Estela told me the story about Serena, she emphasised the positive attitude Serena had and the amount of laughter there was in the house, her determination, and other practices, which all prolonged her life and increased the quality of life.

I always said that what healed her was laughter, more than the Daime. The joy that makes you happy and makes you feel good. She also did other alternative therapies, she went to alternative doctors, she was taking great care of the whole process. At that time, we all had a macrobiotic diet. ESTELA

Psychoactive plants are used by the inhabitants of Wonderland for healing purposes in the same way as a variety of other healthcare practices including biomedicine. Alma is utilising ayahuasca as the primary medicine, complementing it with a healthy diet and other practices.

For me [ayahuasca] is medicine because it contains everything one needs if one is working humbly and listening to what she brings. [...] Sometimes I go to the doctor, but when I get there I am left without an answer. With medicine [ayahuasca] she gives me an answer and helps me with what I am feeling. I don't need other medicines. If I talk about these things with psychologists, they would say I'm crazy. There are many things that I prefer not to talk about [laughter]. [I treat myself] with a plant, or with food, or with changing something in my day to day, you know, that's not a routine thing. You have to change something. That's how I'm making my way. I trust her. ALMA

Jasbir is doing intensive healing work with *degh* (cannabis drink) and treats people with dependencies, traumatic experiences, cancer patients and others for the last twenty years. He described his approach as follows:

I look at everything as a battle. Because it is a battle you need many different techniques. The first thing is knowledge. Assess the person, understand them, talk to them, feel them, hear them. That is the first stage. Just to hear them, to understand them. To let them know you listen, that you understand their pain or their problem and you don't judge them, but share with them. I tell them what happened to me. Not because I want to keep talking about myself, but because it makes it easier. The second thing is to get a second opinion. I ask other therapists I know. What do you think? What can we do? Because other people might have more experience with sexual abuse or suicide attempts. I do it every time because you can forget. Then herbal. What herb can I give them to settle their mind? Or give them more energy? How can I bring them into homeostasis, equilibrium? Massage, releasing stress. Yoga, releasing the tension in the muscles, releasing the tension in the face, in the jaw, in the head. I physically do this. It is like shiatsu, but Indian warrior version. You get all the tension out of the body. It is a northern Indian wrestling massage. I actually went to wrestlers and learned how they do it. How you manipulate the body to get the tension out of the body? Different oils according to the person's constitution. Clean the digestion with oil suppositories. Cleaning the nasal systems, Indian head massage. Even cleaning the hair. Breathing exercises, mantra, prayer and at the end the medicine, *degh*. If somebody is against *degh* then I do it without and in a different way with nutmeg. I do it with a legal concoction. I use all of this to help heal the person. That takes seven days minimum. The person would have three- or four-hour sessions with me every day for seven days. It is not always like that, but generally yes. The more psychologically sick people are, the more closed they are. Psychologically healthy people are very open, let it all out, they don't hold anything in. Then I analysed them, I tell them what practice and exercise they can do or diet they need to keep their balance. That is from the Ayurvedic, yogic perspective. That is what I do full time, this is what I have been doing for twenty years. One on one training. Maximum I have four people at a time. I don't take more than four because then I need to do sixteen hours per day with all four. It is exhausting, but it is rewarding. This work made me realize that it is not just about the mantra or the prayer, it is about creating that silence and openness where the subconscious can come out, where you can liberate and that is in all of us because we are all a brother or a sister, or a son or a daughter, a mother or a father. Is so human and normal, but we have forgotten this subtlety. People could go for 50 years and miss it. A whole life and maybe when they are dying they see this. But really, we are designed to live in that moment. That's why we are creating Wonderland and that's what we are here for. JASBIR

The inhabitants of Wonderland use a variety of healthcare practices in which they engage as active and autonomous agents in the healing. All the inhabitants were in good health at the time I lived among them. Only Manuel was hospitalised once for appendicitis and was released after one week and Mateo recovered from cancer. Few inhabitants had health issues in the past such as a benign myoma, bulimia and anorexia, asthma, pain and anxiety caused by a traffic accident, and psychotic episodes. All these conditions were

successfully treated and non-existing at the time I was conducting fieldwork. None of the inhabitants was overweight or suffering from diseases associated with it. None of them is vegetarian although most of them do have a diet based on mainly whole-grain foods, fruit, vegetables, legumes and nuts, while the meat is eaten only on rare occasions. We were buying grains (rice, buckwheat), sugar, cocoa powder, tahini, tamari, sunflower seeds, sesame seeds, etc. in bulk in an organic wholesale shop one-and-a-half-hour drive from the house. We went there just a few times per year. The flour we were buying in 5 or 10 kg sacks from the mill that Estela's ex-husband is running. Soon after my arrival, I got introduced to Owel's teachings about nutrition and macrobiotics that occupy a central role in the Stone House. Owel is an elder in the community whose teachings are based on the importance of food for health and well-being. He was born in Java but was growing up in the Netherlands and later he moved to the United States of America where he lived with his wife and three children. He was working in a factory where he had to do repetitive work, which made him feel unhappy, so he quit his job and started a macrobiotic centre in Los Angeles in the 70s. Since then he has travelled the world and lived with Native American communities where he developed his message of food, blood and the creator. His message is that there is a lot of confusion in our world due to bad nutrition. His teachings are based on macrobiotics and food is considered medicine because our nutrition influences the quality of our blood and through this quality of blood, we can reach one or another degree of consciousness. The food we eat transforms into the blood that goes to the brain and influences our thinking, therefore, lethargy and disease that we witness in our society is the consequence of our lifestyle and the food we are consuming. I had a long conversation with Aurora, who is a disciple of Owel and a passionate cook, about Owel's teachings, macrobiotics, food as medicine, and three important premises: What do we eat? How do we cook it and how do we eat it?

Grandfather Owel says that the kitchen is the centre of a community, it is the government, the school and the hospital. Kitchen is an altar. From his teachings, I began to look at food as medicine. The medicine is food. My path of medicine is that of food. When the grandfather began to speak of the message of food, he began to explain the entire cycle (see Photo 10) of the descent from the creator, from the great mystery to the most solid. You realize that we are also related to natural law and nature. The descent, the first impulse of the creative energy that divides into two, generates vibration, the vibration generates sound, which is the lightning, the lightning generates the light, from there it densifies and becomes gaseous, like the water element. Why does water give life? Because it is the conduit of creation, of being able to bring everything to solidity. That is why water can be solid, liquid and it can be gaseous. That is our body, our intestine. The mineral quality of the blood is the same as that of the sea. We are nature. If you want to be an ecologist, you cannot go against the human being. You must forgive the human being, understand the human being, change and help that this is shared. The most stable solid is iron. That is why our blood has iron. The centre of the earth contains iron. Our blood is related to the sea, with the centre of the earth, our cells are connected with the stars, our twelve organs connected with twelve constellations. We are a micro-cosmos of the macro-cosmos. That is why the Christian tradition said, 'in the image of God'. So how do we evolve? Well, by the way, we live on earth. And what is the point of union, when you are already on earth, what is the point of union with all that creation? Food. Food is our connection with the earth. Lunchtime has become very social. It would be good to be like the native peoples who eat in silence. Food is not a social act. When I was living with the Mapuche women, lunchtime was not the time to speak. Why? Because it is the point of union with creation? Just as you are a

result of all that descent, each seed, each plant not only has the nutrients of the earth, it has the light of the stars and the entire cosmos, and all the radiation that comes from the universe is condensed and trapped by the plant. In other words, one of our ancestors is the plant world. They are our ancestors. The plant world, as our ancestor, is the one that gives us the possibility of creating haemoglobin from chlorophyll. When we are in our mother's belly, we cannot have access to vegetables, so we eat our mother's blood. I'm not saying we need to eat meat, but I'm also not saying that the alternative is veganism. For me, it is not like that. Raw food is also not an alternative. The alternative is what macrobiotics says: local and seasonal food. Because your body is totally adapted to where you live and that is why the land has different climates and the communities have developed in different ways. Because we are a micro-cosmos of creation and, although we have gone to live in cities because we are human, we are connected and subject to natural law and nature. That is indestructible. But our way of living and creating our society and our customs can be an anti-natural society. Grandfather Owel also talks about three very important fires: the fire from heaven is the sun; another is the fire of the earth, which is the fire of the home, of the kitchen where you cook food; and third is the fire of the heart, the internal fire. For the fire of the heart to be activated the other two fires are needed, the fire of the earth and the fire of the sky. Food absorbs fire from heaven and synthesizes it for the body to assimilate. [...] Macrobiotics says that the most difficult disease to cure is arrogance. In macrobiotics death can be the cure, death can be part of the healing process. That is why it is very important how you die because health is the health of the whole being. If you become aware and die in a good way, that is the cure. [...] It also doesn't matter if you are good or bad, if you go against the law of the universe, you are going to destroy yourself. There lies the basis of food and why it is a problem that we don't teach children what food is and how to eat and all this. After I met grandfather Owel I started to change things that I have been used to from my father's house. He had a very difficult childhood and he always took care that there were many things to eat in the kitchen, but it was not food. When I met grandfather Owel I realised that this was not food and that it really made me sick. I realised that we had lost something important concerning food. My parents were not teaching me how to eat. But they did the best they could. Coming from a humble family we ate what was on the table. My father filled us with food that was not nourishing due to the poverty he experienced. Having the fridge full was the best thing he could do, he worked hard for us to have food. It is super curious that food is a very important thing in our life, however, we do not teach about it. It is one of the things that you are going to do all of your life. One of the bases, the first thing I would do as a feminist, is to educate my children about food. So that he or she can develop the brain, the whole body, all physiology, all this potential and give him or her tools to be truly free and have the capacity to have a high judgment, a high discernment and this begins with food. Because food is the raw material with which you created your thoughts. This is impeccable, this is pure science, it is evidence. What happens is that there is evidence that is accepted and evidence that is discarded. The typical example is with chocolate and children. You give chocolate or sugar to a child and you see the child's reactions, you see how the child behaves, what the child does. When you are an adult this does not happen so much because the body has become accustomed to all these foods that are not food. What's happening? You use more of your own vitality or vital energy, rather than the vital energy that you generate with food. Because the food you eat is poor, you spend a lot of the energy of the origin, of your birth that has already given you everything. But then to grow, evolve, to be able to expand, you keep eating the creation of the creator, you keep eating to make consciousness, to make thoughts, to make feelings, to make emotions, and your health is connected with this cycle. We are all in this cycle. [...] I fast twice a year for ten days eating only brown rice to clean the entire intestine. It is a very strong parasite cleanse; you take a tablespoon of rice that has been soaking. You have to chew 100 times minimum, 100 chews. In reality, we are supposed to chew every bite for a minimum of 50 chews in a normal meal. I also drink kukicha tea, which helps thin the blood and helps assimilate calcium. Rice focuses you and gives you energy, it is a carbohydrate, but you are going to lose minerals. The kukicha helps replenish those minerals. I feel that it is very healing and gives me well-being. I notice it a lot in my nervous system, in my mental state. It is the food that centres you. AURORA

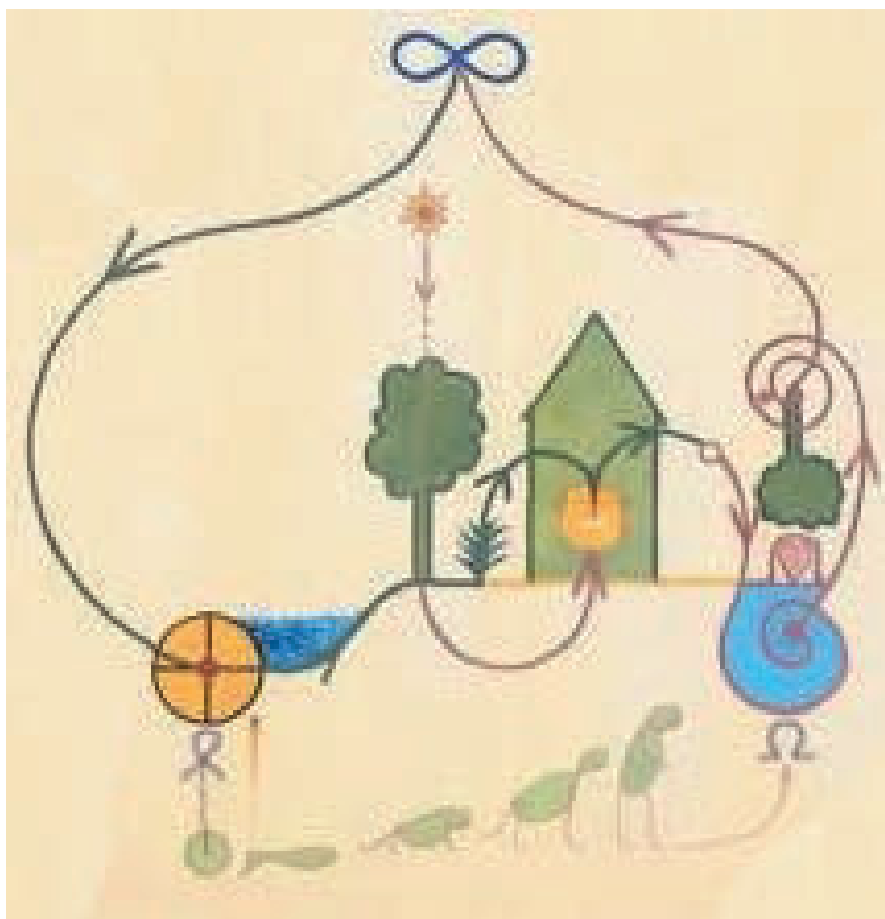


Photo 10: The cycle of food as medicine according to Owel. The image represents the interdependence and connectedness of the human and the environment.

Emma is travelling all over Europe for several years with a *mara'akame* from Mexico, organising, translating and assisting her in the healing treatments. Emma learned from the healer and people who come to see her that the most common contemporary health issues are connected to nutrition and emotional well-being.

For me, the basis of good therapy is a good diagnosis. The therapy is basically recommendations on how to eat well. I see a lot of different people, some with a lot of money that have a very poor diet. Of course, there is an emotional component to it too. But you say to yourself 'wow, you have all the luxuries, a house, a car, whatever and you are eating pizza and pasta every day and it's making you sick'. They need this small, humble granny from the countryside to tell these people 'no, eat vegetables and fruit'. In other words, she tells them very essential, basic things, well, very specific things as well, but you think to yourself 'wow, how we are so confused and we are losing health because we don't take good care of ourselves'. Our emotions have a lot to do with it too. One thing that I realized in those therapies, because you see many people who open themselves and explain their most vulnerable, intimate, fragile and secret things, is the lack of love or the reception of love or a block with love. In other words, the main problem of humanity, which I have seen, has to do with love. Fatherly or motherly love, that of abuse, of a boyfriend or girlfriend, love of society or not feeling integrated, that of a family, some imbalance of love of any kind. A lack of love that later develops into emotion and that emotion is somatised in the body, that emotion is physically put into the body and an organ becomes ill, develops into an illness. It is like a whole circuit. The concepts of health and sickness are very broad concepts in my mind and depend on cultural contexts and personal

histories. Health is a state of well-being of the mind and heart, a feeling of inner peace and that is also reflected at the cellular, muscular, organ level, everything. EMMA

When I was talking with other inhabitants of Wonderland about food and nutrition, they all acknowledged that food is another form of medicine and essential for maintaining health. Healthy diet meant eating whole-grain foods, plenty of fruit and vegetables and little meat, all of organic origin. From what I have observed, they have a healthy diet and only rarely eat sweets, fast food or other processed foods. None of them is vegetarian or vegan. Their diet is semi-vegetarian, also called a flexitarian diet, centred around plant foods with the occasional inclusion of meat or fish. In the time I lived in the Stone House I ate fish or meat maybe four or five times when we were eating in a restaurant. In the Water House meat was on the menu occasionally, since they are keeping chickens and sometimes buy meat from a local farmer. The inhabitants do not choose healthy diet only because it is healthy, but because they like and enjoy it.

Nutrition is super important for the maintenance of health. Health equals nutrition. Hippocrates said 'let your food be your medicine'. I get up in the morning, make a fruit juice and then maybe a celery juice. Celery is super important because it restores... We have 52 different classes of hydrochloric acid in our stomach, and what celery does is it restores everything that is the intestinal flora. The intestine is our second brain, so if you keep it strong in some way, you keep everything strong. You have to be strong to live life. If you have no strength and not in good health, you are losing your life. You have to take care of the body, mind and spirit. [...] I eat meat on very few occasions, pork also due to animal abuse. We are eating antibiotics, we are eating shit, they are consciously poisoning us. LUIS

I'm a cook since I was four years old. Diet is very important for human beings. If we all listen to our body, what it asks, the world would be a bit different. We can nourish ourselves from the field itself, from nature. Some people say 'weeds'. Why weeds? If you pick an edible leaf it can bring you many benefits. There are no weeds. There is bad language, bad thoughts and bad habits, but no bad plants (*mala hierba*). ALMA

There are times when I have a physical imbalance, sometimes in the spring or fall, if I have not eaten well. It is essential that you eat well. Everything is linked. Balance is a very delicate thing. One has to take care of the diet because it brings you out of balance a lot, especially on the emotional level. And of course, emotion and physique are closely related. The doctors still do not give enough importance to this. Because what we eat physically has a lot to do with what we eat emotionally. We feed ourselves emotionally, spiritually and physically. If you aren't emotionally well, you have deficiencies that you then need to supplement with food. Sweets, cheese, or smoking. It is also a form of emptiness. You don't have a good emotional attuning in your life, which does not mean that you have bad relationships with people, but that you are not well. You have to know how to nourish yourself. SUSANA

I work from the heart and this is one thing that I have discovered as I have learned this profession¹⁵. It can be very mechanical because you cook a series of quantities for so many people, this recipe... It involves a lot of effort, there is a lot of pressure when you work with children. I started working in a very practical way in the colonies. I work with food that is manipulated, but at home I have organic food from my garden, only manipulated by myself. Sure, that's different nutrition. There is this contradiction with the food you eat from your garden and the food you eat when you go to work. Like me, I work in a school, or I have worked in a restaurant, or a colony and I eat the manipulated food. Rice with tomato and chicken sauce. I have also learned to slaughter animals. I have sold dead animals from my farm

15 At the time of the interview Julia was working as a cook in the school cafeteria for many years and cooking in colonies for big groups of children.

to earn money, only in small amounts, until I decided not to do it anymore because I thought if you want to eat meat, you should slaughter it yourself. Nobody wants to see blood, but everyone wants two lamb ribs. I no longer slaughter animals, but I know how to do it in a consecrated way. At this time, I don't keep animals to eat. Neither eggs because both of us, who live in this house, work and when you have this type of infrastructure you need to work after working to take care of it and it's so abundant that you also have to work again to store and preserve all this food. The earth gives you food in abundance, especially if you take care of it and you don't need to do much only respect it and watch how everything grows. It's the same with the animals. Suddenly you have eight chickens, but you are going to eat only one. The rest is a gift for the tribe. At last, food is for sharing and we don't know to share, we don't have the culture or the education to share. JULIA

In western society, where folk medicine and traditional healing practices got largely replaced by biomedicine, the New Age networks and complementary and alternative medicines (CAM) re-introduced individualistic and subjectivist values that challenge and constitute an alternative to conventional medical systems (Cornejo Valle and Blázquez Rodríguez, 2013: 22) by giving the patients a greater autonomy in the healing process. However, the autonomy is two-folded, as many scholars pointed out, it generates a “paradox of responsibility” (Granero, 2003: 120) where patients feel responsible for their health and actively participate in the diagnosis and treatment of their disease but, on the other hand, it diminishes the social, political and economic factors of health problems and blames the patient to have inadvertently caused their disease, thus transferring the responsibility from the state or institutions towards the individual (Sontag, 1989: 87).

In Wonderland, as we have seen, the experiences with conventional biomedicine were often unsatisfactory and addressing symptoms rather than the causes, therefore, other practices were consulted by the inhabitants. After all, many of them were familiar with alternative health practices from their family environment and their network of friends. Taking responsibility for one's own actions is a common trait among the inhabitants including when it comes to questions of health and healthcare. They give much importance to a holistic understanding of life itself, thus, the balance between mind, body, spirit and the environment is central to their worldview in which self-care strategies (Menéndez, 1981) form an important part of it. The Cartesian dualism, that modern biomedicine is based on, falls short on understanding the human as a whole being, while alternative practices offer a holistic treatment of the “mindful body” (Scheper-Hughes and Lock, 1987) consisting of physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual and other components.

Why are alternative healthcare practices (including the use of psychoactive plants) becoming so popular in the competitive culture of individualism (Douglas, 1994) As we have seen from the examples, much has to do with how people experience the treatment. The elimination of the disease/illness is not necessarily the main goal. More important is the “gentleness” (Douglas, 1994) aspect that produces feelings of affection, protection, care, relaxation and well-being on one hand, and does not attack or invade the body on the other. Another component is that of taking time for each person and giving them a voice in the healing process. Yet another reason might lie in confronting the liquid modernity (Bauman, 2011), which caused a

collapse of traditional values and frustration, and sparked a quest for “re-enchantment of the world” to fill the void and reconnect with the cosmos, nature, ourselves and the environment (Berman, 1987; Noguera de Echeverri, 2004). The challenge remains of how to re-enchant the world through values and not objects, without being at the mercy of a paradigm that reproduces old moralisms and creates new forms of social control (Riccò, 2019). Perhaps we have to seek the answers by first acknowledging indigenous communities as equal interlocutors and start to listen and learn from them.

PSYCHOACTIVE PLANTS IN A GLOBAL VILLAGE

*Psychedelic drugs don't change you
they don't change you character
unless you want to be changed.
They enable change; they can't impose it.*

– Alexander Shulgin, *Pihkal: A Chemical Love Story*

Among indigenous peoples of the world, psychoactive plants have an important medicinal and nutritional value, but besides that they are intelligent beings with a spirit, in some cases referred to as plant teachers or *plantas maestras* (Luna, 1984a; Schultes and Raffauf, 2004), transmitting knowledge on the origin of the world or mankind and connecting with the spirit (ancestor) world. Throughout history humans sustained a symbiotic relationship with psychoactive plants, learning with them and about them. Psychoactive plants were part of indigenous pharmacopoeia for centuries, often associated with gods and connected to shamanism, magic, religious and healing practices. The use was socially approved and integrated into the religious and social life of the community. These cultures developed a complex ritual setting to enforce the benefits and safety, but also to prevent abuse of these practices (Carod-Artal, 2015). Generally, elders were those who managed altered states of consciousness as part of the religious and pedagogical activity (Grob and Dobkin de Rios, 1992). The shamans/*curanderos/mara'akame/payé*¹⁶ were the mediators between the physical and spiritual realms and would, through the trance state, acquire knowledge about plants, diagnose diseases, ensure a good harvest, and so on (Furst, 2002). The initial use cannot be determined in time, however, “the deliberate seeking of the psychoactive experience is [...] one of the characteristics of *Homo sapiens sapiens*” (Goodman, Lovejoy and Sherratt, 2007: 33). According to archaeological findings, psychoactive plants such as peyote cacti (Bruhn, De Smet, El-Seedi, *et al.*, 2002; El-Seedi, De Smet, Beck, *et al.*, 2005), tobacco (Bruhn, Holmstedt, Lindgren, *et al.*, 1976), poppy (Bisset, Bruhn and Zenk, 1996), and coca (Cartmell, Aufderheide and Weems, 1991) were used for millennia. I was observing the ritual use of some of these plants during my fieldwork in Wonderland. Which ones and how they are used by the inhabitants I will explain in more detail in the continuation.

Coca (*Erythroxylum coca*)

The coca plant was used for its nutritional, digestive and medicinal properties to battle fatigue, hunger and pain, as well as interwoven into the society's fabric due to its religious (Plowman, 1984), medicinal and

¹⁶ Different terms used in different cultures to signify a person who works with psychoactive plants and carries out rituals.

economic significance as a “feature of the rise of agriculture and social complexity in the region” (Dillehay, Rossen, Ugent, *et al.*, 2010). Little is known about its use in pre-colonial times, however, there is evidence of coca leaves being used in healing ceremonies, initiations, offerings, and social interaction (Rätsch, 2005). It is still being used in the daily diet by Andean peoples (Burchard, Bolton, Heath, *et al.*, 1992) and gaining popularity also in other parts of the world, where coca leaves, coca tea, *mambe* (coca powder with tobacco resin *ambil*), and other products are available. In the western countries the use of the coca plant is not widespread, but its active ingredient cocaine, that has been isolated in Germany in the mid-19th century (Gaedcke, 1855), became a popular stimulant and anaesthetic in Europe and the United States until the plant got regulated/prohibited by the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs in 1961 due to its alleged addiction potential. Presently the cultivation and use of coca plants is permitted in Peru and Bolivia for traditional purposes. In Wonderland the coca plant is used by some members. Mateo, a Colombian who is living in Catalonia for several years, explained why he is using it:

Mambe is a plant that is very good for concentration, fatigue, for physical work, for long walks. It is a powder that is put in the mouth, then it is combined with a paste made of tobacco called *ambil*. They always go together. You put it in the mouth, you make like a ball in the cheeks and it dissolves as you are passing the saliva. It has many therapeutic and nutritional properties. It is categorized as a super-food, has a lot of calcium, protein, many minerals. It is a plant that has many benefits at the nutritional level. There is a lot of ways to consume it. As tea for example. In many stores here in Catalonia you can find tea bags with coca. They put them in hot water for a couple of minutes and you have a *mate de coca*. That's what they call it. The most traditional way is to consume dry leaves. Coca is considered food in Colombia.

Poppy (*Papaver Somniferum*)

The poppy plant was cultivated in Europe already in the Neolithic period as food and inebriant but also used in religious ceremonies (Rätsch, 2005). From Europe, its cultivation spread throughout the world and became one of the most important medicines. Besides pain relief opium, the resin obtained from the poppy seed pod was used for a number of other ailments, it had a reputation of an aphrodisiac but has been also used in social settings in China. Prior to its prohibition, smoking opium was done as a ritual in public places such as tea houses, or at home to welcome visitors (Dikötter, Laamann and Xun, 2004; Zheng, 2005) with sharing a beautifully embellished opium pipe (Bertholet, van der Aalsvoort, Elsevier Stokmans, *et al.*, 2007). Contrary to the anti-opium propaganda, the opium-smoking culture in China had elaborated rituals of use with inbuilt constraints that would prevent excessive use and harmful effects (Dikötter, Laamann and Xun, 2004; Zheng, 2005). After the prohibition of the poppy plant, the smokers switched from relatively benign use of opium to more potent and purified substances such as heroin and morphine. In the 21st century, we consider opioid use, besides guns and obesity (Galea, 2018), an epidemic of western society driven by overprescription of opioids, overdoses and availability of highly potent synthetic opioids such as fentanyl and its analogues carfentanyl, valeryl fentanyl, butyrfentanyl, crotonylfentanyl, orthofluorofentanyl, methoxyacetylfentanyl to name just a few (UNODC: Drug conventions scheduling decisions 1961-2020). I never witnessed the

inhabitants of Wonderland using poppy or opium although it is a plant that can be easily found in the area and was cultivated for ornamental and nutritional uses, as well as used in the traditional Catalan folk medicine (Talavera i Roma, 2018).

Peyote (*Lophophora williamsii*)

Peyote cactus has been used ritually since the prehistoric times in Mexico and Texas and has a long history of ritual and medicinal use. For the Wixárika (Huichol) it is fundamentally feminine and represents the origin and the centre of the universe (Rätsch, 2005). Once per year, the Wixárika make a pilgrimage to the sacred land of Wirikuta, to the origins of the world and of culture, to hunt for *híkuri* (peyote), which is keeping the memory of creation alive and leading humans to the source of all being (Myerhoff, 1983; La Barre, 1975). The peyote buttons are brought back and used in peyote festivals where everyone, including children and elderly, ingests the sacred cactus (for references see Rätsch, 2005: 330). Peyote is used by several indigenous groups for divination, protection and healing purposes. Its use as a sacrament in North America in the rituals of the syncretic Native American Church has been well documented (see references in Rätsch, 2005). The ritual circles, as practised in the Native American Church, are used as a model for modern ritual circles where a variety of psychoactive substances are used (Müller-Ebeling and Rätsch, 1997). Peyote as a plant is not regulated or prohibited by the Conventions, but the alkaloid mescaline that occurs in peyote cacti, San Pedro (*Echinopsis pachanoi*) or the Peruvian torch (*Echinopsis peruviana*), is scheduled. Peyote and San Pedro are occasionally used in Wonderland. Both are taken in ceremonies that are conducted either by Sofia and her partner (San Pedro), the Wixárika elders (peyote, mestizo *curanderos*), or other persons of confidence. I participated in one peyote ceremony with a mestizo *curandero*. We took peyote in powder and a tincture made of peyote in the middle of the ceremony. It was my first experience with peyote, and it was a very gentle, subtle experience. I did not experience visions or strong effects of the substance, but a mildly altered state of consciousness that was enhanced by singing beautiful Wixárika (Huichol) chants (without playing the violin) and cleansing with feathers and a rattle that realistically mimicked the sound of the rattlesnake. I found it a beautiful experience of opening my heart and feeling connected to the group of participants. I was told that peyote is working in the abdominal area where the emotions are. By taking it, it makes you work on your emotions. I also participated in one *temazcal* with the Wixárika where we took “chocoyote”. Chocoyote is powdered peyote mixed with cocoa powder, coconut oil, honey, and ground hazelnuts. The paste is mixed well and little balls, like truffles, are made of it. Each truffle contains a micro-dose of peyote and is used in ceremonies in nature [*trabajos en la naturaleza*] and occasionally in the *temazcal*.



Photo 11: Peyote growing in a pot in the Water House.



Photo 12: San Pedro growing in a greenhouse in the Water House.

Tobacco (*Nicotiana tabacum L.*)

The tobacco plant (*Nicotiana tabacum Linnaeus*) is the most important and most commonly used shamanic plant in South and Central America (Rätsch, 2005) from where it spread throughout the world. In Meso-America it was considered a plant of the gods and always smoked in rituals or healing ceremonies. Besides being smoked, chewed, sniffed and drunk, it is used also as a fumigant for protection. It was used for religious, medical, but also social purposes as an important traditional gift for establishing or strengthening social relationships (Rätsch, 2005). Tobacco is one of the few sacred plants, besides coffee and cacao, that is legally available throughout the world. Among the indigenous in the Amazon tobacco is one of the ingredients in various snuffs called *rapé*. In Wonderland tobacco is used as a fumigant, and less commonly in ceremonies where it is smoked rolled in corn husks or in a pipe called *chanupa* (see Photo 13).



Photo 13: A tobacco pipe used in tobacco ceremonies. The pipe is shared among the participants. While smoking it, the person has the privilege to talk, and to ask for protection or help from the Great Spirit.

Rapé is used most commonly, besides cannabis. *Rapé* is a cleansing snuff used by shamans in Brazil and Peru and is made of several Amazon plants. The basis is tobacco mixed with alkaline ashes of various other plants.



Photo 14: *Tepi*, a tube made of bone or wood/bamboo for *rapé* application.



Photo 15: *Kuripé*, a V-shaped utensil for self-application of *rapé*.

The *rapé* used in Wonderland is diverse and obtained from different Brazilian tribes. The exact recipes and constituents of the powders are not known to me. *Rapé* is applied by blowing the powder into the nostrils of the other person with a *Tepi*, a tube made of bone or wood/bamboo (see Photo 14). It can also be self-administered with a V-shaped utensil called *Kuripé* (see Photo 15). *Rapé* is a sacred medicine that is used to focus and sharpen the mind, detox the body and mind, or clean the energies, and is often used in ayahuasca and Santa María ceremonies to help in the process and bring the person in the present. *Rapé* should be used consciously and always with an intention or in prayer. Estela does not apply *rapé* if a person struggles with the use of cocaine or other substances used intranasally. Alma uses *rapé* after *kambo* (a toad poison) to help clear, clean and alleviate what is left after the process of *kambo*. The *rapé* used in Wonderland is brought from Brazil and made by several indigenous groups.

Cannabis

Cannabis was (and still is) an important plant in many cultures throughout the world due to its medicinal value, its spiritual and social role, but also its industrial and nutritional value. Its seeds and stems were being extensively used for the production of oil, incense, livestock feed, paper and textiles. The discoveries of the new world would not be possible without the ropes and sails that have been made of cannabis. Today we are discovering new possibilities of producing plastic and building materials made out of cannabis, as well as its potential in cosmetics and medicine (see Photo 16).

Cannabis has been a shamanic plant since ancient times in Hindu, Scythian, Zoroastrian and Chinese cultures (Clarke and Merlin, 2013). It has dozens of folk names across the world (Rätsch, 2005: 126), which reflects its importance in several cultures. It is the most widespread psychoactive plant besides tobacco (La Barre, 1975) and has a history of traditional and ritual use across the world (Rubin, 1975). Its early use is dated back to the prehistoric times (Rätsch, 2005: 126) and believed to have expanded from Central Asia to the rest of the world (Clarke and Merlin, 2013; Rudgley, 1995). Cannabis is used ritually up to this day in India, Tibet, Bangladesh, African nations, Central America, Brazil, Jamaica (a review on the history on the spiritual use of cannabis see Dos Santos, 2016) and, as I observed in the field, also in Spain. In Europe cannabis became popular medically and culturally in the nineteenth century. A century later the most harmless inebriant and agent of pleasure has been demonized and prohibited half a century ago based on sociopolitical goals and economic structured, not on scientific data (Hess, 1996). Cannabis is not considered a drug by the users but as an agent of pleasure, a plant with ecological qualities, and a culture-forming plant (Rätsch, 2005), also it is a spiritual agent, which is what I was exploring in Wonderland.

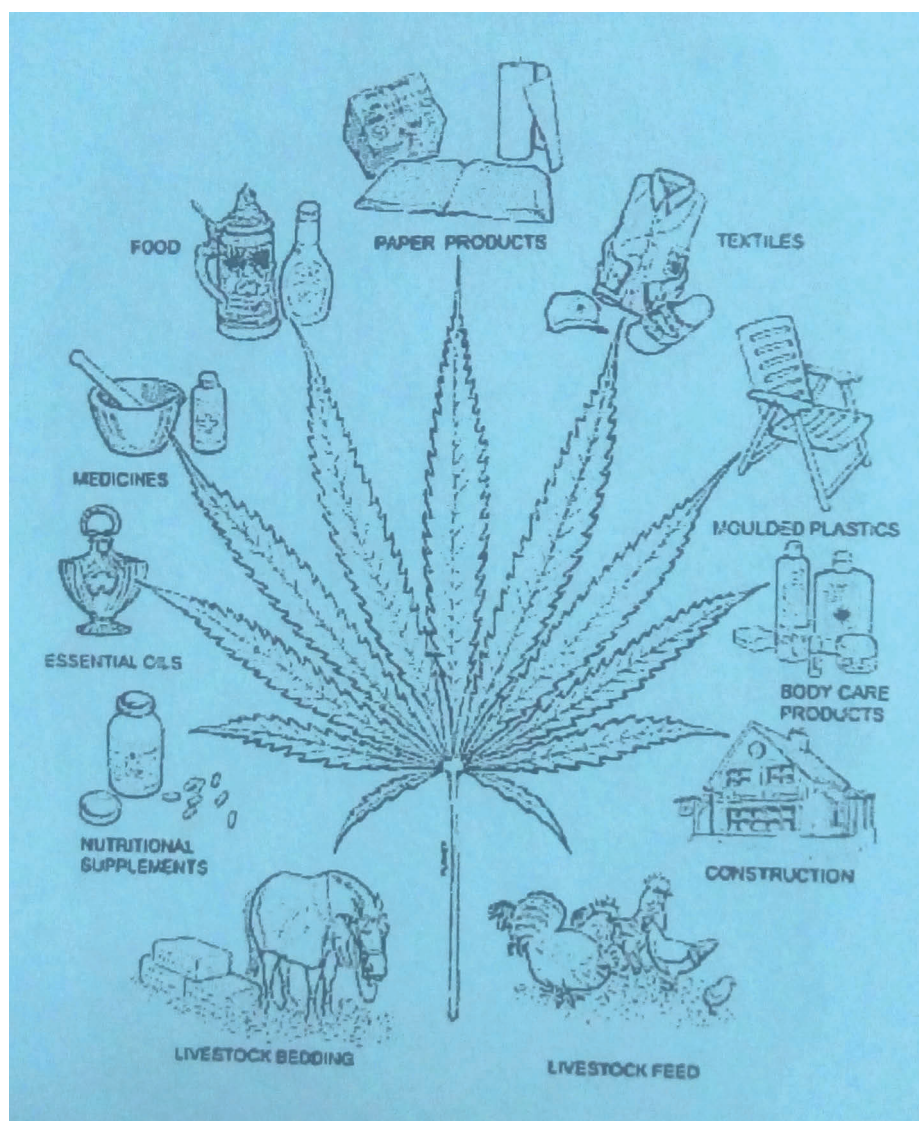


Photo 16: Second page of the *Hinario Santa María* containing songs that are sung in the ceremonies. It depicts various products that can be made out of cannabis.

Today cannabis is used as a sacrament among the Rastafarians and is smoked during rituals. In Mexico, cannabis is referred to as *Santa Rosa* (sacred rose). The flowers are chewed in the rituals and sacred words are being spoken intuitively (Rätsch, 2005). In India cannabis is used in rituals as a drink called *bhanga* or smoked in a *chillum*. *Bhanga* is an important element of special festivities like weddings to protect the bride and groom from evil spirits, it is a symbol of hospitality and offered to guests, similarly as was opium in China. In the Vedas its effects were described as light-hearted, joyful, speech-giving, sharpening the wits, as an aphrodisiac, and so on. It was considered as an *elixir vitae* to serve the welfare of all people as well as facilitate the communication with deities and increase the feeling of oneness. Abel (1980) explained that “to forbid or even seriously restrict the use of so holy and gracious herb as the hemp would cause widespread suffering and annoyance and to large bands of worshipped ascetics, deep-seated anger. It would rob the people of a solace in discomfort, of a cure in sickness, of a guardian whose gracious protection saves them

from the attacks of evil influences”. Moreover, the prohibition of cannabis contributes to the expansion of novel, mainly synthetic psychoactive substances that replace the prohibited plant particularly in urban areas (Charles, 2004).



Photo 17: A cannabis leaf carved in the wooden entrance door of the Stone House.

Although the use of cannabis in India is widespread, cases of excessive indulgence are not frequent, and instances of abuse or harmful effects are uncommon (Wadley, 2016). Possibly more harmful than *bhang*

is considered smoking *ganja* and *charas*. Jasbir explained in one of our conversations that drinking *bhanga* is the original way how cannabis was used in India and pointed out some of the many uses of cannabis:

In India no one smoked cannabis. They do it now, even the Sadhus do, because the *chillum* was brought in by the Muslims from Arabia. But before this point, there was no such thing as a *chillum*. You would drink it. We [Sikhs] have the original method. The roots of the cannabis go back to Shiva and meditation and the tantric cult of Shiva. It is even connected to playing music, it helps you to do art, to recite poetry. Rapers love this stuff. It makes you very good with words. JASBIR

In Ayurveda, the traditional medicine in India, cannabis was used for a number of conditions due to its analgesic, anti-inflammatory, antispasmodic effect, to treat mental diseases, it has been considered a cure for fever or sunstroke, stimulating digestion and appetite, promoting happiness, freshening the intellect, and giving alertness. For medicinal purposes, cannabis was administered orally and hardly ever by smoking (Chopra and Chopra, 1957). In the 20th century, the use of cannabis in the urban areas of India declined due to availability of western medicine and pharmaceuticals that replace it, however, in rural areas the practitioners of indigenous medicine still use cannabis quite extensively in their practice (Abel, 1980).



Photo 18: Cannabis growing in the garden of the Water House.

In Wonderland cannabis is used with the most frequency and, therefore, I give cannabis the most attention in this work. Cannabis is the only plant that the community is self-sufficient with. It is being cultivated outdoors by the community in sufficient amounts to meet their requirements for the year. Each year about a dozen plants are grown in the gardens of the Stone House and the Water House. The cannabis is being used for the Santa María ceremonies. Occasionally it is being given to community members in small quantities as a gift or if they ask for it. No monetary exchange is involved in it. Cannabis is used in different forms (smoked, eaten, or as a drink) depending on the purpose or context and place. During fieldwork, I have participated in several rituals where cannabis was used such as an official Santo Daime ceremony, on a daily basis in the morning and evening, special occasions such as blessing a water well after cleaning and reconstructing it or during a pilgrimage. It is also used on specific occasions such as giving a public speech. Estela eats a cookie before walking on a stage because it helps her to speak more fluently. Recently, oils or tinctures infused with cannabis are being introduced to the rituals. Each participant takes one drop of the oil or tincture. Cannabis is also being used in creams or other topical solutions made by Sofia.

I was interested in the potency of the cannabis used in Wonderland and sent three samples of the 2018 harvest to a laboratory to determine the quantity of cannabinoids and terpenes, as well as the presence of pesticides. Two samples had a high THC content with traces of CBD and the third has almost the same amount of THC and CBD, the most common cannabinoids in the plant. There were no pesticides or other impurities, or contaminants found in the samples (see the analytical report of the samples and the interpretation of the results in the Annexes 3-10).

Ayahuasca

Ayahuasca is the most popular term for a hallucinogenic beverage traditionally prepared by boiling or soaking the bark and stems of the jungle liana *Banisteriopsis caapi* only or together with various admixture plants most commonly the leaves of *Psychotria viridis*. Ayahuasca is a Quechua term meaning "vine of the soul" (Schultes and Raffauf, 2004), but its name varies in different tribes, including *caapi*, *natema*, *mihi*, and *yagé*, and also in its composition (for the variations of the recipes consult Rätsch, 2005, pages 703-708). The origin of the practices cannot be determined with certainty, yet it was spread among numerous indigenous tribes throughout the Amazon Basin by the time it caught the attention of western ethnographers in the mid-19th century. Traditionally ayahuasca was used for various purposes such as healing, magic and religious ritual, rites of passage, divination, sorcery, and to access the supernatural realm to receive information not available through the ordinary channels of communication (Dobkin de Rios, 1984; Kensinger, 1973; Harner, 1973; Schultes and Hofmann, 1992). The contact with the supernatural realm is binding the members of the community into a cohesive unity by providing revelation, blessings, healing, and ontological security for those using such sacramental plants (Grob and Dobkin de Rios, 1992). At the beginning of the 20th century, the use of ayahuasca started to emerge in a religious context. The ayahuasca churches in South America

(such as Santo Daime and União do Vegetal) were born in poor immigrant communities of rubber workers, *seringueiros*, that settled in Acre, Brazil. These communities interacted with indigenous people and used the local traditional practices and knowledge for diagnostics and healing since no other medical and health-care services were available (Apud and Romaní, 2017: 30). There emerged, however, tensions between the religious groups and the government where the illegal practice of medicine and interference with official medicine was at the centre of the dispute (Goulart, 2008). The legal status of ayahuasca is somehow ambivalent since one of the alkaloids present in the brew, N,N-Dimethyltryptamine (DMT), is a Schedule I controlled substance according to the 1971 United Nations Convention on Psychotropic Substances, but the ayahuasca decoction itself is not under international control. In practice, its status is interpreted differently by governments. Traditional use and religious use for churches are permitted in some countries such as Peru, Brazil, USA and Canada. In France and Russia, ayahuasca is considered illegal because it contains a prohibited substance. Portugal, Spain, Mexico and Israel are in a legal void where ayahuasca is not prohibited, but also not permitted. The situation results in people being prosecuted for possession and the outcome of the prosecution differs from case to case. The most up to date information about the legal status of ayahuasca by country are provided by the Ayahuasca Defence Fund¹⁷, a project initiated by ICEERS, dedicated to providing legal, scientific, community, and public policy expertise. The work of the Ayahuasca Defence Fund is particularly important in the last decade when the use of ayahuasca spread around the world due to the growing popularity of the brew in the western countries and the internationalization of the religious groups such as Santo Daime (Labate and Cavnar, 2014). The use of ayahuasca dispersed in spiritual networks (Rothstein, 2001), as well as in therapeutic settings and centres for treating substance dependence or improving psychological well-being, respectively (Apud and Romaní, 2017: 31). In Spain these “ayahuasca networks” established at the end of the 1980s at the hand of the psychiatrist Claudio Naranjo (Apud and Romaní, 2017) especially in the multicultural capital Barcelona. In just a few decades the ayahuasca networks in Catalonia grew to over a dozen identified groups providing a variety of practices such as shamanic ceremonies, religious rituals, alternative psychotherapies, and treatments for drug dependencies (Corbera i Claveria, 2012) in settings such as shamanic centres, churches, holistic centres and similar (Apud and Romaní, 2017). Santo Daime churches established most frequently in Catalonia, in cities such as Barcelona, Girona and Lleida, but are present also in other regions in Spain (López-Pavillard and De las Casas, 2011). These networks facilitate a vibrant interaction between different cultural contexts and result in re-appropriation of indigenous cosmologies and “ritual redesign” (Apud, 2015). The initiators of these networks were professionals such as psychologist, psychiatrists and anthropologists, “spiritual seekers” and “wounded healers” (Apud and Romaní, 2017), while female population, mainly middle and upper-class women, predominate in these “new cultural imaginaries” (Prat, Anguera, Cuadet, *et al.*, 2012; Perdiguero-Gil; 2004).

17 Retrieved on June 10th 2020 from www.iceers.org/adf/country-by-country-legal-status-map/.



Photo 19: A bottle of ayahuasca on an altar during a ceremony in nature [*trabajo en la naturaleza*].

A body of evidence is suggesting that the use of ayahuasca, in the right set and setting, can have positive impacts on the health and wellbeing of these communities (Feeney and Labate, 2014). Studies conducted among regular long-term users of ayahuasca found it to be a very safe and psychologically beneficial compound (McKenna, 2006; Dos Santos, Landeira-Fernandez, Strassman, *et al.*, 2007; Bouso, González, Fondevila, *et al.*, 2012; Bouso, Palhano-Fontes, Rodríguez-Fornells, *et al.*, 2015; Oña, Kohek, Massaguer, *et al.*, 2019). Nevertheless, these psychoactive plants have to be taken with caution and care. Especially in the case of ayahuasca, there are reports on some negative side-effects in the literature connected to cardiac issues (Gable, 2007), drug interactions with pharmaceuticals (Callaway, McKenna, Grob, *et al.*, 1999) or drug interaction with other psychoactive substances (Dos Santos, 2013). In certain people ayahuasca could trigger various types of psychiatric complications (Dos Santos, Bouso and Hallak, 2017), however, the scientific information compiled to date on its possible risks ensures its medical and psychological safety, as well as their low or no potential for abuse, if an adequate pre-selection has been done (Gable, 2007; Jacob and Presti, 2005; Grob, McKenna, Callaway, *et al.*, 1996; Bouso, González, Fondevila, *et al.*, 2012). The therapeutic potential of ayahuasca in the treatment of different diseases or psychological disorders has also been suggested in various scientific publications (Domínguez-Clavé, Soler,

Elices, *et al.*, 2016; Frecska, Bokor and Winkelman, 2016; Jiménez-Garrido, Gómez-Sousa, Oña, *et al.*, 2020), and placebo-controlled clinical trials (Palhano-Fontes, Barreto, Onias, *et al.*, 2019). Most studies have analysed psycho-pathological variables through standardized questionnaires. There have also been interviews and open questions on aspects such as the motivation for consumption or perceived positive and negative effects. If specialized literature is reviewed (Bouso and Labate, 2013) and written testimonies of consumers of ayahuasca are consulted (Oña, 2012), one can encounter great richness and complexity of various personal processes that seem to be triggered by ayahuasca.

Places and practices in Wonderland

In Wonderland there are several places where rituals are done, and psychoactive plants are used. The rituals are done at home in front of an altar (see Photo 20), in the chapel [*ermita*] next to the Stone House (see Photo 21), in the Council House (see Photo 22) or similar structures like *tepees* and *yurts* (see Photo 23), and outside during a pilgrimage (see Photo 24). The inhabitants of Wonderland are using several psychoactive plants in a ritual setting in various places and on various occasions. The plants most commonly used are cannabis, tobacco and ayahuasca or Daime, while peyote and San Pedro are used occasionally. Eye drops called *sananga*, powdered coca leaf called *mambe*, and the toad poison *kambo* are used rarely.

The plants used by the majority of the inhabitants have specific names that were adopted from the traditions the plants have come from. For example, ayahuasca is called *Daime* because its use comes from the Santo Daime doctrine, a Brazilian church that uses ayahuasca as a sacrament. The same applies to cannabis, which is called *Santa María* in the Santo Daime doctrine. Wonderland was initiated by Catalans who were members of the Santo Daime church, but with time the rituals and practices evolved into a syncretic system influenced by various traditions from the Americas that the community interacted with. The Indian Sikh tradition is also shaping the community's way of using cannabis, which is described in detail later in the chapter.

The manner of how tobacco is used comes from various traditions from the Americas. When used as an offering, tobacco leaves are mixed with other aromatic plants and used for cleansing by smudging it in a chalice. From the spiritual line The Red Road [*Camino Rojo*] sacred tobacco ceremonies were incorporated, where the tobacco is wrapped in dry corn husks and smoked. Most commonly, tobacco is used as a powder mixed with ashes or other finely powdered plants, which is called *rapé* and is used intranasally. *Rapé* got introduced to the community by representatives of various indigenous peoples of the Amazon basin. Peyote is called *híkuri*, a name used by the Wixáritari (or Huichol) people. The terminology is important not only when referring to the plants but also when talking about paraphernalia or saying prayers. Using a different terminology emphasizes the distinction between sacred use and the profane, recreational use (MacRae, 1998).



Photo 20: An altar at home in front of which rituals are done.



Photo 21: The altar in the chapel next to the Stone House.



Photo 22: An altar in the Council House (in the proximity of the Stone House) made during the ceremony *Navegación Mariana*. The photo was taken by one of the participants.



Photo 23: A *tepee* in the Water House where ceremonies and rituals are done.



Photo 24: An outdoor altar during a pilgrimage.

The reasons why people turn to these practices and are involved in these networks are diverse, yet among the most commonly identified are personal changes, spiritual curiosity, general psycho-physical wellbeing, a sense of community belonging and others (Apud and Romani, 2017), which corresponds to the reasons mentioned by the inhabitants of Wonderland described earlier. People turn to seek such secondary (non-biomedical or alternative) health practices when the official or conventional therapies are unavailable or have failed in the treatment of some chronic conditions. Often people would mix various therapeutic approaches in the quest to find relief and improve well-being, which Apud (2013) defined as “bricoleur users”. The rituals and ceremonies employed in such settings are perceived as indispensable and serve as therapeutic tools, uniting the clinical and the spiritual components of the treatment (Apud and Romani, 2017).

During the fieldwork in Wonderland, I observed how psychoactive plants are used and on what occasions. I was interested in how the community members themselves understand the use of psychoactive plants and their reasons for taking them. Mateo, a member of Wonderland who is a 36-year-old biologist explained his understanding and his motives for using psychoactive plants as follows.

The use of psychoactive plants responds to an innate, intrinsic need of the human being to expand consciousness. It is a feature in all ancestral cultures where there is more contact with the earth. I believe that humanity received several methods to expand consciousness: fasting, meditation, walking, martial arts techniques, and psychotropic plants. The organic evolution of the human being towards more complex states of organization has reached this point due to nature's order. When the human being is more conscious and self-reflective, it has more evolved states of consciousness. This is a natural thing that I consider is happening to those who are evolving in the physical realm. When the basic needs are covered, such as eating, sleeping, reproducing, the human being begins with another phase of evolution at another level which is no longer physical but at the level of consciousness or spirituality, if you want to call it like that. I think that to use plants or other ways to develop consciousness are responses to an innate need of human beings to expand the knowledge a little further. A human being in the West tends to explore the borders on the macro-level (space or universe) or on the micro-level (the cell, the atom) to know more than you can know with your body. The human being also has this need at the level of consciousness, both externally and internally. All these methods that expand the consciousness are all tools for an internal investigation. As if you had a microscope. This is what makes me want to consume plants. MATEO

Nina explained what motivates her to use psychoactive substances, how she experiences the effects of different substances and the importance of set and setting in the use of any psychoactive substance:

I was always ‘pro’ that people experiment with plants, even drugs because they are like keys that open places that you don't normally get to. It all depends on how you use it, on the quantity. Each plant has its message or gives you one thing or another. Ayahuasca takes you more to the inside, peyote more to the outside. *Rapé*, for me, frees the mind. It helps me because it is very momentary and puts me in the here and now. It helps me to do my prayer. In general, all plants connect you... to not be in the external world or what happens outside, but what happens inside, although one [plant] has more feminine or masculine energy, is stronger or calmer. They are here so that you can use them at the right time, and, like everything, there is also the self-awareness of how you use plants. We already know that you can enter in a habit, which transforms into something other than medicine and leaves its effect. In Ayurveda, I think, honey is used just as a medicine. If you always use honey, it is no longer medicine. It is only for once

in a while. You need self-control and discipline. [...] It is a tool. Some day we will no longer need it and we will feed on the air and we will use the sun to do photosynthesis [laughter], but at the moment we have to eat as healthy as possible and use the plants to help us do our job with joy and in good company. In general, plants are ancestral knowledge and were used by the whole tribe but have been now relegated to places that are hidden or they are being taken as drugs. Almost everything is medicine. If you take it as a drug it will be a drug, if you take it as medicine it will be a medicine. You have to have awareness. NINA

Using a psychoactive plant in the western setting can differ considerably to using the same plant in native communities where the plant grows and comes from and where ritual use is integrated into society. The ritual “brings meanings and social roles that usually belong to different social fields into the same space and time” like for example medicine and religion (Romaní, 2020: 14). Psychoactive plants in a traditional context are used in a cultural-medico-religious context, while in the West they are used in a variety of contexts including medical, self-help, spiritual tourism, religious, recreational, and other settings (Romaní, 2020). ‘Other cultures’ are no longer confined to ‘other parts’ of the world (Moore, 1999). The production of locality is, according to Appadurai, the incidence of “imagination” or “deterritorialization”, thus, the local is not an isolated unit, but part of the global (Appadurai, 1996). Psychoactive plants are the new technology that is interconnecting the world and creating a “global village”. They are not merely products used by people, but mediums that re-invent people and bring with them a change in consciousness (McLuhan, 1962).

However, globalisation of psychoactive plants did not come without consequences. In the mid-50s of the past century, Gordon Wasson published names and places of the *velada* he participated at in *Life Magazine*, which resulted in thousands of westerners arriving in the Sierra Mazateca wanting to experience the mushroom-induced hallucinations. The concentration of western people attracted the attention of the Mexican authorities and altered the social dynamics of the Mazatec community in which María Sabina was ostracised from her community and her house was razed several times. Later María Sabina expressed regrets by remarking that before Wasson the mushrooms were not taken simply to find God, but to heal the sick. She claimed the mushrooms have lost their power and their purity because of the misuse by the westerners (Estrada, 2016). In the last decades, something similar is happening with ayahuasca in Peru, Colombia, Brazil and Europe. The so-called ayahuasca tourism is spreading in remote areas offering transforming experiences for westerners.

The case of ayahuasca commercialisation

In 2001, Robert Wolff wrote in his book *Original Wisdom: Stories of an Ancient Way of Knowing* a critique of western conceptions of shamanism and its consequences by stating:

Today we go on a vision quest over the weekend. We take shamanic training at a two-day workshop that is repeated every few weeks for others who want to learn whatever it is that a

particular teacher has to say about shamanism. There are a hundred others who will teach us differently about what they think shamanism is. There are undoubtedly catalogs that will list the various shamanic traditions we can learn. Having so many alternatives serves only to devalue all of them (23).

Shamanism has captivated the interest of the West since the 18th century (Flaherty, 1992) and scholars such as Eliade (1972 [1951]) popularised and globalised the concept (Znamenski, 2007:180). The term “shaman”, which now got incorporated in the global discourse even among indigenous communities of South America, originates in Siberia and its meaning has been discussed by scholars as signifying the “one who knows” (Hutton, 2001), a priest, or a witch doctor, while Eliade proposed a generalisation of shamanism as a “technique of religious ecstasy” (1972 [1951]). Shamanism in the West has been historically an ambivalent concept that went through devilsation, medicalisation, and idealisation (Hamayon, 1998), and characterised as a modern invention (Taussig, 1989).

The globalisation of ayahuasca and the so-called shamanic tourism is a complex phenomenon burdened by stereotypes, exploitation, ecological impact and injustice on one hand, but also represents a source of income for the indigenous communities and beneficial therapeutic opportunities for the westerners on the other, as Fotiou (2016) discussed based on her observations in Peru. If we very roughly polarise the users of ayahuasca into indigenous or mestizo and westerners there is a great gap between them. In indigenous and mestizo communities ayahuasca is used in initiation rituals, hunting, divination, warfare, spiritual healing, art, cosmology and so on, while in the West it is used for therapeutical purposes, spirituality, personal transformation and closeness to nature (Fotiou, 2016). At the same time, there are indigenous communities which discontinued the use of ayahuasca decades ago, due to colonisation and Christianisation which labelled ayahuasca as devilish and prohibited its use, are just now rediscovering it again (Shepard, 2014). Sofia explained that the Puyanawa in Brazil just recently started to use ayahuasca again, even the women, who did not use it in the past. Among the different groups that use ayahuasca, there are even disagreements about who has a legitimate and original right to use ayahuasca. Who is its rightful owner so to say? Are those the indigenous communities, and if yes which ones, or the religions using it as a sacrament? Maybe the western scholars transplanting it into medical and therapeutical context? What about the “white shamans”? These questions arose and confronted at the World Ayahuasca Conference held in Rio Branco in Brazil in October 2016. When I talked about the issue of commercialisation of psychoactive plants in the West with Alberto, a Mexican living in Catalonia, who is guiding *temazcal* ceremonies he told me:

Although it is the same plant, taking it in a different place influences [the effect] a lot. [...] It is easy to say to the native person ‘I can pay you’, and the person of course says, with all the heart and with all the good faith in the world, because up to this point everything is going well, but when passing it into the hands of another person it begins to impregnate what [the receiving person] wants. ‘The elders gave me a blessing, gave me a permit’, the person says. I see people who have been around for years and can't even touch [the plants] during preparation because they have respect. They do not come with money, financial solvency. Sure, the financial need is what fucks it up many times. So, you arrive, you bought an outfit that many times not even the natives wear because it is expensive. You wear feathers that many times the natives do not use

out of respect for the same birds. They wear necklaces, wuaaah, very exotic which here cost 100 Euro and there it cost you 4 or 5 Euro, right? You get here, people don't know you, they know you're travelling, they know you're half hippie, half this, half another, 'I was walking with this elder' and 'I show you a photo with the whole community'. That happens many times and we don't realize it. [...] The people who know, who have lived there, who know the process, they do not come with folklore, they come humble, neither with feathers nor like shamans. We just come to transmit something that helped us and to share how it is done. It is a process. People consume excessively and get confused about what ritual uses are, the *temazcals*, the ceremonies. Plants and living with them is part of life. Know where it comes from. The attitude of people is very important. You realize who is inviting you because they want money and who is inviting you because they really want to do something. Curiously, people more often go where it is more expensive and where there is not much knowledge. Because they think it is better when you see an individual better dressed than a native, with more folklore. It happened to me in ceremonies that they bring feathers, 20 medicines in their backpack, then they start talking about God, the stars, the aura and the Martians. To make it clear, [the plants] were given to awaken our consciousness, not to disperse it. To give us an understanding, to give us a face, to give us an identity, not to play folklore and make beautiful songs or make beautiful parties. People have to develop a sort of communion in their being with the plant, that they learn to understand it little by little. It can create paranoia if you don't know what's going on in your head. People never take into account that [the effect] can be reactivated with something you eat, something you drink a week later, and suddenly you enter a catharsis or fear. Entering a place is like entering a limbo if there is someone who is holding your hands and telling you why in a nice way, it is different from 'I am a shaman and this is what the elders told me'. Being from there is not a guarantee of doing it well either. Being a foreigner and being from another place is no guarantee that they will do it wrong. You have to see the process, be part of it. ALBERTO

Fotiou (2016) points out the financial aspect of ayahuasca tourism as an important factor that can decide upon the survival of indigenous communities whose lands and themselves have been exploited for decades and ecotourism offers them the possibility to preserve their traditional knowledge, language and their land. The money generated from such activity represents a more sustainable way of survival of these communities than working in lodging which is destroying the forest they depend on. In the case of Puyanawa, they use the money generated with ayahuasca ceremonies to buy land, which has been taken away from them generations ago by the white men. Ayahuasca and the organised visits of Europeans in their *aldeas*, organised by Sofia and her partner, serve as one of the main sources of income for the community and is being used for the needs of the whole community: building a *maloka* and buying land that will belong to them. Tourism can help to preserve indigenous cultures if managed by indigenous communities themselves (Zografos and Kenrick, 2005). Fotiou (2016) emphasises the involvement of entire communities in tourism instead of individuals as the only way to ensure the existence and growth of the communities but can also force them into conforming to stereotypes. Fact is that contemporary ayahuasca shamanism is a result of external forces and an exploitative history (Fotiou, 2016). The indigenous communities do not exist in a vacuum, separated from the rest of the world, but are part of global capitalism as well. The challenge is, according to Fotiou (2016: 170) to find "ways that indigenous communities can participate in a capitalist system, if they wish to do so, without jeopardizing their collective well-being", while we westerners have to be aware of our privileged position when engaging with the indigenous. Fotiou (2016) warns of the marginalisation of indigenous knowledge due to the incapability of the westerners to grasp its holistic nature

and the lack of context for belief and application. Moreover, idealisation and positive discrimination is problematic and perpetuates injustice, what is needed is a “meaningful intercultural dialogue between equals” (Fotiou, 2016: 171).

During my fieldwork, the issue of spiritual tourism and ayahuasca tourism has been discussed frequently. There are three issues raised by the informants, those of power or ego, sex, and money, which emerged due to commercialisation of plant medicines and irresponsible utilisation of them of both the users and the facilitators. The inhabitants of Wonderland refer to these issues as traps that the plant medicines set to those who use them. Estela, Alma and Gloria, who work with these plants in Wonderland, explain how to recognise and avoid these traps as follows:

Sometimes it happens that people think they are chosen by medicine to change the world. Most cases are like this. People who work with the medicine think that they know more than the people who come, while you can learn something from each person. At the beginning when you start working with the medicine you believe that you are chosen because the medicine tells you that. You believe that you have a duty, but you are not the only one who has a duty. We all do, we all have a special duty to fulfil. Ayahuasca, peyote, everything is so fashionable now, although they are prohibited. The more prohibited the more fashionable. People continue taking the plants with anyone, people who did not even have the honesty to form themselves. They went to Peru for a week and returned with ayahuasca and feathers. All this causes people to get lost along the way. They don't know that this is a formation. It is a university study. ESTELA

On the one hand, I see abuse. Some people are working for the benefit of the medicine and the people and others think about the benefits of their pockets. [Ayahuasca] is a plant with power. You have to be attentive, observe, with humility, and tranquillity. But it also traps you. You have to be vigilant. Sometimes it puts traps on your path, it's playing with you. Sometimes an image comes to you to distract you, a nuisance or something like that, and sometimes we get into this trap. Be attentive, know what is real and what is not. If you are yourself and working as you have to be, you do not fall into the traps. ALMA

It is important to point out that not all medicines, sacred sacraments are well used or purified from the hands from which they are coming. My vision is that a person who is aligned with the spirit can communicate with the spirit of this plant. You can also communicate, it's not that you can't. But it depends on how you are using, from where you are getting it from. Are you using a sacrament that is marketed or sold by people who make a trade of this? We do not agree with this, neither do some elders. People must have confidence and certainty where these medicines are coming from, how they are treated, how they are cooked, who is carrying them, how the altar is made, how people arrive, how people take care of themselves, what [spiritual] path are they following? Not that one does a shamanic course of two months or even four years. No. Some people were born to care or to attend others. Originally there was an elder, someone who did this with pleasure, prayed and was attended by the spirits. GLORIA

Estela, Alma and Gloria point out several elements that are essential for those who work with the plants and those who use them. To be honest to yourself and others and have the determination to work with the plants and on yourself diligently is a prerequisite. One has to be humble, respectful and dedicated. Concerning the origin of the plants, both the participants and the facilitator have to know where the plant has come from, how they were treated and prepared.

Emma contributes the increasing interest in spiritual tourism to the western way of life, which is the cause of disconnection to us and the environment and eventually leads to illness. For her to be spiritual means to be a good person, to be consistent with what you say and what you do, to reflect on your life and be committed to your internal call. Psychoactive plants and other practices are tools that can help you in this process if you are prepared to apply the lessons you learn in your everyday life. However, she emphasises that the western users often approach plants and ceremonies with a consumer attitude and competition, which can do more harm than good.

We have to differentiate between fashion and necessity. I think that many ceremonies and *temazcals* are a necessity of time, that is why there are so many because time runs very fast, people are in great haste at the mental level, at the level of health. We have reached an extreme disconnection from nature that we are very vulnerable and very easy to get sick. It is very easy to get lost and not find meaning because it is such a great disconnection. A *temazcal* is healing because it connects you with the simplest, the most elemental, the four elements and this heals us and makes us rediscover our essence. We are privileged to have so many [*temazcals*]. The other thing is a trap that comes from the ego as if it is a fashion, as something New Age and you must identify it for what it is. You can fall into a trap on the spiritual path. People say 'I have so many sun dances, so many visions, I have done so many ceremonies'. There is no competition, what are we competing with? The society is so competitive and spiritual work makes you go to the deepest, the most human, the simplest, most humble, our essence as a human being on a planet, to find ourselves with that peace of the spirit, knowing that we are here for something, to do well, no? For me, the most spiritual thing is to be a good person. This is the basis. We fall into traps of titles, of diplomas, of so many sun dances, so many vision quests, I am more... What is this? It's a trap of society that has introduced this pattern of competition. What's the rush to do this? These are internal calls. When you feel you have to do an offering. To do a vision quest and go to the mountain is a commitment of your soul and your body with that mountain and nobody else. It doesn't matter if you've done it 100 times or not at all. The important thing is how you are in this process of soul, of heart, what are you doing in your life? That is the real ceremony. The most spiritual thing I know is to be a good person. To have a good heart. In the ceremony we can pray beautifully, but is that word consistent with everyday life? It is very easy to speak beautifully. The other thing is to act beautifully and be coherent, and that our everyday life is sacred for us and others. The ceremonies for me are like sparks of light, like little lessons that show us the way, but then the real ceremony is to get out on the street, go to the store, work, be home every day... How are we in those situations? EMMA

I can relate to Emma's words. A plant or a ceremony is not a magical solution. The quantity of ceremonies someone has attended has nothing to do with how the person lives his or her everyday life. These practices do not work on its own, what makes them beneficial is the preparation and the integration along with a change in lifestyle that comes from it and the person's willingness to do it. Estela pointed out on several occasions that it is of no use to drink Daime for 30 years if you are not willing to change anything in your life. She said, "if you don't change, the plant medicines are not for you, it's a waste". I was discussing the difference between spiritual tourism and practising spirituality also with Jasbir and Lucia.

Going from ceremony to ceremony, this is spiritual tourism. They want to have visions as tourism. The plants give them visions and then they have more vision and more visions. But you see this goes back to what we talked about earlier on. Reflection. If you have a vision, you reflect, it is now actualized. It is like Maslow's hierarchy, self-actualization. Once you take the vision and you contemplate it, you are actualizing it. You put it into some practice. But if you

walk past the vision to the next one, this is spiritual tourism. This is also because a person doesn't want to change. And the next thing is, they lack the discipline of having a daily practice. Why do you need so many psychedelics, if you have everyday prayer, walking, doing sport, something? Whatever relaxes you. [...] If you are not going to the zone every day then you are going to be mentally impure, unclean. You will have a lot of residue build-up. Meditating, praying, mantra, yoga, whatever you want to call it, are washing the consciousness. JASBIR

A ceremony is not a party you go to to take medicine and then you go home thinking 'what a beautiful trip I had'. [You have to] have a prior process of awareness, of physical preparation and also of putting that intention to whatever it is you are going to, ayahuasca, *temazcal*... With focus, with clarity. Then there is the person who is guiding us. Many people do it just because... In other words, I put on the feathers, I take out the maraca and, yes, the folklore is very nice, but there are people in psychiatry after an ayahuasca ceremony because they have no previous or subsequent support. People collapse and stay [in that state] for months. You see the person with whom you shared the ceremony and you say, 'oh my god, what do we play with?' More so, when you take it out of context. We are not in the jungle where ayahuasca is from. We have brought it here. The people who drink it here are not the people from where ayahuasca comes from. [...] I feel like nowadays many people, even in our surroundings, are doing Santa María ceremonies and they dress in white and take out the songbooks and a candle and make a very nice altar... Yes, everything is very nice, but for me, it loses the essence. It is pretty, but I don't want to participate, I don't want to put my energy into it, I don't want to sustain those things. I think this is personal work, but I don't like it when people try to do with others what they are not able to do with themselves. I feel like there is great haste nowadays. What do people do? They go up the mountain for 4 years and say, 'now I have the pipe, I have this and that, I have the *chanupa*'.¹⁸ Me, me, me. OK, but why? We can all do it, I know, but is it necessary? I believe that each one has its own place, a place in the world, in life, and your own moment. I feel that the haste is kind of deviating us from the path. They even make me doubt because depends on who you have your first experience with, many people may not want more experiences. It can be very therapeutic or very prejudicial. It is not a duty; it is not about having something. I believe that we already come into the world as divine essences, we already come with a function. If we don't do it for ourselves, what need is there to do it for the others. It is very nice to open a circle with Santa María, to have a *temazcal* in the house for you, for your family, to live it, to integrate it without putting on four feathers and look at me... The ego. [...] It is taking me to these depths, deep darkness of mine while at the same time I feel the rejection of how medicines are expanding without respect. Yes, there are elders that have walked their path, but I feel that in this society, at this moment, people are more driven by the ego than the true duty, this spiritual, universal obligation of the being that has to do that. Sometimes I get more sad than angry. I feel sad to say that we are not appreciating the opportunity, the people who come here to share [the medicines] and turn it into a commercial and ego thing. I don't want to put my energy into this. LUCIA

Emma also spoke about the potentially problematic relationship between the participants and the facilitators of a ceremony based on her experiences and observations. Abuse and harmful practices in the world of ayahuasca shamanism are not uncommon. In the media, we can read reports and cases where participants were abused by the facilitators (Monroe, 2017; Haddad, 2016; Maybin and Casserly, 2020) and scholars warn about it and provide guidelines on how to recognise and avoid bad practices (Sinclair and Labate, 2019). During fieldwork, I did not witness such horrifying practices that one can read in the media. The inhabitants themselves, however, did tell me that abuse can happen even in ceremonies done in Spain. To eliminate such things to happen in the first place, Estela is carefully monitoring every shaman/*curandero*

18 *Chanupa* is the Lakota (Sioux) term for the sacred ceremonial pipe.

she is hosting in the Stone House. After many years of experience, she is inviting only a few people, who she trusts and knows that the ceremony will be conducted professionally, with care and without hidden intentions. The participants who attend the ceremonies are often vulnerable and therefore more likely to succumb to captivating personalities such as some shamans can be. Thus, the person leading a ceremony must be a person with integrity. Usually, it is preferred that the ceremony leaders, particularly men, come and conduct the ceremony together with their wives or partners, which not only reduces the potential chances for a flirtation but also raises the energy of the ceremony to a more complete level.

What happens is that, of course, there are people who are famous in this spiritual path. It's a temptation because you can have a lot of money, a lot of fame like a rock star, you have fans, groupies. All that is a temptation. It's happening with several men who do the peyote ceremony. It's like a phenomenon, this role of the powerful macho with many fans. This ego can be a trap of the medicine because with medicine people can idealize you. That is a phenomenon that happens with medicine. Many women come and many of them have or have had problems with love. They are alone, or separated, or divorced. People who have drug problems come but they don't represent the majority in the group. These women are seeking for something and, of course, if the person who distributes the medicine is a man, they idealize him because they identify the effect of the medicine with the person who distributes the medicine. It is like when Jasbir serves you the medicine. The Santa María opens, illuminates, and you identify this effect with Jasbir. It has nothing to do with him. Jasbir has served you the medicine, but he is not the one that is giving you that openness, it is Santa María. Same things can happen with peyote. It is an ego trap. There are many traps of the ego, of vanity, of lust and sometimes it is very difficult to identify what is a trap. For me the point is to be a good person. Some people have been taking medicine for 30 years and are the same, the same, the same. Instead, you might have to do a meditation and it will transform you more than taking plants for 20 years. Do you understand what I'm trying to say? Life really moves you when the time is right, not by being 30 years in the Daime. In other words, it has nothing to do with it. That is why I sometimes get very frustrated because of the competition within the spiritual world. The whole of society is already competing, do we, who try to work on ourselves and be close to our heart, have to fall into this trap too? EMMA

'...because the guru has looked at me and I have seen that he recognized me.' Oh, please! This happens a lot, especially when working with the medicines. That's why there is trouble with sexuality with some of the spiritual leaders. Because the woman sees the spiritual leader with the medicine as the wonder of the wonders and the man who is carrying the medicine does not have the integrity to respect the process of each one and to stay on the margin. There are three tests that you have to pass. The first is personal importance because everyone gives you attention to you, so you think you are something special. The second is the economic part because in a ceremony you can get several thousand Euro. And the third is women. The man has to have the integrity to work on a spiritual path and not fall into the trap of women. I don't know anyone who would pass all three. Nor do I know many, but normally the one with women happens most often. When we are at the ICEERS workshop that day, you remember, they also talked about sexual intercourse, shamans, medicine men, women, and they have a rule, which is if you have an attraction to a woman in a ceremony you should wait six months to see if it is a real infatuation or it is a sex thing. ESTELA

Several other inhabitants of Wonderland shared their negative experiences with spiritual teachers or shamans such as manipulation, group separation, rivalry or selfishness. In the end, the spiritual leaders as well as the participants are ordinary people who also have flaws and weaknesses. Fotiou asserts that shamans she worked with do not coincide with the archetypical image of the shaman portrayed in Eliade's work, which

does not make them fake, but “real people operating in a particular socio-cultural context” (2016: 158). While some of the inhabitants might have had negative experiences and express frustration and disappointment, they affirmed that, in the end, the most important thing is how each individual applies spirituality in the everyday life.

I just returned [from my travels], I opened up because I had been very closed in my things, my studies. I was ready for the world, I opened myself for sentimental things too and that's when I met my ex-girlfriend in Barcelona where I was working. She was studying martial arts and meditation, aura reading and this, and I said ‘well, I'm going to see what this is’. I went there, I read the program a bit. It was my first contact with the hierarchy of teachers who impart knowledge. There I could see the first manipulations of people with all their power and knowledge and how they sometimes use it for their own interests instead of the growth of the person. There I began to see that, yes, there are many truths, there is much knowledge, but you have to be careful because people are people. We have to work on certain aspects of knowing what power is and then being humble to know how to work, to have integrity while having power is the most difficult thing for us. I just now start to see all the work done. How do I apply all this in my street, with my neighbours, because if I can't, what's then happening here? I don't intend to get along only with my clan, my group and to ignore the rest of humanity because they are different than me. When a group creates separation, I no longer feel well to be part of it. In some ceremonies, I felt that this strong cohesion was lacking. I got lost and it took me a long time to recover, to find myself and feel again what the hell it was and what was true. LEILA

I felt a lot of rivalry between women. There were things that I didn't like that I never identified with it. Which one was prettier, who is wearing the most beautiful feathers, there was a lot of flirting. I did not share that, and I walked away. I really enjoyed the ceremonies until it was over. [...] There were hidden things. Some wanted to pretend to know what they didn't know. There was harshness, lack of humility, immaturity, ignorance and that made the ego to emerge. PALOMA

Some people use their power for their own selfishness, no longer to harm, but out of selfishness. This exists. Confronting that forms part of the path because people who are not in the Santo Daime or use ayahuasca or any of this, do the same. SUSANA

Estela insists that you cannot put a price tag on spirituality. That is why all the activities in the Stone House are financed from voluntary contributions of the participants. “The more you give, the more you get” is Estela's philosophy. Also, no one is being denied the ceremony if they cannot give a contribution. However, “leaching” is not well received either. Occasionally, when foreign ceremony leaders come to the Stone House, a minimum contribution could be required, but again there can be exceptions if the person has low income. Estela insists that in each ceremony an explained is given to the participants on how the money is being spent. These costs include travel expenses, food and materials used during the ceremony, gasoline, wood, and other basic necessities. Although some ceremonies in Europe and, in particular, in Spain are organised with an economic incentive, this is not the case in the Wonderland. In the Water House, most ceremonies do have a fixed contribution for a ceremony, however, the money is again used for the basic expenses that emerge from the activities. In both cases, any surplus of money from the activities is invested in community infrastructure. Both, the Water House and the Stone House are old buildings that need maintenance. No one is getting rich from it or spending it on any kind of luxury. When representatives of Amazon tribes comes to conduct ceremonies part of the money is dedicated to the community and to support

the projects they develop, as in the case of Puyanawa who are building a *maloka* for the community and to secure the land they live on.

An important issue is also that of sustainability and ecological impact that ayahuasca tourism has in the sense of plants supply and protection of the forest. Overharvesting is not only an issue of ayahuasca in the Amazon, but also of peyote in Sierra Madre, or of iboga (*Tabernanthe iboga*), another psychoactive plant, used in the Bwiti tradition in Africa (Faura and Langlois, 2019). On a global level we are facing climate change, destruction of rainforest and natural habitats, indigenous leaders and activists who agitate against it are being killed, it is a far greater issue that I cannot dive into in this work because it demands analysis on its own. What I can address is how these issues are addressed by the inhabitants of Wonderland. In Wonderland the protection of the environment is among the most important values. The ayahuasca that is used by the inhabitants of Wonderland is brought to Spain once per year by some of the community members. Each year some of them go to South America to harvest, prepare and cook the brew together with the native communities. Some members of the Santo Daime in Spain also organised and started to cultivate *chacruna* (*Psychotria viridis*) in Europe. While I was conducting fieldwork, they cooked the ayahuasca in Europe and sent a bottle of it to the churches of Santo Daime in Spain, among them one bottle arrived also in Wonderland. The inhabitants are aware of overharvesting and are looking for solutions. One of the reasons why Estela works mainly with cannabis, or better Santa María, lies in the sustainability aspect. Cannabis is a plant that can grow practically all over the world. The community of Wonderland cultivates it in sufficient quantities each year and it does not have to be brought from other places or cultures. They are building a tradition based on the time and place where they are living. By learning from other traditions, they aspire for the recovery of their cosmology and cannabis (Santa María) is the technology that facilitates this process, like some indigenous groups, who did not use ayahuasca before, but utilised it to revitalise their cultures, restoring identity, dignity and well-being (Langdon and Santana de Rose 2012; Wright, 2013).

Neoshamanism and New Age

New Age and neoshamanism tend to represent shamanic practices and practitioners in an excessively positive manner, which results in the romanticisation of shamanism (Fotiou, 2016) and misrepresents indigenous practices by reinforcing the stereotypical image of the Noble Savage (Kehoe, 2000). Indigenous people in contemporary society are embedded in global struggles and face important challenges. The case of ayahuasca shamanism can be seen as another case of “cultural imperialism” (Meyer and Royer, 2001) in which “white shamans” use certain elements of indigenous knowledge and leave out the rest which is difficult to integrate (Vitebsky, 2003). This not only affects the neoshamanic practice but also decreases the cosmological significance of shamanism (Fotiou, 2016).

In a globalised world, we live in today, several psychoactive plants crossed cultures, spread around the globe and transformed into a “transnational phenomena [...] known as the New Age, one of the inheritances of the counterculture of the 1960s” (Romaní, 2020: 14). Contemporary use of psychoactive plants is situated in the sphere of neoshamanism where they serve as tools for alternative lifestyles, facilitate the emergence of new phenomena like spiritual tourism, and settle into medical contexts of psychotherapy and treatment of drug dependence (Romaní, 2020). In western society, the concept of the New Age and neoshamanism have a negative connotation and are considered non-authentic, distorted, decontextualised, superficial, and somewhat artificially constructed. Even the inhabitants of Wonderland themselves have a critical stance towards the growing popularity of these practices worldwide. Aurora is critical towards the New Age and sees it as fashion and anti-community while emphasising the importance of discipline and effort needed to live a spiritual life, as well as honesty, sincerity and love needed to build a community, a tribe.

The New Age is a way to distract people from the purpose of life and what is happening. New Age has taken real information, knowledge ... and made it into a business. For me, the New Age is another type of social engineering, social experimentation, and social manipulation. The problem is that sometimes everything gets labelled as New Age and not everything is New Age. [Estela] is not New Age in my mind. She has nothing to do with New Age, but the things she does, the vocabulary she uses... New Age has used true knowledge and has brought it to... in other words, when there is narcissism when there is selfishness when the head is in the air and the feet are even more in the air, that for me is New Age. It's when you want to try out everything. All the discipline, the effort, the will... New Age does not want to know anything about the effort, they do not want to know anything about giving and giving and keep on giving. There is a strong force behind all of it. You have to look at what that force is. What do people follow? Well, New Age has a lot to do with fashion and the trends. People have a hard time to follow a path. The Daima talks a lot about cultivating the garden, and it is meant the internal garden. What happens often in New Age or the women's circles? That we are all very sisterly, but there is no support. In other words, when you live with someone there is support because coexistence forces you to support. You have to take the chestnuts out of the fire and share them among everyone, leave things clean, take care of the house, take care that there is food in the pantry, that there is fire. That is union and support, and this creates families and creates very lasting tribes especially when it is done with sincerity, honesty and love that goes beyond the flaws of an individual. It happens to me with the Estela, I love her despite her flaws and sometimes I have had a hard time with her, but my love is beyond that, we are a tribe. Same goes for long-term friends. I do not care anymore to attend various circles and talk. It is OK to talk about sisterhood or brotherhood, to use nice words and have nice speeches, but I will not believe it. I am going to listen, and I am going to learn from life, and I am going to take into account different points of view. I know that true friendship develops over time by overcoming obstacles. When you really need someone's support it comes from your blood family or from the tribe with whom you have been able to live, overcoming challenges, argued with, those who have seen your all faces and your darkness and still persevere. This is friendship and it is also an economy. AURORA

Precisely the unity of the community and maintenance of it are, according to Porrás Carrillo (2003), the traits that distinguish neoshamanism from shamanism. The main elements of shamanism are the interconnection between all levels of reality in a way that everything that happens to an individual affects the whole community on the physical and spiritual level; what is perceived by the senses is a localisation of broader patterns of energy; both the perceptible and the imperceptible are aspects that influence the disease;

consciousness is everywhere and everything is alive; the universe is sacred and has a purpose and a meaning (Mehl-Madrona, 1989). Tradition, norms, guidelines and customs are important characteristics that differentiate shamanism from neoshamanism. Neoshamanism consists of fragments collected from a variety of spatially dispersed traditions and contexts, while shamanism consists of cosmogonic aspects and a worldview; cosmographic aspects like sacred spaces; ritual and ceremonial aspects; and therapeutic and instrumental aspects (Porras Carrillo, 2003). According to Jacobsen, 1999, xi) neoshamanism is defined as “a form of shamanism that has been created at the end of the 20th century to reestablish a link for modern man to his spiritual roots, to reintroduce shamanic behaviour into the lives of westerners in search of spirituality and, thereby, renew contact with nature” (Jakobsen, 1999: xi).

If I now look at the example of Wonderland and apply these elements of shamanism I could say that the elders of Wonderland (Estela, Owel, Jasbir, Sofia, and Alma) transmit a myth, a worldview that acts as an authority and establishes order in the community (cosmogonic aspect). Wonderland has spaces that are considered sacred (the Stone House, the Water House, the chapel, the mountain Montserrat) and the community members periodically go to them to leave offerings, request a favour or express gratefulness (cosmographic aspect). The inhabitants of Wonderland take part in unique ceremonies and rituals (*Navegación Mariana*, Santa María, pilgrimage to Montserrat) that have a social, political, ideological and religious function (ritual and ceremonial aspect). The process of healing is understood in a holistic manner contrasting the western individualised approach. Healing in Wonderland is understood as a balance between mind, body and spirit and medicine is taken by everyone, not only the sick. Healing is done collectively. It is not the doctor who cures, but the person itself with the help of the community. Music, singing and dance can also be considered instruments of healing since they affect the body and are present in any healing session. Crystals, feathers, and other objects or symbols are utilised in ceremonies and placed on an altar, which is made for each ceremony and dismantled after it is over (ritual and ceremonial aspect). “What has been worked here, stays here, it transmutes”, explained Emma in one of our conversations. Shamanism is a complex system that involves the entire community, demands complete dedication and is essentially a service to the community, while neoshamanism is a set of techniques imitated or extracted from the practices observed in other cultures that fill the gaps of meaning and knowledge, as well as the ineffectiveness of biomedical systems (Porras Carrillo, 2003). Aurora described the Stone House (and Wonderland) with a parable of a tree:

You cannot be in a hurry in the spiritual world. You cannot be anxious about gaining knowledge. You cannot follow 5.000 paths at the same time. It is different when you are in one place and there are different branches, but from the same tree, which is what happens with the Sikhs, grandmother Rosa, with grandfather Owel, who know each other and have a connection between them. [The Stone House] is like a big tree with branches, that expand but you can follow that tree, stay in that tree. AURORA

I was told that the Wonderland community has been perceived by the locals in the region as a sect that is doing black magic. Estela’s friends abandoned her when she chose to change her life. Some inhabitants’

blood relatives had difficulties to accept them or thought they went crazy. Manuel's mother thought he regressed by not having a steady job and living in the countryside and felt like Estela stole her son. Olivia revealed how she feels about the relationship with her younger brother:

It's been three months since I last talked to my brother because he thinks I'm losing my mind by being here. He says that I'm selfish for doing what I feel and prefers that I stay in Barcelona working what I don't want and get drunk every afternoon. He knows that I go to drink beer every day after work. In his opinion, that's better than this. But he has never given me a chance to come here and see for himself. OLIVIA

In his book, *El estigma del extraño* Joan Prat (1997) discusses the stigmatisation of people with a sectarian experience and the response of friends and family, who say that they do not recognize their children and accuse them of being unconcerned with family interests, brainwashed and deceived.

While conventional initiations are recognized by society, sectarian initiation is only recognized as such by the initiate and the group to which one belongs; but the hegemonic society judges this process as an absurd trip to the social "nothing". The non-recognition of the process modifies the reading of the objectives and the phases from its foundation: the personal metamorphosis, characteristic of all initiation, becomes a process of destruction and annulment of the personality; the teachings or the initiatory knowledge become a brainwashing; the totalitarianism and voracity of the institution become a mechanism that engulfs poor victims previously transformed into zombies; the authoritarianism and despotism typical of the initiated contexts is read now, in the sense of the megalomania of some soulless gurus who rule their pupils as if it were a concentration camp (Prat, 1997: 195-196).

Prat urges to reinterpret and redefine such notions, like Melton and Moore (1982) proposed, as a state of liminality or as a practice of asceticism.

Wonderland as a form of *communitas*

The ethnographer and folklorist Arnold van Gennep (1977 [1909]) introduced a three stages ritual structure, which consists of separation from the usual social setting, the liminal stage or a stage in between, and reincorporation. Victor Turner used this structure and further elaborated the liminal stage, which was of his main interest. The liminal stage is a period when an individual is in-between. It is a time when social statuses or other differences between individuals cease to exist and a structure of equality or social unity forms among the community members. The state of liminality in a ritual produces, what Turner called, *communitas*.

The term *communitas* refers to an unstructured or little structured community where people are equal to each other. In essence, it is "a relationship between concrete, historical, idiosyncratic individuals" (Turner, 1991: 131). It is characterized in terms of community spirit, solidarity and unity and is an acute stage of the community, which enables it to share a common experience and takes the community to the next level. According to Turner, there are different kinds of *communitas* that need to be distinguished: existential or

spontaneous *communitas* of ephemeral experience of unity; normative *communitas* of a permanent social system based on common needs and resources; and ideological *communitas* of utopian social models that are based on existential *communitas* (1991: 132). The latter is an external form of an internal experience of existential *communitas* that generates imagery and philosophical ideas. While normative and ideological *communitas* are structured, the spontaneous ones eventually follow the same path or cease to exist. Ideological *communitas* contain clearly formulated views on community living and universal human values such as “peace, fertility, the health of mind and body, justice, comradeship, the equality before God, the law or the life force of men and women, young and old, and persons of all races and ethnic groups” (1991: 134). Prevailing in these *communitas* is also the absence of property. While Turner’s work was not explicitly directed towards exploring the health and disease model, he did discuss aspects of it when elucidating broader cultural themes such as mechanisms of social regulation, religious systems or cosmology of a particular culture (Lambert, 2002).

Community living is a dialectical process of successive phases between the mundane needs of the social structure and the ecstasy of communion. Either one of these states is essential for a community. Without *communitas*, which must be periodic and ephemeral, the spirit starves, whereas without social structure the body starves (Myerhoff, 1983). The structure is closed and associated with nomenclature, wealth, status or inequality, it begins in the past, settles in the present and projects into the future. *Communitas*, on the other hand, has an open character in which everyone can enter, it emphasizes the absence of status, hierarchy and rejects social distinctions based on wealth and status and belongs only to the now, the present moment (Prat, 1997). If the manifestation of *communitas* lasts for a longer period it is seen as dangerous and anarchic from the hegemonic perspective and attempts are made to shorten and control it (Prat, 1997). In *communitas* the liminality is perceived as contaminating and dangerous, therefore it needs to be limited to specific spaces and times (Douglas, 1966), it unites people only momentarily. It is tolerated as a phase, but never as a permanent condition (Prat, 1997). Moreover, *communitas* is predestined to become a structure. Turner’s work on liminality and *communitas* is essential to comprehend the phenomena of social change, as well as the role and symbolism of rituals.

Turner’s understanding of rituals was utilized by Barbara Myerhoff in her study of the annual Huichol pilgrimage and published in the book *Peyote hunt: The sacred journey of the Huichol Indians* (first published in 1974). She used Turner’s definition of *communitas* to emphasize the differentiation between the profane and the sacred. Her work also greatly elaborated on the role of peyote in a Geertz-Turner-Lévi-Straussian framework in the resolution of societal, historical, and ideological conflicts of Huichol society (Myerhoff, 1983). Although her work was published almost half a century ago it remains relevant especially for contemporary understanding of drug use and the depiction of controlled use of psychoactive plants, which is an integral part of the culture among many indigenous people of Central and South America.

In his doctoral thesis, Romaní (1983b) analysed the hippie movement as a form of *communitas* in Catalonia during the 1960s to 1980s in the context of political transition to democracy. He demonstrated that the values of the hippies coincided with characteristics of *communitas* and psychoactive plants were used as an essential symbolic element. Hippies emerged when Catalonia was in a situation of *communitas* on a political level concerning the Francoist Spain / the Spanish state. There was thus a moment when *communitas*-hippie coincided with *communitas*-Catalonia in contra of the Spanish State. *Communitas* in this case was a moment of de-structure of traditional life, a “ritual of rebellion” (Gluckman, 1954) that would generate new models and symbols for a new social reality. Some of the founders of Wonderland were in their youth those hippies Romaní was writing about. It appears that Wonderland-*communitas* represents another moment of de-structure or ritual rebellion in Spanish / Catalan history, which perhaps could lead to the social integration of some values and customs of the Wonderland community and generating a new social reality for everyone.

The concept of liminality is not only a quality of rituals but can be understood or used in a broader sense. For example, midnight represents liminality in time. Waking up from a dream or being under the influence of psychoactive substances represents liminality in the states of consciousness. Illegal immigrants or teenagers (being neither children nor adults) represent the liminality of beings. Borders, crossroads, rivers, shores, caves, bridges, etc. represent liminality in places. Liminality can be applied also to ethnographic research when the ethnographer is both participating and observing the culture. The researcher is at the same time part of a culture but also separated from it, and by means of self-reflexivity interpreting the observations and revealing bias.

In our case, the stay at the Stone House is liminality in place. It is a place where people generally stay only temporarily (a couple of days or weeks) and where rituals take place regularly. At the same time staying at the Stone House implies a profound change in everyday practices. In other words, everyday living and ritual practices are very much intertwined. People come there when facing challenges in life, they spend time together as equals and separate from the usual social obligation and environments in order to heal and learn.

Spiritual vs. habitual use of psychoactive substances

While ritual use of ayahuasca is already a well-known phenomenon, the ritual use of cannabis is less known. In Europe, cannabis is the most used among the prohibited plants. However, it is used in a profane way as opposed to sacred. In Spain, and especially Catalonia, the use of it is directed through so-called Cannabis Social Clubs (CSCs), which are cannabis dispensaries where people can buy and smoke it. The researched

group, however, is using cannabis daily but in a controlled ritual setting. Such uses of cannabis are fairly rare and, therefore, a valuable research subject in terms of its effects and use.

Most of the inhabitants of Wonderland that I have interviewed had past experiences with a variety of psychoactive substances. Most commonly they used psychedelics such as mushrooms and LSD, stimulants such as amphetamines or cocaine and entactogens like MDMA, in lesser degree opiates or alcohol. Half of the interviewees have smoked tobacco in the past or still do it. Besides Ramon and Luna, everyone used cannabis at some point in their life. However, after they learned to use it in a ritual, their relationship with the plant changed significantly. Now they still use it, but as Santa María not as cannabis, which means they use it pure (without mixing with tobacco), less frequently, and with an awareness and intention. Sofia explained how she experienced the difference between cannabis and Santa María:

I smoked [cannabis], but not as Santa María. After I began to consecrate the Santa María from there on I cannot smoke any more. I can, but I will faint. If I mixed the María with tobacco it made me dizzy with disastrous vomiting.

Santa María is not necessarily used in a group setting or a ritual. Each person has an individual approach to it, as I will describe in more detail later. The inhabitants, however, did not only change their relationship with the cannabis plant but their use of other substances, such as cocaine or amphetamines, discontinued completely. Similarly, in the case of alcohol, most of the interviewees decreased the use of alcohol to the minimum, occasionally drinking a beer or a glass of wine with food, while before they would use it daily. Ceremonially, ayahuasca or Daime and tobacco is used most commonly besides cannabis. Most inhabitants have been in contact with both, Santo Daime and ayahuasca taken in other contexts mainly with indigenous groups. While some prefer the structure of Santo Daime, others dislike the strong Catholic symbolism in it. Tobacco is used in many different contexts as an offering to the fire, smoked or taken intranasally in ceremonies. About half of the people I have interviewed are or have been smokers (see Table 3).

The inhabitants were telling me stories about their past substance use and how it changed once they got to know Estela and since they started using psychoactive plants in a ritual group setting. I find their experiences telling and proof that not everyone who uses psychoactive substances is “addicted”, in fact very few are, and using a psychoactive substance it not inevitably destructive, as it is suggested by national law-makers and international agencies, but quite the opposite, it can be beneficial, if the use is controlled, socially accepted and informed.

What stunned me most is the fact that my own use of cannabis, tobacco and other substances changed unintentionally during fieldwork. In this part, I want to present the stories of several inhabitants of Wonderland and include my personal story and experience as well.

ID	Age	Tobacco	Cannabis	Alcohol	Ceremonial use	Past substance use
Estela	66	No	Yes	Rarely	Ayahuasca/Daime, peyote, tobacco	No
Ramon	n/a	No	No	No	Tobacco, mushrooms	No
Gloria	40s	No	Yes	n/a	Ayahuasca/Daime, San Pedro, tobacco	n/a
Nina	43	Used to	Yes	n/a	Ayahuasca/Daime, tobacco	Mushrooms, LSD
Mateo	36	No	Yes	n/a	<i>Mambe</i> , peyote	No
Jasbir	41	No	Yes	n/a	No	No
Lucia	36	Used to	Yes	No	Ayahuasca, tobacco	LSD
Carlos	40s	Yes	Yes	Occasionally	Ayahuasca/Daime, tobacco	n/a
Emma	36	No	Yes	Rarely	Ayahuasca/Daime, peyote, San Pedro, tobacco	No
Alma	43	Yes	Yes	Rarely	Ayahuasca/Daime, tobacco	No
Sofia	43	Yes	Yes	Rarely	Ayahuasca/Daime, peyote, San Pedro, tobacco	Amphetamines, cocaine, MDMA
Luis	56	No	Yes	n/a	Ayahuasca, peyote	Cocaine
Olivia	27	Yes	Yes	Occasionally	Ayahuasca	MDMA
Susana	53	No	Yes	Rarely	Ayahuasca/Daime	Cocaine
Tomas	40	No	Yes	Occasionally	Daime, peyote	Mushrooms
Luna	10	No	No	Tried beer	Ayahuasca	No
Julia	59	Used to	Yes	Rarely	Peyote, tobacco	Amphetamines, cocaine, LSD, heroin, Datura, mushrooms
Manuel	36	Yes	Yes	Occasionally	Ayahuasca/Daime, peyote, San Pedro, tobacco	Amphetamines, cocaine, MDMA
Aurora	36	No	Yes	Rarely	Ayahuasca/Daime, tobacco	Mushrooms
Leila	44	Yes	Yes	Occasionally	Ayahuasca/Daime, tobacco	Amphetamines, cocaine, LSD, MDMA
Paloma	49	Yes	Yes	Occasionally	Ayahuasca/Daime, mushrooms, tobacco	LSD
Isabela	47	No	Yes	Occasionally	Ayahuasca/Daime, tobacco	MDMA

Table 3: The use of substances among the interviewed people.

Olivia smokes tobacco and occasionally drinks a glass of good wine or beer. She used to smoke cannabis and tried MDMA twice in her life. Her mother had cancer and died when Olivia was only 22 years old. Together with her younger brother, they were left on their own in a house with a mortgage. Olivia had to set aside her study of genetics and started working in a clothes shop for three years to pay for all the costs. Then she decided to sell the house and went with her boyfriend to Thailand where she worked as an English teacher until they split up and she came back home. Olivia did not want to live in a city and wanted to focus on studying naturopathy and other alternative therapies. As she was searching for places to volunteer, she found the [Water House]. It's been six months that she has been living there before we met and did the

interview. Olivia was very open and shared with me her use of psychoactive plants and her relationship with cannabis, which she managed to re-establish in those months staying in the [Water House].

Before I was an occasional smoker [of cannabis], with my friends once or twice a year, but the moment my mother died, I started smoking quite a lot. There was a moment when I smoked daily, only at night, never during the day. I worked a lot, I didn't eat, and I just wanted to smoke my joint at night, then in the morning, I woke up sleepy, because I slept two, three hours, only drinking coffee. If something happened during the day, I got angry and wanted to smoke a joint, and I entered in this... I lost 25 kilos. At one point in summer, I realized that I was always in a bad mood, always thinking about the joint and I told a friend of mine that I don't want to continue like this. That's not me. I quit smoking and from there everything changed. I sold the house, I started doing yoga, to take care of myself more on a spiritual level. I only smoked every once in a while, with a friend, not by myself. [...] The first ceremony I did here [the Water House] was Santa María with women. I was scared. It was just a day that I had argued with my brother and had seen my ex-partner in Barcelona. And when I got here, I said to [Sofia], 'I realize that the two most important men in my life take a lot of energy from me'. She told me 'I'm going to do a Santa María ceremony tonight, why you don't come?'. I said 'look, it scares me because I relate Santa María to the death of my mother'. 'Just come because we do it differently', and I said, 'well, okay'. Besides, I was lucky that it was in a group of friends of hers, very close, very intimate. I had an experience that I started to see how everything really was. I tried *rapé* for the first time too. I loved it. I was [anxious] and *rapé* helped me to calm down. We did the circle of Santa María and then we were singing songs of Santa María. At that time, I did not feel the high that you feel when you smoke with tobacco, I was with my mother. My mother came. [Sofia] explained to me that it brings feminine energy, it reconnects you with the mother, with the grandmother. My mother was sitting there in the circle, smiling. There was a light there. And wow, for me it was like a click. I enjoyed it a lot. We did another Santa María ceremony and the same thing happened. I expected to cry a lot, but I was smiling all day. From there on I started working with Santa María by myself. I connected with the Santa María and from time to time, when I feel that I'm not doing my job, she calls me, and I take her. Usually, I take the extracts that [Sofia] is preparing with a little THC and there I connect a lot with the plant and she talks to me and it tells me the whole truth about myself and my being. I usually take it and, after a while, when I feel it is coming on I sit in my room, I open the window, many times I smoke a cigarette and she starts talking. Well, I'm talking, I'm verbalizing, but I don't normally say these things, so I feel like it's her. Right after the meeting of women, which was very powerful, I began to realize all the work I have to do about my relationship with men and I realized how much I prevented myself from advancing in this sense. I spent many days working with Santa María and, as I felt sad, I was afraid that I was going back to Santa María for the wrong reason. Going back to being sad and turning to Santa María, but more like marijuana than Santa María. But then I took a step in the relationship with my brother and also with my other relationships and put an end to several things and I realized that no. It is not that I was taking Santa María, but she is helping me. From then on, it's been a month and a half since she has not called me again. OLIVIA

Isabela was experimenting with different substances in her youth. Few times she participated in ayahuasca or Santo Daimé ceremonies either in the Water House or the Stone House. When she met Estela, she learned about the ceremony Santa María, which re-established the use of the plant in a sacred manner. She merged her massage practice with cannabis oil and the Santa María ceremony and, together with her friend Sara, created a new practice called *Cura Santa*. Cannabis is a plant that was, one way or the other, always present in her life. In her family cannabis was used a medicine already 10 years ago when her father was struggling with cancer and used cannabis to treat the side-effects of chemotherapy. Isabela said that

thanks to cannabis he, and the whole family, at least had some pleasant moments in that time. On Sundays, there would be a family reunion where they would all together smoke cannabis.

When I had 19, 20, 21, 22 years I experimented with ecstasy, with pills. For me, it was quite an adventure because it opened me to a wonderful collective state. We all loved each other so much, we hugged each other and, of course, it was something, I wanted all my life: to be in that communion, you know, with people who want to love me. What do you want to be when you grow up? Well, I want to be loving and to be loved. For me, this has been my quest. Ecstasy was the first thing that freaked me out on an experimental level. What happened is that ecstasy had this consequence of this tremendous drop that will make you feel very depressed. It took me a bit, but I decided to stop taking it completely. A trip to Valencia helped me a lot because in Valencia was the 'Ruta del Bakalao'¹⁹, so there, uff, I was very shocked. I met a woman who was 40, I was 20, and I saw myself in her, how I didn't want to be at 40 years old. There I decided that this has to end. I tried substances like cocaine, but my nature is not getting hooked on these things, because what I am looking for is more... If I didn't get hooked on ecstasy, then the other substances do not have that thing either. Cocaine has not been a substance that I have taken regularly, occasionally from time to time, but I also decided to absolutely stop taking it, because it doesn't make me feel well. Tobacco I quit for the same reason because it did not do me well. I smoked from when I was 15 to 30 when I got pregnant. I use *rapé* only in a ceremony with Santa María and on pilgrimages. If we talk about cannabis, the Santa María, she came in my life much later, when I already had known the Bach flower essences that have a lot to do with my opening of consciousness, they have already led me to an understanding of life and opened that door for me. I had a period of smoking cannabis, the joints as they call it, and I stopped doing it because it didn't do me well. There came a time when I felt bad. Every time I smoked with someone, I had a disconnection with the people I was with. I was very blocked, so I decided not to smoke marijuana, as it is called, mixed with tobacco. I think it was due to how we smoked that made me enter into that state of separation, of disconnection. So, I had put it aside. The experience with my father [brought cannabis back into my life]. He was ill, had cancer and in the last moments cannabis was the one that helped him to stabilize all the symptoms of chemotherapy, all the discomfort. Thanks to cannabis he had a few more pleasant moments. This was in 2010 and 2011. I knew many people who were opening up to the plant to help themselves with their illnesses. In fact, my father had a very good green thumb and before he got sick a friend asked him if he could grow cannabis at home for his mother, who was a lady suffering from Parkinson's. My father cultivated it at home and had a super nice harvest. In the period when my father was cultivating it, we would go to my parent's house on Sundays. My mother cooks very well. She makes super delicious rice. The whole family would meet, my sister with her partner, the father of my children with whom we were together at that time, and my parents. We ate rice, and we all smoked cannabis. I smoked at that time because it seemed a super nice experience, sharing the plant with my father. It was a very powerful moment. Apart from this moment, I didn't use cannabis again until I met [Estela] at an event. I was working there in the kitchen as a volunteer and it had a big impact on me how Santa María was used one night in a ceremony in the kitchen. I do not smoke it, I passed the Santa María on and I simply immersed myself in this collective consciousness, in that encounter with the plant and with everyone. It was so beautiful, I got a lot of understanding about the places that cannabis invites you to enter, if you are aware of the moment, if you do it with respect, with listening, with openness. From then on and until now it has been a very enjoyable journey with [Estela], learning a lot. ISABELA

Susana was experimenting with various psychoactive substances in her youth. She had a powerful experience with cocaine that frightened her and made her change her life completely. She started practising

19 Ruta del Bakalao was the largest clubbing movement in Valencia from the late 1970s to mid-90s. It was a popular form of night entertainment for thousands of young people and notorious for the use of substances such as MDA, MDMA, cannabis, LSD, and amphetamines.

meditation and joined Santo Daime. While some inhabitants of Wonderland find it difficult to identify with the Santo Daime doctrine, especially with its catholic symbolism, Susana didn't experience any resistance towards it. However, her parents do not know that she is a member of Santo Daime. She thinks they would be disapproving of it. She is also participating in the ceremonies with Santa María, either as part of the Santo Daime *trabajo* or in an individual Santa María ceremony in the Stone House.

In my surroundings have always been people, let's say, a little rebellious in the sense that everyone smoked joints, took LSD, took pills, amphetamines. I tried to smoke joints when I was very young and I felt terrible, my body rejected all this. [...] The first time I smoked Santa María I was 15 years old, at school like many people, with some friends, as if it were a special thing. Well, we made a couple of puffs and 'oh my gosh!' I lived half an hour from school and walked home every day. I got home and stayed there having a great time. But of course, I didn't know how to read... when you're so young and you don't have any experience with all of this, of course, you don't understand what is happening. I am quite cautious; I did not want to get into all of this. At the age of 24, I was with some friends, it was summer and there was a friend of mine who bought cocaine, so we spent a few days sniffing cocaine. I did it to overcome something, I will dare to try it and see what happens. Of course, cocaine is one thing that I do not recommend to anyone because it gives you verbal fluency and increases your self-esteem at first. Basically, you can say that that's it. I felt very well, I spent a week taking it and, one day while I was talking with a friend of mine like now with you, I suddenly left my body and saw myself talking. Of course, I got scared. From then on, I began to do some changes in my life. I never took cocaine again, but I began to realize many things in my life. What happens many times is that we do not see ourselves in our own lives. From then on, I went through so many changes, radical changes that led me to leave the town I was living in, leave my whole life behind. Changing my house, my work, my environment, everything. SUSANA

Nina is a cannabis user since her youth. With Estela, she learned to use it in a ritual setting. For her, the setting and setting are crucial for a meaningful and beneficial experience. The group ceremony is uniting the participants and build community, a sense of belonging, which is what people often lack and seek. Yet, it is not only the plant that is therapeutic but the ceremony, the group of people, the songs and the act of singing, all also contribute to the beneficial effects of the plant.

I always liked experimenting. I didn't use regularly, because I trained swimming where they did [doping] controls. At 17 years old I experimented with trips [LSD], I started smoking hashish. Santa María has always accompanied me. There were moments when I was not using, but when I stopped swimming I smoked daily and when I got older occasionally, not all the time. Cannabis has always been around. I experimented, not so much with the pills because that is already a laboratory elaboration, but with plants, with infusions, with mushrooms. I began to take ayahuasca, peyote, San Pedro in the [Stone House] and every time it becomes more clear to me that these medicines have to be taken in a ceremony and with songs because it makes it a double medicine, and in a circle with the family, even if you don't know each other. When we come together, each one comes more or less naked, with what we are, and it is always easier to share and to grow if we do it together. I think that when you reach a point in your life where you want to go deeper your being or to connect with your being, plants help a lot to overcome blockages or trauma. They are like your facilitators to go to a place where you are having trouble getting to, which is usually very deep. [Smoking Santa María] outside the ceremony did not take me deep. I smoked it to escape somehow from my situation, many times to have fun. Smoking in the ceremony is completely different because the energy of the plant comes to you in a completely different way. Besides that, it brings you a lot of information, it can direct you. When you set an intention, it reveals you something that you cannot manage to elucidate or find

meaning. In a ceremony, you are in a group, in a circle and it generates the energy of union, that we are all one. We live and share with each other. We all want the same thing. For me, this is very powerful. NINA

Tomas is one of the latest members of Wonderland. He is in a relationship with Emma who introduced him to the community. Although he is a cannabis user for many years, he is now discovering the spiritual use of Santa María and other plants. The intention one has when using psychoactive plants is important and determines its effects, Tomas realized. Much as I felt when I participated in the first Santa María ceremony, he was left surprised that there is another way of using cannabis, a way that connects you with the plant and makes you connect with your emotions, with yourself.

I stopped using Santa María in 2009 because I wanted to do a reset. I knew that the way I was using it, the ludic way, no longer gave me anything at that time and I decided to stop. But it always remained in my memory that in one way or another I had to use it because of the strength it gave me. It was meant for something more than 'hihi, haha'. So, it stayed dormant. I have always wanted to make my own medicine with pure ethanol and Santa María. That came later in 2014 when I was already cultivating a little plant in my parents' house and I did not consume them. I had them stored in jars. I got ethanol and a friend of mine made the medicine and there I started taking Santa María again. When there was Santa María, we smoked it daily at the time when I was studying. I did not consume chemical substances. Just Santa María and the mushrooms. [...] One of the things that I realized very early is that if you have a negative state of mind... What Santa María gave me was that change. I realized now, having more information, that it is not only a plant that has chemical compounds, and these chemical compounds have an effect on the body, but it is truly an entity that people can use not only to heal themselves but to open their hearts to the world. When you smoke, keep in mind that you knock on someone's door and they will ask you why you are knocking. You have to be very clear about why you are knocking on this door. In the last month, I am consuming every day and I realized that a game enters the mind. When you are under the effect of [Santa María] it is followed by sensations, emotions and feelings. It could be that this is the trap you made yourself. Right now, I realized that I am making myself believe that I need it to reach a state of consciousness when I know that it is not true. It is true that for me now, seeing it from a sincere perspective, I use it in a ludic way. When I saw it in the [Stone House] in a ceremony and for a bigger purpose, this left me very surprised. For me, it was a discovery. I like the introspection and you feel good. This is how I would like to use it, always with a purpose. [...] I tried *mambe* [coca leaf] with *ambil* [tobacco paste]. I like beer, not every day, but almost every day. With Emma, I learned about the *híkuri* [peyote] and the Santo Daime. *Híkuri* is the feeling of brotherhood, a place that you are sharing and that opens your heart, it is like a hug. We are in a teepee, we are going to share and see all people at the same level, we are all in the same place and here is the *mara'akame* activating the medicine with its songs and each one at his level of consciousness to be able to purge all that energy that we have inside. For me it was an incredible discovery, to see how there are other ways to use ancient medicines, that you can truly get to heal your inner things on an emotional level, on a mental level. TOMAS

Emma tried smoking cannabis as an adolescent with her friends, but she did not know how to handle its effects and felt aversion to it because she did not like the way how it was used in her circle of friends. As Becker (1953) emphasised a person will only engage in cannabis use if the person learns how to use it in a pleasurable or beneficial way. It was when Emma met Estela and learned the ceremonial way of smoking Santa María, that she felt safe, guided and taken care of while under the effect of cannabis and experienced its benefits.

When I was a teenager, when everyone goes out to party and starts trying things, I was never interested in the chemical. Until today I have not tried anything processed, in the end, nature is also chemical... by chemical I mean processed in a laboratory, manipulated by humans, I have never tried that. And the plants... I was not looking for it, but it came onto my path. Due to the events in my life, San Pedro came first and simultaneously ayahuasca in Peru. Those were ceremonies with diets minimum 2 days before, a purgative that cleaned you above and below and then fasting with liquids, water or some fruit. When you had the ceremony, of course, the plant entered you with full force. And like the entire intestine... The mind, as well, was calmer and cleaner. There was all the strength of the plant. Of course, the place where the plant is collected gives it also a different power. After a few years, I went to live in Mexico and there came peyote. When there is a party or a concert, I have a beer, but I don't like wine or liquor. That doesn't suit me, nor do I like the effect, neither during nor after. I never smoke, only in a ceremony of four tobaccos at the moon altar when it is time to pray with tobacco, yes, I really like it, but I have never smoked. Santa María came in the adolescent period. Most of my friends tried and smoked for many years. I saw the whole addiction process, that they needed it, and that repulsed me. They became tiny because the plant dominated them. They would do anything to get it. Sometimes we were in the mountains hiking, without seeing any human nor village or anything, and they went down the mountain to the town at night, came back up without sleeping, just to score some hashish. Sure, I tried it the first couple of times with friends, but I saw that it was not useful for me, nor did I enjoy it because for me it was very strong and I did not know how to manage it. They could continue talking, even going around, driving, eating or cooking, but not me. I got that power, and I did not know what to do with it. I didn't feel good doing it in that context. When I found [Estela] and the ceremonial spaces that embrace that power of the Santa María, well, there I felt 'ah, that's great'. I mean, I'm not crazy. We are in an environment where we can receive this by honouring it with respect, I feel accompanied and I feel safe. Basically, it is this, I feel safe in the circle because of the context of respect for the plant, the essence, the power that comes and I feel good, I know how to manage it because there are accompaniment and structure. We channel that through songs, prayers, there is a group force that also maintains that vibration. If I am alone it is like my mind goes away, but in a circle, I really like it. With Tomas, we do it outside the ceremony, but we do it with intention, with respect, with prayer in tranquil places, in nature. If we channel it walking, it's fine and a lot of information comes to me, but if there is a place that makes me nervous or I get scared, then I'm not doing well. Of course, if it is not channelled very well, there are two escape routes: either sleep or eat. For example yesterday I did not feel good afterwards because I said, 'what was done with that force?' Eat. I didn't feel good about it today. I don't know if I want to do it again. Only in a ceremony. EMMA

Julia was a teenager in the 60s and had an intense youth, experimenting with everything that came onto her path. She also saw the brutality and the consequences of a prohibitionist drug policy that creates criminality, hospitalisations and deterioration of people. In her late 20s, she moved out of the city with her husband started a new life with him and three children. In that time, she also met Estela but did not maintain contact due to obligations she had and taking care of her children. Fairly recently she established contact again and started to participate in the ceremonies done in the Stone House as a way to find herself and her path. She is now using tobacco and cannabis, but only in the Stone House because, like many others, she only feels safe and taken care of there.

I started smoking hashish when I was 16 years old. It was of excellent quality and also the body so pure, so clean because I rarely smoked tobacco. So, I was very detoxified, and the first hashish experiences were, well, very elevating. We were also dying of laughter and feeling like we are floating. This never happened again as we were smoking because the body is getting used to it. So, all this was going lost as years passed by. I stopped using it because it didn't do

anything to me that I wanted any more. In other words, it stopped being psychoactive. It was rather depressing physically. I could feel my energy going down. I had little desire to do things, little initiative. I didn't like this at all. That's why I stopped smoking in 2000. I used it from 1976 to 2000 because, of course, it is difficult to quit smoking. After I started smoking hashish, I started to meet more people that already started with heroin, who came from the United States. It was the psychedelic age so, of course, all the music, all this was related. Lou Reed started... I was hanging out with people who started using heroin, which was top quality too, it was not diluted. Many people brought opium and hashish from Afghanistan because there was no war. So, of course, it was impressive, the quality was... There was a lot of illumination and then there were a lot of people who started to do a business. Everything began to be more and more commercialized and then some people got hooked on heroin which was tremendous because they were injecting. They were junkies. I have tried it but through the nose. Cocaine came much later and the lysergic acid. The LSD was very good. Everything very pure. It was very related to the writings of Timothy Leary, William Burroughs, then there was also Lovecraft, oneiric writings and so on. The clothes were also very freaky, snakeskin boots with a satin skirt, and I always had long hair. Then speed also started, and many people distilled diet pills to get speed. When I was 16 years old, I was a freak and I met some dealers... at that time it was still a dictatorship... there were people beaten up by the police every time there was a raid. I knew two or three people who were tortured, and they made them to rat, to give information, with electrodes in the balls or the brain. As it represented in in the film *One flew over the cuckoo's nest*. Well, it's the same story. These people went in and out of the psychiatry. I met one who had the electrodes in the balls, in the testicles. Another in the head, who, every time he came out, spoke worse. There were people in jail who were snitches when they came out because they were hooked on heroin. Many of these people later became hooked on heroin. Many people spent times in prison, going in and out snitching to the police. [...] I have tried hashish, marijuana, heroin, speed, cocaine, LSD, datura, mushrooms from the age of 16 to 18. What I have discovered later, over the years, is to utilize them for observing. I observe myself, I share, as we learned from other people who consecrate and pray with these plants in a sacred way and do not mix tobacco with marijuana, for example. Marijuana wants to lift you and tobacco makes you stay on earth. It is another type of work. It is very nice to discover the use of each one. I do not mind continuing consuming, but with a different type of mentality. In this way, I felt again the high and the psychoactivity of the plant, of marijuana itself, with three puffs only in a round of many people, but with marijuana that was blessed, sublimated, offered, planted with a conscience, with love. This is very important because all this you are projecting through your hands. [Estela] is one of the first people I met when I arrived here [in the area] 32 years ago. She was still living with her husband. We only used marijuana, everyone consumed, but in such a way that I started to have concerns about these things. I lost the contact a little bit and I separated with my partner with whom I have come here. In the year 2000, I decided to stop smoking marijuana. I decided that it doesn't work for me, I don't want to use it, I don't want to consume it. Then I started the search of my path. I also had to work because I had no money, and my children were studying. That was a big burden and I only had little help from the state. I was working for a few years. I cleaned, then I found a job in a dance school, I worked on a ship, and ended up cooking in a school that enabled me to have more time for myself and in between I resumed my contact with [Estela], starting to participate in the *temazcal* and her work with Santa María. Santa María with the Sikhs is a beautiful ceremony, and I am consuming Santa María again, but only when I go to the [Stone House]. I don't consume anything in my daily life. Only the tobacco from the *temazcal*. I have to work on my verbal communication, to externalize myself. I have found my motivation in the fire and tobacco is the plant to communicate with. I really liked getting to know the peyote and I will continue with it, but following the line, always in contact with the [Stone House]. What the [Stone House] has given me is this faith, trust, I know that I will be taken care of. That I will not be afraid where I am going, I will be cared for by noble people, nobody will want to take advantage of anyone. Today this is a trade. I no longer want to smoke or use marijuana; I prefer to do it in the temple. I'm going to the temple,

I'm going to the sanctuary, I'm going to the source. I'm quite a novice with all this, for about 7 years, when I was 52 years. I remember celebrating 52 years in the [Stone House]. JULIA

Cannabis came into Aurora's life when she was a teen. Later she tried LSD, but ayahuasca she came across in Chile, where she worked as a volunteer for a few years. She met Estela at a meeting in Arizona and when she returned to Catalonia, she visited her in the Stone House. She fell in love with the place and stayed living there for several years on and off. She also became a registered member of Santo Daime; however, she said her path is macrobiotics and everything that has to do with food. From growing, preparing, cooking and eating it. In the years when she was living in the Stone House, she was also supporting another project about food and nutrition lead by grandfather Owel who is closely connected with Estela and the Stone House. He had a great impact on how things are done, and his teachings are transmitted to everyone who comes to the Stone House. I will introduce him and his teachings in the next chapter. Aurora is one of his pupils and applies his teachings in her everyday life. Her dreams are to share the knowledge of food and nutrition to children in a form of workshops. Currently, she is in search of an old *finca* in the area where she could settle down. We had contact recently and she told me that she completely stopped participating in ceremonies and does not use any psychoactive plants whatsoever because she feels that they do not benefit her at this point in life.

I started smoking joints super young when I was 13 years old. With about 18 we tried the trip [LSD] with friends. I tried it twice. Once in a disco. In this disco, I freaked out because I saw people hooked on ropes. There I decided to never do it again in a discotheque, it is not a good atmosphere, it is not a good astral. This is not cool; it is not nice. So, [the second time] I stayed with a friend in a cottage and it was nice because we started a fire, there was a fireplace and we had pens, pencils and blank sheets on the table. We took it and each one went where we wanted and did what we wanted to do. We spent the night, and it was amazing. After that, I didn't take it more. One day, on a friend's birthday, I tried mushrooms. We went camping in a mountain. I did not take more until I went to Chile the second time. There I met an *ayahuasquero* and did the first ceremony with him. He was a *vegetalista*, he was not Daime. I still remember the first song in Quechua. It was quite nice, a miracle. The guy gave me a bottle, which I brought home and that was the first and only time that I had a small ceremony with some friends. It was very good in the sense that I did it with a lot of respect. [...] I was a stoner from the age of 14 until I came here [the Stone House]. Ever since [I used] intermittently. I want to share it, not pray alone. Sometimes I take it to sleep. AURORA

Paloma liked to experiment with psychoactive substances since her youth. She preferred psychedelics but she tried other substances too. She likes the empathic and self-reflective effect of psychedelics. For her, it is like psychotherapy, a substitution for a therapist. After she met Estela, she started to use psychoactive plants exclusively in ceremonies with her.

I have tried the trips [LSD] that were very good, but I was never addicted to anything. At that time, I was taking mushrooms, trips, cannabis. After meeting [Estela] I continued taking, but only with her, it's like she does it super-safe. [...] Alcohol occasionally. I like substances that make you... psychedelic. I never liked coca [cocaine] or things like that. I have tried everything. I told you I had a wild life without fear, but I was never interested in them. I'm interested in mushrooms, things that make you feel, make you connect, tune in. [...] Every once in a while, I take them. It may take months. I'm not looking for it. Any ceremony offered by [Estela] I know

it's my turn. I don't have any doubt. It is a great help and I need help now. For me that's it, it is not telling a therapist about my life. I don't feel like my way is over there. PALOMA

Luis used to take cocaine on the weekends when he was "lost in the city", as he phrased it. He came across ayahuasca, peyote and Santa María in the Stone House, where he was living for about a year when he left the city. He pointed out that psychoactive substances should not be used recreationally daily. In his view, it should be done as something exceptional.

I use Santa María only sometimes. I want to use it correctly, only in a ceremony. Never in a ludic or personal way. Nothing happens, if one day we use it, we smoke it, absolutely nothing happens, what I don't want is for it to become a daily habit. Let's do something special. Let's not make a routine of the special. LUIS

While many Wonderland inhabitants only use Santa María in ceremonies, Leila has her own manner and reasons to use it. She does recognise it as a form of escapism. At the same time, she uses it to deal with emotional pain. At this point in her life, it works for her and she does not consider it problematic, but as helping her to improve her life.

I smoke joints with tobacco. I do not share. It is not a social question. I smoke my joints in my house in peace. Only in my house. I listen to reggae for example, instead of listening to Santo Daime, that also has a very powerful message about the earth, the creation. It is a different way that inspires me. Or I dance. Whatever she [Santa María] tells me to do. If she tells me to dance, I dance. To sing, then I sing. If she tells me to get creative and do things, well, I get creative or I start writing things. Or I simply watch a film. I know it is a question of anaesthesia. I know it is my personal matter of not wanting to see or coping better with what I have to see. I totally see it as abuse. I have this contradiction. I have seen how it is used well, one of the ways how it is used well. I know that I can meditate and travel with her. Yes, I know that. I learned how to get along with her, but don't use it in that way. Yes, I know that too. Why? Because it is a question of not wanting to see something. I anaesthetise myself to not see the shit in the world for example. Could be. Or the abuse? Could be. And I'm still inside the abuse because I'm abusing? Of course, it can be. I don't torture myself. I accept it, because this plant protects me from pain, from something, from hypersensitivity that I could not deal with, if I did not use it, to live my life better. In time everything is put in its place or the mind is transformed. LEILA

In October 2018 I did the first interview with Lucia. We were talking about her life and her use of psychoactive substances. At that point, she was smoking Santa María and used an extract orally.

I am taking it intending to relax. Motherhood is very beautiful, it is where I want to be, but it's super intense too. 24 hours, every day. There are times when I kind of project my anger, my frustration on them [children] or I get nervous and Santa María, with that focus, with that intention, allows me to recover to a more calm state. I take it at night, before sleeping, to be able to rest well and to get up the next day with more strength. If I start a day very grumpy and I don't have the patience, I smoke a *pito* with that focus. For me, this focus is more important than the substance. Maybe I could reach it by hugging a tree, but I do this ceremony to calm myself, to be more kind and loving. To smoke Santa María and do a *temazcal* are the best ways for me to enter in these states. Those are the two medicines which I continue using. [...] We used to have moments [as a family] when we would stop everything and we all sat down with a small altar, a candle, opening a ceremony of Santa María with the children around us, of course, they would not smoke, but they also consecrated themselves and participated when we sang. But this last year has been busy with many things to do, a lot of intensity and we have been neglecting it. It seems that the more we need it, the less we do it. All goes fast, I do a *pito*, I

escape for 2 minutes, I smoke a bit and I run back again. I do not like the form that I use [Santa María] lately, because it is fast, and we do not share it with [Carlos]. It is not the most appropriate, but I'm not beating up myself because of it.

Half a year later I did another interview with Lucia where she told me that the same month as we did the first interview she decided to stop using Santa María for a while because she did not get the desired effect from it. She believes that once you take a substance it stays in your body, or better, the memory of it remains, so there is no need to take it, but find other ways to connect with that state to obtain the benefits, what each one needs, and what brings one into the present moment. She found that in her children and the *temazcal*. In the future, she might use Santa María again but does not feel the need right now.

I quit smoking Santa María last year in October. Because it was turning into a... For me, Santa María is a key or a channel to connect with a part of myself and life from a different point. I think a ritual approach is this awareness and consciousness about why am I using that substance and what I want from that experience, even though you never know what you get, but you know, this focus. When I lost that, I realized I was just relating to that substance, to that plant out of the need for peace, or when I was too anxious, so I relate to it in a very addictive way. I lost the ritual, I lost respect for the plant, I lost respect for myself. So, I was having *pitos*, as we call them here, joints only with herb, no tobacco, but rather than doing the whole process, I was just having a couple of puffs and running around, and I was upset because I didn't have the time to be doing that, but I would wait for that time to arrive, and it went like that every day for a long time. I wasn't happy with that relation. The opposite. Even the effect of the plant wasn't what I used to have. It was the opposite; I was just getting more anxious. When I realized what was happening, I said to myself 'stop it, take a break, take a deep breath'. Since then I only joined one ritual in the [Stone House] with [Estela]. I told her, '[Estela], there has been many months' [...], she replied, 'don't worry, if you need to lie down, whatever you need to do, you can do it now'. So, I opened to that, and I wanted also that kind of experience again and it was amazingly happy, good, deep and profound, which I also appreciate. I have been in many rituals or Santa María ceremonies, taking part in them, but not using the plant and it's also fine. I mean, I have that plant in me, you know what I mean. This break is good for me. At the beginning [I struggled a bit], not because of the plant, but because of my habits. Running away from my routine and hiding those feelings in smoking. If I would have artemisia or tobacco, I wouldn't use Santa María, you know what I mean, but I didn't want to go back to what I used to be. That was my only small struggle at some points and because my partner does smoke, so I could see it often in my everyday life and I had to do this. Drinking loads of water, you know... [laughter]. But I was so convinced, and I was so sure that it doesn't do me well, so I don't struggle at all. I always have it around, I could do it anytime, it is not like I don't have access to the plant. It's on my altar and it's fine. I don't want to use it that way. LUCIA

From the examples, it is evident that most people changed their substance use patterns after learning about and taking part in ceremonial uses in the Stone and Water House. The people have control over the use and have relatively little difficulty to abstain from use if they feel they do not get the desired effect from it. Zinberg (1984) established that set and setting play a crucial role in determining if someone is going to gain benefits from the use or not. We learn from Manuel's example that participating only in a ceremony, where psychoactive plants are used, does not necessarily lead to a healthier lifestyle. Personal determination and engagement are key to make changes. There is a growing number of studies that show psychedelics, such as ayahuasca, psilocybin mushrooms, ibogaine and others, can help in cases of dependence and make it easier to make a change, but long-term success depends on the individual's motivation and having a supportive

environment (Kohek, Ohren, Hornby, *et al.*, 2020; Talin and Sanabria, 2017). Psychedelics have a significant potential for treating dependencies and could reform contemporary dependency treatments. A redefinition of addiction or dependence has to be part of the reform. It is ironic that the psychoactive plants (or their active compounds), that are used in Wonderland, are prohibited by law based on their assumed addiction potential and no medical value (International Drug Control Conventions 1961; 1972; 1988), while science shows that only a small percentage of all users get dependent (Sullivan and Hagen, 2002; Wadley, 2016) and reports a low addiction potential of cannabis and psychedelics (Nutt, King and Phillips, 2010). Regular, long-term use on its own is not necessarily destructive or leading to dependence. The people I have met use some psychoactive substance on a long-term basis, but are they dependent? Do they need treatment? What people learn in the Stone House or the Water House is the difference between misuse and self-control. It is not the substance that is addictive, it is the triangulation of substance–person–environment that determines how much control over the use a person will have in a specific period (Alexander, 2010). Furthermore, the ritual use of psychoactive substances helps to maximize the desired effect, control drug use levels, balance positive and negative effects, and prevent harms (Grund, Kaplan and Vries, 1993).

Jasbir, a 41-year-old linguist, spiritual teacher, with degrees in chemistry and Sikh studies, provides therapies with cannabis for different mental health issues including dependence. In a conversation with Jasbir, we were discussing how cannabis is used in western society in comparison with how it is used by the Nihang Sikhs, about the difference between recreational and spiritual use, and about substance dependence.

The use of cannabis in the west has become for sensory gratification rather than the spiritual roots that it has come from. But saying that, even in our tradition we acknowledge that cannabis can be used for *bhakti*, devotion to meditate to connect with God, the divine. We can use it for warfare, it is used as a medicine to treat soldiers, preparation before going to war and we also acknowledge that we can use it for pleasure, sexual union. So, it has that tantric element we acknowledge. It is not that we do not do that, we know we have to be careful. Because then you just end up habituating this behaviour. We treat it as a sacrament first. In our worldview, it is a sacrament first and everything else second and third and fourth. Here [in the west] there is no intention. The set and the setting, the feeling you are going to put into it, is what you are going to get back. So, if you are not going to set it up properly, it can take you into some bad places. [...] I think people use cannabis now for too much sensuality, they use it to heighten their senses, they use it to taste their food more or to eat chocolate, play video games, or make love with their partners and it is OK. I am not against that, but it is a waste. Because it is just taking you into your senses more, while it could be taking you more upward into clarity, which is burning karma, burning illusion. I would say one is materialistic use and the other is spiritual use. One is for sensory pleasure, to get high. But for me, because I meditate, it does not get me high. It just gives me insights. I do not really take it much anymore. [...] If a habit or behaviour is not serving you, you must change it. And you must learn to change it quickly, not 20 years later. Not that you are angry for 20 years or lustful for 20 years or you are a liar for 20 years, drunken for 20 years. You must do it right now. Do it differently. [...] I work with alcoholics a lot and they are surprised when I say, ‘you can drink after’. They go like, ‘what?’. Because everyone says they should not drink. ‘No, you can drink’. They would ask me, ‘why do you say that?’. I would say, ‘look, what you resist will persist. If I tell you can’t have it, you will want to have it more. Limit it. Learn to have one drink, to have two drinks, but do not have more than two and know you are recovering, have one or two drinks, once or twice a week’. It is wisdom. Do not say it is the devil, everyone who drinks is evil. Lots of people drink a glass of wine when

they eat, and they are fine. Lots of people get drunk too. Everything must be approached in the right way. JASBIR

Ramon, a sociologist who worked for the government in the field of protection of indigenous rights in Mexico, moved to Canada 10 years ago and is living with the tribe Algonquin (Anishinaabe nation) in the Wahgoshig reserve where he is learning the *temazcal* ceremony. He is travelling all over the world to spread the knowledge he gained among the indigenous. Our paths crossed at the beginning of my fieldwork when he was staying with us in the Stone House for about a month. In one of our conversations, he told me another useful analogy for the use of psychoactive substances. He said:

We can look at it the same way as going to the library. If you go to the library all by yourself looking for books on astrology, you might end up reading about cooking or something completely different from what you were looking for. You might still find interesting and useful information, but it's not what you were searching. Way better is to consult with the librarian, ask him or her to show you the department where you can find books on astrology and he or she will bring you directly to the place you've been looking for. You need a guide, which will guide you through the experience and help you find what you are looking for. If you go on your own, you will surely encounter interesting stuff, but you can easily get lost in it.

In Wonderland using psychoactive plants is a group activity. A structured and safe space is created where participants feel taken care of. Special time and space are dedicated to the use of psychoactive plants. In other words, it is not used while doing daily routine and the focus should be kept on the plant and the messages it transmits. Estela explained that this is important because, if you're doing something else, you cannot hear what the plants have to say to you. This does not mean that one cannot use (for example) Santa María alone, important is to always use it with an intention or purpose. Sofia affirmed Estela's words and emphasised that people can use it also for its medical benefits. At the same time, she expressed her frustration about the legal status of cannabis, which denies access to those who need it.

Santa María opens many doors and helps people a lot. Young people using drugs and pills are looking for something, María opens you, disconnects you and she also has this very playful part. Of course, when you know María in this [recreational] way, you say 'damn' and you can continue using it, but if you already give it that [spiritual] connotation it will take you to different places because it is a plant that guides you a lot, it accompanies you a lot. You don't have to do the Santa María ceremonies. You can smoke at the end of the day and do some puffs and it gives you something very good for you, it guides you. Then there is all the medical part all the benefits it brings. It is a plant that is illegal, but it's helping my mother because she had a lot of pain and suddenly, she does not. But I can't cultivate it because the system tells me that it is not legal. It is a plant that you can grow yourself, ayahuasca is something else, and it is a plant that grows quite easily and gives you a lot. SOFIA

Nonceremonial use of psychoactive plants is rarely practised by the inhabitants, but not condemned in Wonderland. Similarly, as in traditional cultures who use psychoactive plants, such as the Wixarika, people are taught how to create a suitable space where they can use safely.

If a Huichol eats peyote nonceremonially, but in sufficient quantities for visions, he takes certain precautions to avoid drowsiness or nausea. He eschews food and liquid on the day the peyote is eaten and on the previous evening and following morning as well. He is expected to be seated comfortable and quietly and to have several free hours in which he will not need to be disturbed.

He should be in a dark or shady place in order to appreciate fully the intensification of colors (Myerhoff, 1983: 220).

At this point, I would like to reflect on my own experience of using psychoactive substances and what impact living in the Stone House had on me and how it changed. I was a tobacco smoker for over 15 years. I was thinking about quitting often but managed to stop for three weeks only during all those years. My second attempt to quit smoking was when we went for a 10-day pilgrimage to Montserrat and smoking cigarettes was not *per se* prohibited during that time, but undesirable. I decided to stop there and then and since then I have not smoked another cigarette for the last two and a half years. In my case, tobacco use truly was an addiction and was the most challenging for me to overcome and persist in it. Now I believe I am at a stage where I will not start smoking again, but the path to where I am today was long, surprising and tough. I was dreaming about the thick smoke coming out of my mouth, how good it felt, how I missed it. The mind is powerful, but luckily, I was living in the Stone House at that point, which was the best environment for me to overcome my cravings for tobacco and learn to live without it. When I stopped smoking, I had my tobacco pouch half full. I had all the paraphernalia at hand. Instead of throwing it away or giving it to someone, I decided to use it. Every time I would badly want to smoke a cigarette, I would take the amount of tobacco I usually rolled into a cigarette and gave it to grandfather fire, asking him to help me stay strong. In this way, I slowly used up the bag of tobacco in the following months. The regular rituals with *rapé* and Santa María help me substantially in the first couple of months when my struggle was greatest. Both of them helped me to deal with my cravings as substitutes in critical moments. My intention was not to replace one substance with another but in moments of weakness, which I experienced in the first months after quitting tobacco, *rapé* and Santa María helped me to abstain from relapsing. After two and a half years since I smoked tobacco for the last time, I still sometimes dream about smoking and then wake up relieved it was just a dream.

I came to Catalonia eager to try new things, while having (what I would call) a healthy relationship with cannabis for more than 15 years, using psilocybin mushrooms on an occasional basis for more than five years, and substances like MDMA, LSD, amphetamine and cocaine on rare occasions, only when they came onto my path. I was avoiding buying them. The cannabis and mushrooms I would grow myself or get them from friends and acquaintances. The only substance I was struggling with was tobacco and was just waiting for the moment to finally take a leap forward. Altered states of consciousness were, therefore, not unknown to me. I believe these experiences made me a better person. A person with empathy, self-love and forgiveness. It also helped me to self-reflect and grow as a person. But that is my perception of it. I obviously do not know how I would develop, if I would not take these substances, especially at such a young age. My first joint I smoked when I was fourteen. However, in my opinion, I was never depended on any of these substances, besides tobacco. I was using cannabis on and off for more than 15 years. I had periods when I would smoke from morning to evening, while still leading an active and productive life, getting good grades at school or, later in my life, going to work and having success professionally. I also had periods when I stopped smoking cannabis for several weeks or months without any effort. When I started smoking cannabis

in high school – as many kids do – I felt betrayed and lied to by the psychologist who gave us a lecture on drug use in elementary school because my experience of cannabis was nothing like they told us, warned us, or threatened us. The misinformation about substance use makes more damage than good in my personal opinion. When my mother found out I am smoking cannabis, I was seventeen at that time, it devastated her, her whole world collapsed. She was convinced I am going to end up shooting heroin and die somewhere in a ditch. The more I tried to explain to her that it is not how she thinks it is, the more she was convinced that there is no hope for me, that I already went too far. It is just a matter of time. Since it was impossible to talk about it openly, we both shut down and ignored that anything ever happened. She never mentioned it again or asked about it and I made sure she never sees me smoking or finds any paraphernalia and like that years went by. I was a good student, finished high school, went to study, finished that as well. I was never in trouble, I was autonomous, earning money and living my life. More than 10 years after she caught me rolling a joint, I made a new attempt to talk to her about cannabis. I started to be actively and publicly involved in cannabis activism and organising seminars on the use of cannabis in medicine in Slovenia. It is a small country, where everybody knows everyone, so I wanted to tell her what I am doing and why. Since our last talk a lot of time passed, she saw with her own eyes that I did not ruin my own and her life because of drugs I grew up to be a responsible young adult not anyhow different than everyone else. Now we could talk openly about my experiences, about what the dogma about drugs leads us to believe, and what cannabis is and how it was used in the past. The propaganda against the cannabis plant was, and still is, ferocious and leaves little space for constructive discussion. Few years after our open talk and numerous news reports on the medicinal properties of cannabis, my mother started to use hemp and CBD products for pain herself. Since she realised that she was misled to believe cannabis is an evil drug, I could talk to her also about other substances I tried and experimented with. She was not necessarily supportive of it, but we could agree to disagree. It meant a lot to me to be able to talk about it with her. I told her my memory of the first ecstasy pill that I took when I was about sixteen or seventeen, the infinite love I felt for everyone and everything. I have never before or after experience something like that. When I came down, I have never experienced such a low, so exhausted and empty. I wanted to feel that love again. That was an important moment in my life when I realized that I have to be cautious and aware when using substances, not doing it because of boredom or escapism. Amphetamines I would occasionally use to study before an exam. After the initial experimentation with friends, I always chose to use the substances alone, in my room, listening to music or, as Terence McKenna suggested, in silent darkness. I was interested in what the substance does on its own, without external stimuli. Since I started using mushrooms in this manner, I stopped drinking alcohol altogether. I don't remember when I had my last drink, and I don't miss it at all. My use of alcohol was destructive, I never learned how to drink it, neither did I like it. As a 17-year old, I had another learning curve on how quickly one can develop a dependence, when I was drinking red wine every day for two months straight and how I felt the first day I stopped. For me it was a social thing, I would meet with friends and go out on a bench in a park with a litre of wine and some weed every evening. It was a day in November

when it got quite cold, so everyone decided to stay home and not go out for our usual “happy meal” (as we called the combo of 1l red wine + 0,5l cola), which made me frustrated and angry. I was capable to self-reflect to the degree that I realised that what I am doing is not good for me and will lead to serious trouble if I don’t stop now. In later years I was still drinking, but terrible experiences with hangovers made me stop altogether. I never actually liked being drunk, because I had a blackout at some point and did not remember what was going on. I never liked the taste of any kind of alcohol, I was drinking it exclusively to get drunk. At some point, I connected the dots and called it a day. Although I do not have any scientific proof, I believe the use of psilocybin mushrooms improved my mental health and lead me towards a healthier lifestyle in a subtle, maybe even subconscious way. After I finished fieldwork in Catalonia, I stopped using psychoactive substances except for coffee and occasionally cacao. It’s been two and a half years since I smoked the last cigarette and on rare occasions, I still use cannabis in low quantities for creativity and self-reflection.

The rites in Wonderland

Rites and rituals have been part of human society for millennia and a popular topic within social sciences and anthropological research since its beginnings. Researchers such as Lévi-Strauss, Girard, Maertens, and Turner saw an important role of rites in mitigating or reducing existential anxiety when facing uncertainty, the unknown and otherness (Maisonneuve, 1991). Rites have an important function for individual growth and collective regeneration (Campbell and Moyers, 1988; Durkheim, 1912; Bourdieu, 1982). Maisonneuve (1991) defines rites as customs and several rites that are connected into a coherent system form a ritual. Rites are “symbolic social techniques” that offer socio-emotional support and maintain or reinforce social bonds that unite the individual with society (Maisonneuve, 1991: 141). They can be sacred/religious or secular/civil, but all of them are bound to space and time, the use of sacred/special objects, and define behaviours, beliefs, terminology, and symbols that give meaning. They regulate behaviour, create meaning and respond to universal needs through initiations, gatherings, and meetings in which united individuals reaffirm their common feelings. They are processes that contribute to the integration and cohesion of a social group or the maintenance of the hegemony of a social sector. The rite does not need to be linked to religion for it to function, it is timeless and functional in traditional as well as modern societies where it appears if there is sufficient demand for its symbolic efficacy. Rites are not only important regulators of one’s destiny or the community, but also channelling fundamental feelings such as love, hate, hope or sadness, limit violence and other transgressions. The rite is the mediator in the domain of the divine, it governs the unstable, the ruptures, timelessness, and defends against anguish, limits and miseries of the human existence (Maisonneuve, 1991). Rituals, particularly rites of passage, represent a transition to a new phase in life and into adulthood. An integral part of any rite of passage is an altered state of consciousness (ASC) (Turner,

1967) and are a universal experience for humankind. According to an ethnological study done in the 1970s, ASCs were institutionalized in 90% of the almost 500 cultures examined (Bourguignon, 1973) and the application of such states in western society can be seen as a modern adaptation of these practices (Dittrich, 1985). However, not only do psychoactive plants induce ASC, but a variety of technologies have the same effects, such as intensely rhythmic or repetitive physical activities (dancing, clapping, drumming), extreme heat (sweat lodges), fasting, and other “extreme” experiences (hyperventilation). In the West, it is believed that ASCs produce illusions or false experiences, whereas cultures in which ASCs are socially integrated suggest that they “provide access to a dimension of reality that remains inaccessible to us in normal waking states, a divine or supernatural sphere not conducive to the biological survival of the human organism, but edifying to man as a spiritual animal striving for more ethereal goals than self-preservation and procreation” (Langlitz, 2007: 179). These processes are supervised and guided by experienced and trained persons such as shamans, *curanderos*, sorcerers, priest, etc. who “share specific knowledge regarding a variety of methods and techniques used to access altered states of consciousness and navigate across the murky waters of those non-ordinary states” (Aronovich, 2019: 260).

A ritual is a social happening, but also represent a healing practice in its totality. The community setting can facilitate therapeutic effects and at the same time strengthen group identity and cohesion. Studies exploring shamanic practices from a pharmacological perspective found them evoking psychophysiological mechanisms that release endogenous opiates (Frecka and Kulcsar, 1989; Prince, 1982; Winkelman, 1997). Activities such as intense rhythmic physical activities (dancing, clapping, drumming), extreme heat (sweat lodges), fasting, night-time activities (when endogenous opioids are at its peak), etc. are releasing endogenous opioids and consequently stimulating emotional and physiological responses (Frecka and Kulcsar, 1989) which, besides reducing pain, produce a state of euphoria, well-being and maintain the homeostasis in the human body (Valle and Prince, 1989). Such experiences strengthen not only the individual but social relationships as such by dissolving boundaries and increasing connectedness between individuals. Such a community experience itself can produce therapeutic effects among the participants. When a person is faced with one’s own fears, limits and uncertainties and when the person explores the unknown terrain of one’s own mind, it is the opportunity to befriend one’s own shadows and return as a more complete version of oneself (Plotkin, 2008).

The fundamental problem of modern western societies is the ritual poverty and the disappearance of initiatory rituals that transmit mythologies about the origin of everything, the now and the future. We lack rites that are establishing relations with our ancestors and family, rites that teach us basic skills of existence and replaced it with an “increasing emphasis on rationalism and scientific positivism [which] has excluded magico-religious practices from its ruling worldview, delegitimising the practitioners of those social roles” (Aronovich, 2019: 259). Consumerism absorbed much of the place that the rite once held. We consume the products of culture with little or no symbolic value. We live in a world where people forgot how to make a

fire, we consider it dangerous and are scared of it.²⁰ Economic success is valued more than happiness and well-being. We buy pills and fund health services, but we don't take daily care of our health by eating good food, maintaining a clean environment and caring relationships. Instead of cohesion and strong social bonds, social fragmentation and ideological divisions are created. We live in a society where ASCs are being feared and “efforts have been made not only to prohibit many of these substances but also to criminalise and delegitimize the persons who know how to use them with relative security and intelligence” (Aronovich, 2019: 260).

Nonetheless, human beings are searching for a different way of living and questioning the relationships with oneself or the changing world by bodily experiences, religious rebirths, return to nature, new forms of art, eclectic and subversive actions, all of which reveal a persistent quest for rites. New rituals, new movements and new communities emerge and develop rapidly to offer a response to the quest for happiness, well-being and meaningful life. Emerging spiritual movements and also a variety of communities who incorporated the use of psychoactive plants are creating access to a new spiritual existence. We are filling up this gap in our social fabric with new kinds of rituals and guides who are willing to accompany the “seekers” in their quests and help them to have beneficial and meaningful experiences on one hand and reduce, as I explain below, potential negative effects such as psychosis on the other.

Wonderland is an environment that supports the ritualistic and socially integrated use of APPs in a safe and controlled manner. The people participating in the rituals and ceremonies are by no means depended on the substances. It has been demonstrated before that controlled use is a result of social learning and is particularly effective when allowed to develop in a legal manner (MacRae, 1998). Controlled use is supported by social sanctions and social rituals, where users share elaborated rules, values, and behaviours. These social controls limit APP use by defining what use is acceptable; minimizing potential negative effects by defining measures to be taken before, during, and after use, such as choosing an appropriate environment for use; and emphasizing obligations and relationships by supporting user activities that are unrelated to substance use. All of these precautions help to integrate the use of substances into society positively and safely (Zinberg, 1984).

The rituals utilized by the community are a bricolage of indigenous, religious and spiritual practices and serve as regulators of social life. The Wonderland community mixes several traditions from the Americas to India, and religions such as Santo Daime²¹ and Umbanda²² with other elements from New Age movements (e.g. using the book *A Curse in Miracles* as a sacred text), which has influenced not only how they use

20 Estela emphasised many times that fire is the only element that cannot be polluted. We polluted the air, the water and the soil, but we cannot pollute fire, so we prohibit it. Fire is the only pure element connecting us with our essence. The same is happening with psychoactive plants.

21 Brazilian religion using ayahuasca or Daime as a sacrament.

22 Brazilian religion from the early 20th, which combines spiritualism and occultism with African and American religious influences. Santo Daime and Umbanda merged into Umbandaime, which is rather bringing songs of nature, the deities and spirits, than Catholic symbolism into the Santo Daime rituals.

psychoactive plants, but also their everyday lives and the worldview. In this sense, Wonderland is an example of how a community relates to psychoactive plants and contributes to the re-integration of plants (or substances in general) as ordinary, rather than extraordinary elements whose risks (if we choose to call them that) can be managed via social control, similar to how traditional social controls manage the use in other contexts or how we manage the use of “domesticated” substances such as alcohol (Del Olmo, 1992). While critics might consider Wonderland’s bricolage ritual practices as superficial neoshamanism or New Age, precisely the unity of the community and maintenance of it, are the traits that distinguish it from contemporary neoshamanic groups, as I argued in an earlier chapter.

Every ceremony in Wonderland is led by an elder or a person of confidence, yet all the participants engage in all phases of the ceremony (before, during and after). There are several elements in every ritual regardless if psychoactive plants are used or not. These elements correspond with categories that Fericgla (2017) identified in various rituals that are using ayahuasca. The spaces where rituals are conducted have a uniform and harmonious decoration composed of calm and stable colours and with various symbols from foreign or domestic cultural contexts. The space is quiet and is either closed or an outdoor place in nature. There is always a marked delimitation between inside and outside the ritual space and clear rules within the ritual space. The altar is central, and all participants are facing it. It consists of a fireplace or a candle and other symbolic objects such as an image or a statue of the Moreneta (Virgin Mary of Montserrat), crystals, flowers and other objects. The space is fumigated with soft and pleasant smells such as copal, palo santo, dried herbs such as sage, white sage, rosemary and others. The light during the ceremony is soft, usually from a candle or from the fireplace. There is live music during the ceremony where songs are being sung and the music is played with maracas, drums and guitars. Songs are sung in Spanish, Portuguese and Catalan language and everyone participates in the singing. The guide is generally also the main musician or singer but has also a couple of experienced persons who are assisting in the ritual. The lyrics of the songs transmit clear, positive and educative messages about life, relationships, nature, and the psychoactive plants that are used in the rituals, as I explain below. The facilitator or guide familiarises with all participants individually, particularly the newcomers. The guide also gives meaning and purpose to the ritual and transmits moral values at the beginning and sometimes during or at the end of the ceremony. The people who participate in the rituals are informed about the effects of the plants and trust and know the guide or facilitator. Most of them are experienced users therefore they come to the ceremony relaxed and have realistic expectations. For each ceremony, there are indications on the dress code, which is usually light colours, long skirts for women and long trousers for men. The participants are usually sitting in a circle on the floor, or occasionally on a chair or dancing (in Santo Daime rituals). In Santo Daime rituals the group of participants is also divided by sex, women on one side and men on the other. A light diet free of sugars, alcohol and other substances before and after the ceremony is also prescribed. After the ritual, the participants have a meal together such as fruits, a simple miso soup, and vegetables and rice. Before the ritual, all the participants prepare the space and socialise. No one leaves the ritual in the middle of it. All the participants who started the ritual have to be

present when it ends. After the ritual everyone helps to clean the space. After the ritual is over and after the participants have eaten, they go to sleep. Next morning group activities and integration circles take place such as sharing thoughts on the experience, walks in nature, sometimes current social or political issues are discussed and so on.

In Wonderland different sorts of psychoactive plants are being used in a ritual setting. Cannabis (which they call Santa María) and *rapé* are being used daily. In the Stone House, the day usually starts with a ritual of blowing *rapé* to each other's nostrils and pure Santa María is being smoked afterwards. Other psychoactive plants are used less commonly such as *híkuri* (peyote), San Pedro, ayahuasca or Daime, *kambo*, *sananga*, and *mambe* (coca powder). All these practices are done in a controlled setting by people with a lot of experience and knowledge. Every ceremony is a community gathering and people of all generations come together.

I chose to describe ritual practices that use cannabis in this work because they have never been documented before and they represent a new way of using cannabis, which is neither recreational nor medical but combines spiritual traditions from various parts of the world to create a unique setting for safe and responsible use.

Vision quest and *temazcal*

Some ritual practices in Wonderland do not involve the use of psychoactive plants. I would first like to present some important rites in the community from which new rites emerged in time. They are based on the Pan-Indian spiritual teachings of the Red Road [*Camino Rojo*], which got inspired by a variety of Native American traditions. One of the most important rites of the Red Road is the *temazcal* or a sweat lodge, the other is the vision quest [*búsqueda de visión*].

A vision quest is a ceremony where a person isolates oneself in a forest or a mountain and engages in prayer while abstaining from food and drink for four days or more days. Sometimes the fasting and prayer are augmented with the use of psychoactive cacti, such as peyote or San Pedro, or with cannabis, as I describe in the next chapter. To complete the ceremony a person has to repeat it four times. This particular ceremony comes from the Red Road tradition and the native American spirituality as well. Other similar ceremonies are *Retiro de Luna* (vision quest only for women), *Navegación Mariana* (vision quest using a drink made of Santa María), or Sun Dance (*Danza del Sol* where participants are dancing for four days and four nights).

The *temazcal* is a purification ceremony and is an essential part of the vision quest. It is done every day of the vision quest marking its starts and end. A *temazcal* is also done independently of the vision quest,

as an autonomous ceremony. In fact, it was the rite that brought many of the people to spirituality. Many individuals I have met during fieldwork told me that a *temazcal* was the first ceremony they went to in the Stone House. It is done in a dome-shaped structure which is covered with blankets. Volcanic stones (representing the grandmothers) are heated in the fire (representing the grandfather) and then placed into a pit in the middle of the *temazcal*. Inside the *temazcal* incense is put on the stones then water is poured on the stones to create hot steam. Prayers and songs are offered to the Great Spirit throughout the ceremony. This communal ritual is where the community comes together to heal individuals as well as relationships (Katz, 1982; Laderman, 1991). Many of these ceremonies are based on an ethic of reciprocity and maintaining balanced interrelationship (Garrett, Torres-Rivera, Brubaker, *et al.*, 2011; Portman and Garrett, 2006). Alberto, a Mexican in his late 30s who is doing *temazcals*, came for a visit at Carlos' and Lucia's house one day when I was there too. We were sitting in the kitchen talking about the *temazcal*.

A *temazcal* is where you pray, where you talk to God. The energy that we invoke through the fire, passes through the altar, rotates through the *temazcal*, returns to the altar and rises to the sky. The *temazcal* is where we open the door to speak to God. We are in the mother's womb, we are in a vacuum, there is no matter, there is a connection, there is darkness, there is heat, there is humidity as in the mother's womb. It represents being in the mother's womb. CARLOS

The function of the *temazcal* is to be with your family and to be able to speak with your family, to know each other, to spend some time together. [...] It is a hospital, it is a school, it is what you want it to be. Therapeutically speaking you are entering a hyperbaric chamber with a much greater effect. Energetically you are living and sharing with members of the family, but you are also learning as if you were in a school. By sharing experiences, sharing arguments, doubts are resolved [...] by comparing lives and listening to what problem others have and how they solved it. People get to know each other from a different point of view, as sisters and brothers. People heal because when you have a wound, the heat enforces regeneration. And it is a hospital where women go to give birth. Until the sixth or seventh month, they go to the *temazcal* to soften the bones. When it's time for them to give birth, they put them in the *temazcal* and make it very very hot so that the muscles open and the delivery is not painful. My grandmother told me the best position is squatting. ALBERTO

At the beginning of August 2018, I returned to the field after spending one month in Slovenia. The house was empty when I arrived in the afternoon. Estela was in the hospital visiting Manuel, who was recovering from appendicitis. The first night I could not sleep, my body was itching. The next morning, I woke up with a rash on my left arm and my upper back, later it spread on my left leg. We had a peyote ceremony planned in those days with the Wixárika who came from Mexico, so the house was full of people and I was extremely irritated by the constant itch. Estela suspected flees causing my rash, I was thinking of bed bugs and dust mites (though I have checked the mattress thoroughly and did not see any signs of it), or possibly a sun rash (I was, after all, driving from Slovenia to Spain in my car for two days during a heatwave having my left arm and leg exposed to the sun). No one knew what's causing my rash and I was the only one in the house who had it. I decided to sleep outside in a hammock also because I was not in the best mood. After two days the rash did not disappear. Plans changed and instead of the peyote ceremony we prepared for a *temazcal* at Mateo's house. I asked if it is smart to go into a *temazcal* with my condition and the answer was positive, so I did not hesitate. In the afternoon we prepared "chocoyote". In the night deer came to the

house and ate the flowers that were planted in front of the house. In Wixárika cosmology peyote [*híkuri*] – deer – maize are a unity, every ceremony is depended upon the presence of all three symbolic items (Myerhoff, 1983: 221). Next day we did the *temazcal*, but before we entered, we ate some of the *chocoyote* that we prepared the day before. It was the hottest *temazcal* I have ever experienced. In the first few minutes, I already had to lay on the ground with my face touching the moist and cool soil. Our friends from Mexico were leading the ceremony. I was listening to the stories about the nature of life and the connection with the ancestors that we are establishing in the *temazcal*, however, details I cannot recreate. I was struggling with the heat and while I tried to focus on the words, my mind was occupied with thoughts of getting out. We had to shorten the ceremony because a neighbour came concerned about the open fire, we had to heat the stones. Not to upset the neighbour, we decided to enter all the stones at once and make the ceremony shorter. Once the blankets were lifted, the heat decreased, and fresh air entered, I was relieved. When I got out of the *temazcal* I felt like reborn and exhausted, but my body was not itching any more. We sat down in a circle and smoked Santa María, then we continued singing songs, conversing and laughing until the evening. The rash disappeared completely by the next day. I never experienced something like this again.



Photo 25: The fireplace with stones in the centre ready to be lit up, an altar in the middle and the *temazcal* at the end. On the door there is an inscription “for all our relationships” [*por todas las relaciones*].

Many of the old traditions and practices are becoming obsolete in our society due to industrial development. “Periodic innovations in goods or tools foster the belief that anything new will be proven better. This belief has become an integral part of the modern world view” (Illich, 1975: 89). Illich calls such a state a delusion that constantly renovates poverty and implies that the things most people use are not good enough, at least not as good as the new ones, which are constantly renewing. Obsolescence, in his view, is a threat to the right to tradition. This is not to say we should regress as a society, but recognize the value and the role of certain teachings, guidance, or healing for which individuals take personal responsibility, rather than eliminating them (Illich, 1975: 88-91). Individuals and communities should have the freedom to choose lifestyles and effective practices. The Wonderland community is rediscovering its own roots through exchange and learning from other traditions:

In tribes, people only did the vision quest when they needed a vision. When they were lost, when they did not know what to do, what their role in society is. This was a time when you went on a vision quest. Currently, since we are so sick in the West, we all need a vision quest because we don't know, we have lost this contact with the mother. We all want to do a vision quest. In the past no, only people who needed it, because they could not find their way within the community. It is not a tradition here because we do not remember it. The other day some scouts were here, and they performed a rite very similar to the vision quest. But it was a Christian version. So, the Christians already created this form, or they brought it from America, I don't know that. At the age of 20, they celebrate and perform a rite that represents leaving home. You take your backpack, a fire is made, your parents let go of you and you go to spend one night alone in the mountain. With all due respect, we are taking advantage of these sources to recover our [traditions]. In the end, [...] the monks prepared *rapé* here too, I was just used in another way. Mushrooms were used, many things. [...] This path [Camino Rojo], apart from being very useful in my life, helps me to recover our essence as a people, the root that has been cut so many years ago, since the appearance of the Romans 2000 years ago. It is being maintained, but much has been lost. The Romans have already unified a lot. All these paths help us because, in the end, what they do is, they put you in contact with the earth and it is this earth that you feel, these roots that you walk on, and it is these trees that speak to you. Everything is communicating. Thanks to the work they have done there [Mexico], today these roots continue to have a memory and what we are doing is learning to listen with these methods. We are learning to listen to our roots. The tradition [I have learned that comes from Mexico] is very beautiful but, in the end, I really feel, [...] with all respect and with all gratefulness to all the teachings I had from this other part of the world, it is our turn, as Europeans, to recover our roots. CARLOS

The vision quest [*búsqueda de visión*] is a rite of passage. Many cultures made these small retreats to ask for help from the ancestors, the guides, to figure out what to do in this new vital stage that one is facing and to spend time in hibernation with oneself to be able to focus better. Traditionally it was done when there was a process of change, change of the life cycle or when something strong happened some shock, something very strong that you do not know where to go. It is also a retreat. It is very ancient and found in many cultures. The vision quest as we know it resembles more the one of North America, of the Lakotas, which then went down to Mexico. Of course, where there is a transculturalisation of customs there is a cultural adaptation too. EMMA

Rituals of Santa María

Contemporary ritual use of cannabis has been rarely a study subject. One of the few has been done by Mahmud (2008) in Bangladesh where the spiritual use of *ganja* or *bhang* is seen as part of identity politics and resistance to ideological imperialism. The author emphasises that the perspective of the user and the scientific perspective are in direct opposition in respect of anti-social activities, criminal activities, healthcare, prosocial behaviour, and religious activities (see Figure 7). The researcher with no practical experience of substance use approaches the phenomenon with scientific knowledge and the user with practical experience, but without the accredited expertise of scientific knowledge. The first sees the phenomenon as a social problem, the other as normal life experience (Mahmud, 2008). The author poses the question: ‘What makes the researcher’s perspective credible and that of the ganja user unreliable?’ As I have discussed earlier, science has taken an authoritative role in the field of drug use labelling it as delinquency or disease, while the user has no relevant voice in such discourse. The user’s ways of comprehending the world are unscientific and therefore wrong. The researcher knows the user better than the user knows himself/herself.

Researchers’ perspective	Ganja users’ perspective
1. Ganja use develops in the individual a proclivity for anti-social activities.	Ganja use keeps the individual away from anti-social activities.
2. A ganja user often engages in criminal activities.	A ganja user gives up all deviant activities.
3. A ganja user ruins his/her physical health by its regular use.	A ganja user finds medication in the regular use of the substance.
4. A ganja user engages in violent and abusive behaviors.	A ganja user devotes him/herself to serving helpless people.
5. A ganja user develops confusing and misleading ideas about religion.	A ganja user attempts to clarify his/her religious perception and conforms to religion.
6. A ganja user gets isolated from the larger society.	A ganja user participates in the group to which s/he belongs and thus becomes more social.

Figure 7: Conflicting identities of the *ganja* user (Mahmud, 2008: 456).

Mahmud (2008) presents the narrative of one spiritual user of *ganja* and identifies the motives for the use as getting closer to Allah and as a form of alternative medicine for relieving physical pain. When the user started to use *ganja* as a group activity in the Bengali Association, he became aware that Allah lives within society and his association with Allah grew even closer and developed an active group identity even if the association had a marginalised image in the mainstream society. Regular use of *ganja* in the group created a social space for the users where they could reclaim a positive social identity and resist marginalisation. Just like the inhabitants of Wonderland, the spiritual users of *ganja* in Bangladesh created their own needs, beliefs, values and goals such as to be a good person, to change the lifestyle, to be happy, to be healthy and

have well-being, to have good relationships, to gain spiritual satisfaction and be in contact with the divine, to develop and grow personally, and to recognise the divine in everyone and everything.

Due to the widespread use of cannabis and its illegal status, there is however a negative reception of cannabis in different spiritual lines, even by those who use other (illegal) psychoactive substances or plants, according to Estela. Cannabis is generally not used as a sacrament in most contemporary spiritual lines or traditions. Although it has a history of ritual use in different cultures around the world (see a review in Dos Santos, 2016), it is regarded as a misused and harmful ‘drug’, while other substances are regarded as ‘medicines’, which is partially the result of the past political repression of the plant and, according to the informants, its feminine energy (see page 91).

The daily Santa María rituals

The cannabis plant has a special place in the Wonderland community. It is referred to as *Santa María* and used as it is being used comes from the Padrinho Sebastião branch of the Santo Daime doctrine. The ceremony of Santa María was incorporated in the Santo Daime rituals by Padrinho Sebastião Mota de Melo who introduced a new understanding about this power plant along with a design, teachings and various songs. Estela and Sofia opened the Santa María ceremony to people outside of Santo Daime or those who, in one way or the other, already had their relationship with the plant and present them with a sacred/ritual/spiritual way of using Santa María, as well as restore the value of this sacred plant. With time the ceremony was changing, adapting and incorporating other songs about forces and the elements of nature that created a new ceremony of consecrating and sharing altogether. The rituals employed do not imitate a particular spiritual tradition; rather, they were developed as a response to the time and place where they are practised. In this regard, these rituals are genuine and original.

Santa María awakens the feminine energy and gives us the instruction to live a good life if we know how to use it, share it with a clear intention, and respect it. When using Santa María, one has to dedicate the time only to these purposes. It should not be smoked while doing daily routine or out of boredom. The focus should be on the plant and the messages it transmits if you're doing something else you can't hear what it says. If used improperly it can disperse one's mind. In one of the ceremonies, where most people were novices in smoking Santa María but had experience with cannabis, Estela described:

Here in this place, we consider Santa María a sacred plant and we always use it ceremonially. We use Santa María in a group, we are praying or doing spiritual work. Sometimes, when one personally needs support, then we use Santa María to walk in the forest or to gain understanding about something in our life that we do not understand. We never use it in a ludic way. We intend to keep the spirit of this plant and this place in a very sacred manner. We always ask all the people that come to us to only use Santa María at very special moments, because when you

don't use it like that and you're talking about normal things of life, the Santa María loses its strength. This is how we work here with this plant.



Photo 26: The image of Santa María.

In the Stone House, a ritual is performed each morning when the sun rises and each evening before going to sleep. Each ritual lasts for about one hour up to one hour and a half. The morning ritual takes place in the chapel and is supposed to replace the local tradition of people living in the countryside who pray for a good day after waking up. In India, for example, it is believed that using *bhang* early in the morning cleans the body of sin (Abel, 1980). The evening prayer is done in the house in front of the fireplace where thanks are given for the day before going to sleep. These rituals play an important role in binding the community, and cannabis helps individuals to improve introspection and empathy, and to release tensions, as explained by Estela:

To begin the day with prayer opens you in a different way and then you start moving. At night you understand much of what happened; you clean all the nonsense that happened during the

day. When we lived here as a group it was also very important, especially at night. In the morning also because we started the day together well. During the day a lot of things happen, tensions among the people. While singing all together in the evening you realize your nonsense; it cleanses you.

In the morning everyone who is staying at the Stone House gathers in the chapel for prayer. While standing in a half-circle facing the altar an alternated version of the Lord's prayer and Hail Mary is said in the Spanish language. This version of Lord's Prayer was taken from the spiritual line Great White Brotherhood (*Gran Hermandad Blanca*). According to Estela, it corresponds better with the Wonderland's worldview as the original one because words such as guilt and sinner are taken out of the discourse. Rather than the Catholic tradition, the prayer in its tone of invoking the force and the self-affirmations corresponds much more with María Sabina's invocations (see recorded invocations by Estrada, 2016: 59-61).

Padre Nuestro

Padre Nuestro que estas en el cielo
santificado sea tu nombre Yo soy
Yo soy tu reino venido
Yo soy tu voluntad cumpliéndose
Yo soy en la tierra como yo soy en el cielo
Yo soy el que da hoy
el pan de cada día a todos
Yo soy el que perdona toda vida
tal como yo soy toda vida perdonándome
Yo soy el que aparta
a todo hombre de la tentación
Yo soy el que libra a todo hombre
de toda condición perniciososa
Yo soy el reino
Yo soy el poder
y yo soy la gloria de dios
en eterna e inmortal manifestación
todo esto yo soy.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father who art in heaven
hallowed be thy name I am
I am thy kingdom come
I am thy will be done
I am on earth as I am in heaven
I am the one who gives
the daily bread to everyone
I am the one who always forgives
just as I am always forgiving myself
I am the one who turns
away every man from temptation
I am the one who frees every man
from every pernicious condition
I am the kingdom
I am the power
and I am the glory of God
in eternal and immortal manifestation
all this I am.

Ave María

Ave María
llena eres de gracia
el Señor es contigo
bendita tu era entre todas las mujeres
bendito es el fruto de tu vientre Jesús
Santa María Madre de Dios
ruega por nosotros hijos e hijas de dios
ahora y en la hora de nuestra victoria
sobre el pecado, la enfermedad y la muerte
Amen.

Hail Mary

Hail Mary
full of grace
the Lord is with thee
blessed art thou among all women
blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus
Holy Mary, mother of God
pray for us sons and daughters of god
now and in the hour of our victory
over sin, disease and death
Amen.

After the prayer, everyone is seated in a half-circle and *rapé* is applied to everyone who wants it. Before the Santa María is lightened the leader of the ceremony holds the rolled Santa María against her forehead and utters a short prayer in Spanish or Catalan language with the following words to consecrate it:

Consagración Santa María

Así pidiéndote, Santa María,
que penetres en nuestro cuerpo físico,
mental, espiritual.
Por el orden del sol,
la luna, y las estrellas
declaro sagrada y
bendita esta Santa María
Así es.

Consecration of Santa María

Asking you, Santa María,
that you penetrate our physical,
mental, spiritual body.
By the order of the sun,
the moon, and the stars
I declare this Santa María
sacred and blessed.
So be it.

Santa María is smoked in complete silence. Each person takes three inhalations – one for the sun, the second for the moon, and the third for the stars – consecrates themselves and then passes it on to the right to the next person, counter-clockwise. In cases when children participate in the ritual, they consecrate themselves with it and pass it on to the next person without smoking. Smoking is not obligatory for anyone. After the *pito* (rolled pure cannabis) is smoked to the end, every participant reads one random chapter from the book *Perlas del Yo Soy* (Facchini Barsé, 2011) and one person reads a chapter from the book *A Course of Miracles* (Schucman and Thetford, 1976). When finished, everyone sits quietly in meditation for a couple of minutes. The whole ritual is closed with the same prayers as at the beginning.

Changing the discourse is important because it gives another meaning to what is being done. There is a book called "A Course in Miracles" that is very good because it works within the mind. It helps us see all the things we have in mind that are wrong, that are made with a wrong pattern. It helps us to see it differently, it frees us and makes us feel good. We work a lot with this book because it helps us a lot to have another approach to the things that happen. We take great care of our vocabulary.

The evening ritual has the same structure. Instead of reading chapters from the books, songs of Santo Daime are sung, usually the *Oração* or the *Hinario Santa María*. Certain local features have been recently introduced into the daily rituals, such as *El Virolai*, a hymn dedicated to the Virgin Mary of Montserrat, who is a spiritual and patriotic symbol of the Catalan people, as explained by Estela.

We have also included the blessing of the Moreneta (Virgin Mary of Montserrat) with Santa María. In Daime, there is no Virgin of Montserrat. All these are things developed in time. We also use songs from the Red Road (Camino Rojo) and Umbanda. All this is a mix that we have made it does not have an old tradition, nor does it come from anywhere in particular. We pray

differently; the Lord's Prayer comes from the White Brotherhood. We see it as more appropriate for this time because we work with the book *A Course in Miracles*. The book speaks to you that there are no sinners, no guilt. We are also in this change of the discourse in our prayer, but we just read and let everyone interpret as they want, how they feel.

The hymnal of Santa María, which is sung regularly in the evenings in the Stone House, consists of 14 songs from the Santo Daime tradition. The songs transmit gratitude to the plant, emphasize the difference between the sacred Santa María and the profane cannabis, and also emphasize the respect and discipline needed for its correct use (MacRae, 1998). The songs represent Santa María as a divine force that teaches us, warms our heart, comforts us, brightens up our path, unites us and heals us (*Uma Bela História*). She is our omnipresent mother full of love that we need to stay loyal to, defend her, and liberate her from those who accuse her, and who do not know how to use her (*Minha Santa María é livre*).

Minha Santa Maria é livre
(Regina Pereira)

Minha Santa Maria é livre
No lugar onde Ela está
Mas a gente é que lHe acusa
Quando a gente usa sem saber usar

Santa Maria é nossa Mãe
E nossas filhas e nossas mulheres
Mas é preciso muito Amor
E todas elas se consagrar

Aqui dentro desta irmandade
Alguns irmãos precisam entender
Que para usar a Santa Maria
É com lealdade pra lHe defender

Mas é com fé e paciência
Que para todos vai se libertar
Quem estiver vai se libertar
Quem não estriver pode até chorar

Uma Bela História
(Lúcio Mortimer)

Eu vou contar uma bela história
Da plantinha que mais tem amor
Ela era bem pequenina
Padrinho viu e abençoou

Ele disse preste atenção
Aqui tem uma força divina
Quem souber dar consagração
Tem uma Mãe que nos ensina

Ela cura e alimenta
O Amor em nosso coração
O seu perfume nos acalenta
E nos conforta em nossa missão

Um anjo veio e foi dizendo
No sonho de nosso Padrinho
Com esta planta também se cura
E tem mais luz no seu caminho

Com o galho verde em sua mão
O anjo veio e fez a profecia
Agora vamos ter união
E mais respeito à Santa Maria

The ashes of the *pito* are carrying the prayer therefore they are always collected and used by Sofia in her line of natural cosmetics. The rolled Santa María has no filter, instead, a small bamboo tube serves as an extension. If at the end a small piece of the *pito* remains it is placed into the fire. The smoking of Santa María is an elaborated process and demonstrates deep respect that the people feel for the plant.

Navegación Mariana

Navegación Mariana is a syncretic ceremony practised annually in the Stone House. It is a new ritual and as such it doesn't exist anywhere else in the world. It is the offspring of a vision quest [*búsqueda de visión*], a Native American ceremony where one isolates oneself in a forest and engages in prayer while abstaining from food and drink for several days. The ceremony I have participated in lasted in total six-day of which

four days the “navigators” [*navegantes*] spent in isolations. The first day was the opening ceremony and the last day the closing ceremony. Some ceremonies augment fasting and prayer with the use of psychoactive cacti, such as peyote or San Pedro. In the Stone House, Santa María is used for that purpose. The name of the ceremony was first changed from *búsqueda de visión* into *búsqueda de payés* (*payés* is a Catalan word for peasant). Over the years, the ceremony evolved into a new practice. The name was changed from *búsqueda* into *navegación* – to navigate represents a symbolic interpretation of the psychological/spiritual effects of cannabis. As Estela explained, the *Navegación Mariana* came to awaken the feminine energy since the majority of the ceremonies that exist are very masculine and Santa María is feminine. The elements of the ceremony do not follow any specific tradition but are “following the instructions of Santa María, she’s the guide on what to do and how to do it. The spiral altar in the *temazcal* and the spiral fire in the Council House is an instruction from Santa María”, explained Estela. The ceremony aims to remind us of who we are and connect with nature. The ceremony follows the same basic format as the vision quest, but with several differences in the design and with its own songs.

Like the vision quest, also the *navegación* is a ceremony completed when the person repeated it four times/years. Each time corresponds to one cardinal direction, to one stage of life, a season, a specific colour and a specific stage of the ceremony (see Figure 8). In October 2018 the ceremony took place for the fifth time, it was the 1st *navegación* of the 2nd cycle. New participants can join the ceremony in the first two years of each cycle, in the 3rd and 4th no new participants can join.

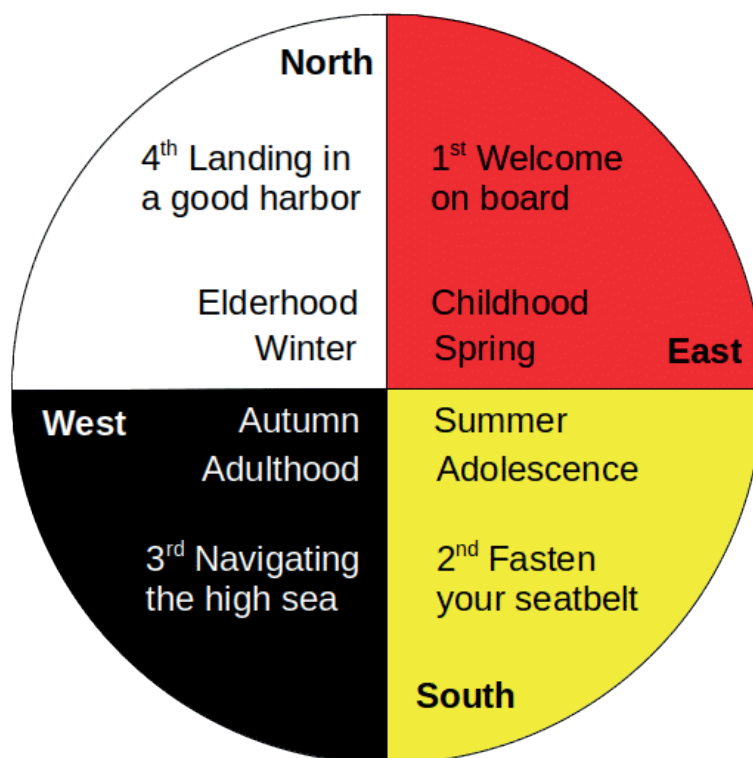


Figure 8: The phases of the *Navegación Mariana* ceremony.



Photo 27: The sails of the *Navegación* with a transparent flag on the top and the Council House in the back. The photo was taken by one of the participants.

The participants of the *navegación* are divided into two groups: the *navegantes* [those who isolate themselves in the forest] and the *apoyo* [helpers], the same as in the vision quest. While the *navegantes* are isolated in the forest the *apoyo* is supporting the person from a distance in the camp. Preparing clothing for the *temazcal*, supporting the person with singing each day, etc. The *navegantes* have to prepare 365 prayers beforehand, small pouches of tobacco tied to each other with a thin rope or thick thread to form a long cord. The pouches have to have a colour corresponding to the phase of the ceremony. For example, if the person takes part in the ceremony for the second year, the colour is yellow. Additionally, they have to prepare 7 wooden shafts in the corresponding colour: 4 for each cardinal direction, 1 for the earth (green), 1 for the sky (blue), and 1 for the spirit (purple). The cord with the pouches and the shafts serves to create a small protected space in the forest where the person spends the four days and is only allowed to leave the marked the space in case of emergency. Besides that, the *navegantes* are allowed to bring with them a large piece of plastic for rain, thick socks, a sleeping bag or a thick blanket, a mat (optional), and a hat or a *pareo* for shade. They are not allowed to bring a flashlight, a utility knife or anything else that may distract them from the time of internalization. During the ceremony, no one was allowed to use mobile phones (except in urgent cases) or take photos. Next year the rule on making the photos was more relaxed, so I asked for permission to publish the participants' photos of the "boat's sail" with the transparent flag on top and the spiral-shaped altar made one year later in October 2019 (see Photo 27 and 28).

Besides smoking Santa María, drinking cannabis got introduced in the *Navegación Mariana*. The drink is made out of cannabis mixed with different ingredients that may vary. The basic recipe contains five ingredients (besides sugar and water): cannabis, black pepper, cardamom, cloves, and almonds. This recipe was introduced by Jasbir and Amar, Indian Sikhs who form part of Wonderland for 15 years. Jasbir told me how he got introduced to the Sikh tradition and told me that even among Sikhs the Nihang are controversial due to their use of cannabis (*bhang*) and as a consequence of colonialism, which created a modernised puritanical version of the tradition.

I was 19 when I went on a trip to India with my family. There was this festivity, a version of the Hindu holy festival. The Nihangs have their version. I saw the Nihang leader on the horse, dressed like me now. This power about him, this energy. I said I want to be like that. Then I went and, like you are interviewing me, I got my camera and started to interview them, and I just liked what they have said. They are disciplined but open. They had everything in a perfect balance. They weren't against drugs, they weren't against sex, they weren't against women even though it was a male order mostly, there were women there but not many, they would have few shots of alcohol here or there, eat meat. They wouldn't want to be very pure, their whole life was being strong, meditative, devoted, truthful. It was very practical. I wanted to be like that. Within the next year, I joined them. I took the initiation with my guru and every morning hundreds of us listen to what he says, and we learn. Then we do the rituals with the medicines, with the horses, the scriptures, the mantras, martial arts. I lived with them on and off for four years. Then I met my wife. Her uncle was also a Nihang. She understood who I was. [...] The warriors I knew never had depression, never anxious, never had cancer, they never had diabetes, asthma, they never had any of these modern diseases. They would all have the same story. I was sick and then my mum and dad gave me to the Nihangs, to the warrior sect, and then I took the medicine and then I got better, and I never went home. They all had the same story.



Photo 28: The spiral-shaped altar inside the Council House with a fireplace that is maintained during the ceremony. The photo was taken by one of the participants.

In the Sikh tradition, the Ayurvedic drink is called *Shaheedi Degh*. In Ayurveda, the traditional Indian healing system, cannabis has not only an important religious and social role but is considered a medicinal plant with a range of effects that depend on the dosage and form of application (Nadkarni, 1976). Each ingredient in the beverage plays a role in balancing the energy of the cannabis and giving it direction: black pepper purifies the blood and improves blood circulation, cloves clean the organs and are anti-septic, cardamom cleans the liver and the stomach, and almonds are good for memory and the brain. In the *Degh* we prepared for the *Navegación Mariana* saffron was added to cleans the body, sandalwood oil aiding the throat and the crown chakra, rose petals, nutmeg²³, and anise were added.

23 Jasbir is doing ceremonies with *Degh* at home in England for people with different mental health problems. If a person for some reason doesn't want to consume cannabis, he makes the drink with nutmeg instead, which also has psychoactive properties.

Guru Gobind Singh three-hundred years ago mixed this formula of Shiva and he created his own version, a unique version which had black pepper, cardamom, cloves and everything else, which was a complete warrior medicine. It just wasn't the cannabis on its own. Guru Gobind Singh wanted [*degh* for] the all-round person. He changed the formula, so you can stay in your married life, you can work. You can drink it and it doesn't get you too high, that is more all-round benefits and more Ayurvedic. For the Nihang, this thing really is a medicine, and it is not just because of cannabis. It is because we grind it with the almonds, melon seeds, cloves, rose petals, nutmeg, anise seeds, cinnamon, saffron, sandalwood oil, fennel, the whole host of things that we can put into there. This makes a really strong Ayurvedic concoction. We make an Ayurvedic concoction, we grind it, and we leave the solid. We filter it so it makes it easily digestible. One of my teachers, he died now, he lived in England, he was about 110 when he died. He lived of cannabis for three years of his life, he didn't eat any other food, he only drank this medicine. He had nothing else for three years of his life. We don't cook it; it is made cold. It is just ground and ground and ground. We make it into powder, we grind it very finely and then we add some sugar molasses, and then we make it into a drink with water. [...] The Santa María is always a drink. Only sometimes only powder with Santa María, spices (fennel) and sugar are taken. It has a different effect. But normally it is used in a drink. There are so many different ways of making it. There are ways you can make it that will get you very high, some ways make you more grounded, some make your heart open. We can change it. In our rituals, it is normally made the same way. It has 5 ingredients only, but I make it with 10 or 15 different things. Because in India the weather, the environment needs one thing and here needs a different thing. I used my knowledge to change it to the weather here. Otherwise, the María can be very cold, it can also cause some problems in the body. I try to balance it. So, here I brought the saffron and pure sandalwood oil that I will put in. Sandalwood and saffron suit any *dosha*. If you put it with the María, the María makes the sandalwood and the saffron work harder in your body. If anybody has a health problem and they have this it is like drinking medicine for the body and also for the soul, for the mind. Regardless of the *doshas*, these two herbs will balance anybody. With the María even more. María on its own can make *Vata*, air. You can get too much into thinking. JASBIR

The ceremony started in the chapel with preparing *Degh* in a group of 30 participants while singing the mantra *Satnam Waheguru Ji*. The women were wearing long skirts or dresses in a light colour and the men long light-coloured pants and shirts. Estela wore a white dress with a green cannabis leaf on it and a white turban. She looked like an angel. We all had to have our heads covered with a scarf or a turban before the ceremony. Jasbir explained this is done because

the head is the crown, the temple, where our consciousness can connect to the divine. By covering it, it makes us aware of this part of the body and therefore enhances meditation. It's like the skull cap of the Jews and other religious headgear, but for us, we see it as a tool for developing union or yoga with the divine.

First Jasbir was grounding the cannabis in a big stone mortar with a wooden pestle. The cannabis used was a mixture of the harvest from the Stone House, Water House and Carlos' and Lucia's house. He used probably around 20 grams of dried flowers. After a while, when the cannabis turned into a fine powder, it was put into a metal cup. Next black pepper, anise, rose petals, cloves, cardamom (double the quantity compared to other herbs), nutmeg, and saffron were grounded in the mortar. A couple of drops of the sandalwood oil were put on powdered cannabis. While the mixture was being ground in the mortar, we were doing the mantra and Jasbir's assistant sprayed each one of us with a mix of rose water and a bit of sandalwood oil. I was sitting on the right side of Jasbir, looking over his shoulder and writing notes. The aroma of

the spices was very strong. When the spice mixture was grounded into a fine powder, he blessed the cannabis powder with his 1000 years old dagger that he carries hidden in his turban and put the cannabis back in the mortar.



Photo 29: Grinding of cannabis and other spices in a stone mortar.

He continued grounding everything together for a while, then he emptied the mortar into the metal bowl and started to grind the almonds. We finished singing the mantra and Jasbir said we can start singing Santa María songs and bless us with them. He continued grounding in rhythm. When the almonds were ground he added the spices combined with the cannabis powder into the mortar and mixed all together. In a smaller bowl, his assistant poured the water, sprayed it with a bit of rose water, then he added a bit of the water in the mortar and mixed it into a paste. In a large pot, they put two kilograms of brown sugar and melted it in two litres of water. He put a sift on the big pot and a cloth filter on top of it. He put the paste on the cheese filter and slowly poured several litres of water over it. We were singing the *hinario* of Santa María during this time.



Photo 30: Preparation of *degh*.

When it was done, Jasbir squeezed the last drops of liquid out of the cheesecloth and put the leftovers in a bowl. He blessed the brew with his dagger again, while saying something in a, to me, unknown language, probably Punjabi. After that, we all stood up. Usually, at that point, an animal is sacrificed, but we sacrificed an apple instead. We were standing in a circle and the apple went around. We had to project our worst on it, the worst things about ourselves. In the end, he cut the apple in half with the dagger and we threw the apple far away from the chapel. Symbolically it meant cutting off the head of a demon. *Degh* was given to the altar, to the Moreneta, other saints in the chapel and the water spring, which is in the forest. Then each of us got a bowl of the brew. Carlos' oldest daughter from a previous relationship was also present, she is seven years old. She also took a few sips of the brown-like-cocoa beverage. The taste was delicious. The metal bowls were cleaned each time from all our energies with the rose water. We sat on the floor in a circle and Jasbir gave us an eye medicine made out of several different herbs. In its effects it is similar to *sananga* eye drops used in the Amazon basin, that cause an intense burning sensation for a few minutes. After everyone recovered from the eye drops Jasbir started to play the portable Indian harmonium and sing mantras. It was a pleasant meditative ceremony with only light effects from the *degh*. We finished the ceremony in the middle of the night and went to sleep. When I came back from the chapel a little black

scorpion was on my bed. I captured it in a jar and let it out through the window. I wanted to write before sleeping, but I couldn't find my notebook. It was storming outside and raining heavily, so I decided to look for it in the morning. Next morning the whole mountain was surrounded by thick fog. Like the world doesn't exist, it's just us and no one else. It was still raining. I went to the chapel to look for it and fortunately found it lying on the floor.

It is the day when nine *navegantes* (two men and seven women) go to the forest into four-day isolation. Estela is one of them and yesterday she asked me to be her *apoyo*. I felt honoured. We started the ceremony as we start a Santa María ceremony by praying and then taking the *rapé* and smoking Santa María. In the end, Jasbir gave each one of us one bowl of *degh*. Due to the rain, the *temazcal* was flooded and it was still heavily raining. We decided to do a symbolic *temazcal* in the house, in the living room. We put a big paella pan in the middle of the room on which we placed nine hot stones on it. In the *temazcal* ceremony, the *navegantes* were taken the word and from then on, they were not allowed to speak, eat, or drink anything, except *degh* we will bring them on day three. After the *temazcal*, we accompanied the *navegantes* to the chapel, where they spent the first night. Next morning the storm and rain stopped so we could take the *navegantes* to the forest. Every morning and evening we would go to a meadow to wish the *navegantes* good morning or good night and sing to them to express our support and give them strength. The fire on the altar in the Council House is maintained the whole time. At least one person stayed there throughout the day and two persons at night. Seventeen people were staying in the camp, five men and twelve women. The youngest was Carlos' seven-year-old daughter. Most of the participants were between 30 and 60 years old. In the mornings we did a *temazcal* – Sofia was leading the ceremonies and in one of them she thanked me for the work I am doing and asked the spirits to help me to put my experience in words because it is an important work for all of us – and later in the day, we would work in and around the house, cooking, socializing and preparing for the evening ceremonies with *degh* and Santa María in the Council House. The work in the kitchen is essential. It is a big part of the ceremony itself. The diet during the ceremony is basic. The participants in the camp could choose between a diet of whole grain rice, gomasio (roasted powdered sesame seeds with salt) and kukicha tea (roasted green tea twigs) or adding vegetables to the rice.

After the *navegantes* spent four days in isolation we went to pick them up and bring them back to the camp. On the way from the forest, we first welcomed them in the Council House and then we went straight to the *temazcal* where the word was returned to the *navegantes* and they were allowed to drink and eat again. We prepared some delicious fresh fruits juices (pear, apple and pomegranate), a miso soup and gave them water. Then we went to have lunch (rice, vegetables, gomasio and kukicha tea) in the house. In the evening we did the closing ceremony, a circle of integration, with *degh* and tobacco. We did the tobacco ceremony in the living room of the Stone House. Everyone was sharing their thoughts about the experience while smoking tobacco in the sacred pipe (Chanupa) or rolled in a corn husk. Reflections were very positive, and it took us about three hours. The four days of isolation in the forest were meant to enable us, the participants, to

ground ourselves and connect with nature, each other and the elements. What people shared about the ceremony was that they gained a lot of instruction and inspiration for their lives and, on the other hand, dealt with their fears and obligations. A prosocial component of the experience was also recurrent where participants would contemplate their relationships and how to improve them. The group work and activities done during the ceremony in the camp contributed to community building, increased self-responsibility, connectedness, and unity within the group and gave the participants a sense of how to live in a community. The silence gave way to the subtle effects of Santa María, which were perceived as feelings of joy, love, and soft-heartedness. After the circle of integration, we did the Santa María ceremony with *rapé*, *degh* and smoked Santa María and with that the *Navegación Mariana* was complete. Until next year.

Cura Santa

The inhabitants of Wonderland are incorporating Santa María in other practices and are creating new rituals such as the *Cura Santa*. Isabela and Sara were room-mates, living in a town close to Barcelona when they came up with the idea to join their massage techniques and create a whole new ceremony using cannabis oil and, if the person wants, also smoking Santa María as part of the massage ritual. It lasts for about two hours and the idea to do it came spontaneously when

one casual Sunday we were with our children and – [Sara] does Shiatsu and I am also a masseuse, I do a more energetic massage similar to Californian massage – she [Sara] proposed to do an exchange. [...] She did a Shiatsu to me and I gave her an energy massage. [Sara] told me ‘[Isabela], if you and I do it, it is so complementary’, because Shiatsu is more about touching the body, the organs, with a lot of awareness and mine is very intuitive, very energetic, from a much more subtle place. It is very symbiotic, very integral. It has all this holistic nature. Then we did a test with some friends. Two or three women came to do the *Cura Santa* and, of course, it was spectacular. With [Sara] we agreed about where each one would start the massage and then we just let ourselves go. That’s how we started. The *Cura Santa* is expressing what we are each in each moment. There is not only Shiatsu and an energetic massage, but there are also other things. Everything that happens has to do with the path we are learning, with the way we are learning to express the heart. There is singing, there are instruments and all the invisible world that we also invite to be present in this *Cura Santa* that manifests itself. Apart from what the person brings. What is *Cura Santa*? *Cura Santa* is love [*amacion*]. It is not healing, it is not a massage, it is love [*amacion*]. We are lovers [*amadoras*]. So, you are not going to get a massage, you are going to love yourself and also love yourself through the people who are present and everything that happens there. *Cura Santa* is being super generous with us because it is evolving, it is manifesting, it is being guided and each time it tells us new things. It is not that we invent it ourselves, this information comes. Each time you learn more and when you are with that openness, well, life manifests itself. It is like that. Besides, the *Cura Santa* has this name because it is a tribute to Santa María. We use cannabis oil with which we oil the person and that gets physically absorbed by the body and opens the body quite immediately. Apart from that we also give the possibility of smoking [*pitar*] Santa María or taking the oil orally so that the person establishes the contact. Cannabis, as we know from ancestral knowledge, is a plant that represents feminine energy. It is the opening of the heart, of joy. The *Cura Santa* is a reconnection with our feminine energy that is loving, that is caring, that is nurturing and sustaining. The cannabis plant helps us awaken what we already are. In the end, it is not that the

plant gives us something that we do not have. The only thing she does is to make us remember. Like an instrument tuner. She gives us the note and we remember it. And when a person receives a *Cura Santa*, or rather, when we receive a *Cura Santa* – because when we do it, all the three people are receiving it – we enter in a vibration, a state of more connection, more openness, very fine that also helps you to walk life from a more loving place, to take care of yourself, to be more attentive to yourself. You have space there that, if you water it, it becomes a beautiful garden. ISABELA

Subjective effects

Using psychoactive plants in a ritual setting produces a variety of subjective effects. For the inhabitants of Wonderland, the incentives to engage are diverse, therefore, the subjective effects differ accordingly from individual to individual. However, certain common denominators of subjective effects can nevertheless be determined. Based on the gathered data I defined three categories of subjective effects that were experienced by the inhabitants of Wonderland: self-transcendence, pro-sociality, and emotional regulation.

During fieldwork, I have never witnessed serious negative side-effects being experienced by the participants of the rituals and ceremonies. Only a few of them did experience psychosis at some point in their lives, which was never the result of the drug only, but a consequence of the triangulation between context, the subject and a drug. With Estela, I had several conversations about what she does and how she acts (as a facilitator) in case someone does have a difficult experience. At the end of this chapter, I, therefore, examine Wonderland's strategies on how to deal with a person who experiences a psychotic episode and place them in a context of symbolic healing and western psychiatric approaches discussed in other relevant literature.

Self-transcendence

According to Maslow (1971), self-transcendence is one of the basic human needs and “refers to the very highest and most inclusive or holistic levels of human consciousness, behaving and relating, as ends rather than means, to oneself, to significant others, to human beings in general, to other species, to nature, and to the cosmos” (1971: 269). To have a comprehensive and cross-culturally valid approach to psychology, non-ordinary states of consciousness have to be taken into account, such as “mystical states, cosmic consciousness, psychedelic experiences, trance phenomena, creativity, and religious, artistic, and scientific inspiration” (Grof, 2008: 47). Transpersonal psychology was developed to embrace the human experience holistically and self-transcendence has been recognized as a significant part of non-ordinary states, psychedelic experiences, contemplative practices and ancient traditions (Grof, 2008). This led Maslow to integrate self-transcendence into the top of the hierarchy of basic human needs. Theories of personality

integrated self-transcendence as a personality trait related to spiritual aspects of the self that are reaching beyond oneself (Frankl, 2014) and described it as "acceptance, identification, or spiritual union with nature and its source" (Cloninger, Svrakic and Przybeck, 1993: 981) by seeking coherence, integration, and meaning across all dimensions of life (physical, spiritual, emotional, rational, social) that add value and orientation in one's life (Shimako Abe, 2013). For Reed (2003) self-transcendence is a capacity to expand one's own intrapersonal (values and worldview), interpersonal (relations with other people and the environment), temporal (creating a meaning of the present by integrating the past and the future) and transpersonal boundaries (relating with dimensions beyond the observable world). Self-transcendence is also an element that helps us understand human needs and motivations that lead us to engage in social change (Clark, 2018). Self-transcendence is a universal neuropsychological process for all individuals regardless of place, time and religious background. While it is often attributed to religious practices, it has been shown that these experiences emerge also outside religious contexts (Taylor, 2012). Therefore, the experience of self-transcendence is universal and only varies according to context and one's background (Johnstone and Cohen, 2019).

In Wonderland self-transcendence manifests with the help of psychoactive plants, such as ayahuasca and cannabis, that transmit knowledge and awake the memory present in all human beings. It establishes a connection to God, oneself, other people and nature, as well as confronting with the transience of human life, nothingness, as well as eternity. By triggering these non-ordinary states of consciousness, it facilitates life changes, gives solace and direction, and makes them feel part of everything.

These medicines are memory and through them come a series of vibrations and messages, so that humanity awakens the memory, remembering what is already in us. The spirit of the plants come to bring us harmony, memory, balance, this creativity being illuminated, raising awareness, to raise higher vibration and thought. So, in some way the spirit, in each drop of this gem of knowledge, is anchoring us more in this memory. GLORIA

In some way you become an observer and you observe your thoughts, and you observe the flow of energy that is within you, well, you have the capacity to see yourself. If you have the ability to see yourself, you have the ability to change those things and manifestations that you consider not to be good or correct. [...] It produces a connection with God, with a great spirit, with your interior and, if you are attentive, the plant is speaking to you. The plant always speaks to you, if you are attentive, awake. What you are experiencing right now, the plant speaks to you and tells you and communicates with you in a loving way. LUIS

We have done *trabajos* where all of us were already somewhere else. There was no pain, nothing to forgive, no injury, and nothing happened to anyone and everyone was in a serene joy, that is, we all felt the same. That place exists within us all, those who use [Daime] and those who don't. [...] It is really an investigation. We are all a bit anthropological, not to show it to the world, but to ourselves. Although everything that happens to one of us resonates with the others. It is an illusion that you are you and I am me. SUSANA

When I got to Santo Daime I was delighted because I saw immediately that we were all equal, there was equality. We were all students of life and with the medicine, I surrendered myself completely. It took me to a place that was my home, where I felt super comfortable. All of the Daime *trabajos* led me to that place and it was always wonderful. I was very pure and had no hidden things. I think that, if you do not hide anything, she speaks to you about eternity, about

love, that we really are one. Since I felt that and lived it for so long, all my *trabajos* were wonderful. [...] All plants, all medicines take us home to that eternity. They open the way for us to clean interferences or self-deceptions, so that we do not fear our hell, nor our demons and to try a bit of eternity so that we say, 'there is the way'. PALOMA

I can say from my own experiences. Using psychedelics made me lose the fear of death, which is one of the biggest fears that everyone has, and it made me, cannabis particularly, have to look at my fear of death. That was the first time I ever took it with the warriors. It made me confront my fear of death. I can't say I'm over it because it can come back, but it made me really get to grips with it. It made me understand it. Being in the void, the nothingness. I was high for two, three days. That was very important for me. After that day, that was the biggest shift I have ever had spiritually. I was about 25 then. I have gone all youth drug-free. And then suddenly this big green metal iron bowl... All I could see was light and emptiness and this, kind of, telepathic feeling with some being. Just feeling nothing existed, I was completely transparent, and time had completely stopped. It took me weeks to come out of that and I have never been the same ever since. Because it literally rooted me into reality. It was like a rude awakening. JASBIR

Sometimes I smoke alone in my house but with prayer. *Rapé* and Santa María have helped me a lot to get into the habit of praying or blessing or thanking for the day. Whatever ritual, a *temazcal*, a ceremony of Santa María I think that brings me to a state of consciousness of praying, thanking, entering into communion, I don't know how to say it. To say 'I pray' sounds strange to me because I have always been totally atheistic. Well, there is some powerful force, but I never prayed in the manner of the Catholic religion. The medicines have introduced prayer from another place. Now I can say that I am religious, and my friends and parents freak out. All religions at its base have the same message, what happens is that afterwards, man has distorted it. Maybe more spiritual. It is a religion that is internal to oneself and that you can share with other people. You can put an image of someone or some symbols but deep down it is like something that is inside of you that connects you with the superior. For me that is religion. I'm spiritual, but as I have incorporated the prayer it appears to be more religious. I have a faith and a belief, but not with something that is written somewhere outside, it is something that is in me and this transforms my life in how I do things, what I put my energy in, what I eat, what I work. [...] Medicine connects you. People like me, who live in cities, are disconnected from the essentials like rain, wind, sun, sea, mountains, trees, food, land... that carry ancient knowledge and the people who bring their medicines, from whatever place of the planet, are connected with the ancestral and with the primordial. Why are we here? Well, to enjoy this planet that is generous, abundant, beautiful. It gives you awareness of how the economy, great powers in general, how they treat the world, and it connects you to how the land, the water should be treated. It brings you respect. It brings you connection with the most primal thing that someone will tell you 'this is going back' and I see that it is not, it is going forward. To move forward, to develop is to reconnect with what gives you a healthier direction in all aspects. What gives you a meaning of what is life and what are you doing on the planet living this life. All medicines come from the earth, so they are very connected to all this and somehow, they have brought me this connection and found spaces where I can connect. To be connected you have to be touching the ground. NINA

Pro-sociality and pro-environmentalism

Self-transcendence is closely connected to pro-social behaviour such as altruism, empathy and feeling of oneness with other people and the environment. The pro-social effect of psychoactive substances has been researched since the mid-20th century and especially in the last few decades, the number of research papers

has increased significantly. Particularly psychedelics and entactogens have been found to enhance pro-social behaviour. Preliminary evidence suggests that both, recreational and ceremonial use of psychedelics and entactogens can produce acute and long-term effects on prosocial behaviours, emotional empathy, openness, interpersonal closeness, forgiveness, and other (Hysek, Schmid, Simmler, *et al.*, 2014; Hendricks, Clark, Johnson, *et al.*, 2014; Nauert, 2018; Johnson, Hendricks, Barrett, *et al.*, 2019; Jungaberle, Thal, Zeuch, *et al.*, 2018; Pokorny, Preller, Kometer, *et al.*, 2017; Griffiths, Johnson, Richards, *et al.*, 2018). Also, prescription drugs have been found to increase pro-sociality. Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors have been suggested to increase warmth and companionship (Ilieva, 2015), make them feel better about living in a modern world (Pieters and Snelders, 2009), make them more cooperative and less critical (Levy, Douglas, Kahane, *et al.*, 2014), and less likely to harm others (Crockett, Siegel, Kurth-Nelson, *et al.*, 2015). Pro-social behaviour is facilitated by reduction of anxiety, an increase of self-confidence, a decrease of fatigue, and disinhibition of communication (Müller and Schumann, 2011) as well as improvement of societal health (Lane, 2001). Moreover, psychoactive plants and substances facilitate cultural change by enhancing pro-sociality and maintaining or managing groups, as well as promoting acceptance, providing solace, enhancing efficiency, and motivating people (Wadley and Hayden, 2015).

Throughout this work, I give examples of how the inhabitants of Wonderland learn to function as a community, help each other, listen to each other and take care of each other. In the rituals and ceremonies (such as the *Navegación Mariana*, see page 195-204), which are always done in a group, they learn to share, interact, collaborate and connect to each other. Although it is not always explicit, the group activities and group rituals contribute to social bonding and group cohesion. By collaboratively preparing the ritual space and the food, by spending together several days 24/7, by sharing several hours of an intensely personal journey with the whole group during the ritual, by expressing the experience in the integration circle with the group the last day, and finally collectively cleaning up the ritual space, the altar and the house, bonds are being formed between people who perhaps would never speak or meet each other. Recent experimental research on prosociality and rituals has affirmed that the primary role of rituals is group cohesion, social bonding, and facilitating cooperation and commitment among the participants (Wen, Herrmann and Legare, 2016; Xygalatas, Mitkidis, Fischer, *et al.*, 2013; Legare and Watson-Jones, 2015).

Based on my observations in Wonderland, I can say that not only did the rituals bond the participants, but it made them more emphatic towards other people, outside the ritual circle. Some inhabitants of Wonderland improved their family or intimate relationships, while others improved their professional relationships. Some inhabitants decided to leave their jobs because they wanted to do something else with their lives, or did not feel happy with what they were doing to earn money, Susana and Nina however started to look and value at their jobs and the work environment differently instead of changing it. By changing one's own perception of a certain situation they have achieved to look past their conflict with authority and accepted their work with less resistance and judgements.

I have been a very wild soul. I worked in many places, but I always had a lot of difficulty with authority. [...] When I have gone to work, I always saw all the defects. [After participating in Santo Daime] I don't have that conflict anymore, that has disappeared because I accept the rules without a problem, I don't give it value. I am now fully practical. I earn a salary to pay rent, water, gas, buy some pants and I can pay the Daime, travel and that's it. I'm not going further. Before I questioned everything. It was because I was emotionally out of balance. I was projecting myself excessively on the outside. SUSANA

I have a telecommunication job in a big monopoly with good colleagues. It gives me some flexibility to do my things. I value this very much, but I didn't like who I worked for, a water company since water has to be free for everyone. When I started going to the *temazcals*, going to the [Stone House], putting myself on service and support in the vision quests, I completely changed my perception. I started going to work and I no longer focused on who I was working for. I saw that I was serving people who call and need something or want to pay a bill or do not have water and need a technician to come. Instead of looking up and saying 'motherfuckers', I look to the other side, to the other end of the phone where there is a person who needs help and I'm on duty to help wherever I can. I'm much happier with my work. It's the same [work], but it's like where you put your focus, into what you like or what you don't like. Seeing the positive or the negative part. By focusing on your service, it takes away your ego a little bit. You can have a good or bad day, but it gives you more awareness of the other person. So, I think I do my job just like I did before, but with more awareness. NINA

Susana's and Nina's experience can be viewed from at least two points of view both with prosocial elements. On one hand, they felt greater acceptance for their employers and colleagues, which made them feel better in their work environment and at peace with themselves and others. On the other hand, they have lost their critical attitude regarding working conditions and adopted a conformist and accepting behaviour, which might remind us of conformism achieved with *soma* that Huxley described in *Brave New World* (1932).

Pro-sociality translates into feeling relatedness, empathy and unity with other people, while pro-environmentalism translates into feeling relatedness to nature and other living beings. It has been reported in several studies that psychoactive plants and substances provoke a feeling of unity, oneness or connectedness due to ego-dissolution and loss of self-awareness, which blurs the boundaries between the self and the surrounding (Tagliazucchi, Roseman, Kaelen, *et al.*, 2016; Carhart-Harris, Erritzoe, Williams, *et al.*, 2012; Griffiths, Richards, Johnson, *et al.*, 2008). Furthermore, psychoactive plants (particularly psychedelics) are often taken in a natural setting (Masters and Houston, 1966). All rituals and ceremonies in Wonderland that I participated in are done in a natural environment except for one Santo Daime church which is situated in the city. All the rest of ritual places are situated in rural areas surrounded by forests. Rituals such as *temazcal*, *Navegación Mariana*, *Retiro de Luna*, pilgrimages, walks in nature (*trabajo en la naturaleza*), etc. are done mainly outdoors. Great emphasis is given on the natural setting in Wonderland. As I explained elsewhere in this work, Estela claims that the forest and nature are healing the people, not the psychoactive plants *per se*. According to her experience, many people don't even need to take a plant, but just walk in the forest and touch the soil (e.g. by gardening). This corresponds also to research suggesting that contact with the natural environment has physical and mental health benefits (Maller, Townsend, Pryor, *et al.*, 2006; van den Bosch and Depledge, 2015; Capaldi, Dopko and Zelenski, 2014), a contact we are lacking in the western society

(Kesebir and Kesebir, 2017) and which might be one of the reasons for the increase of mental distress and other health problems we are witnessing.

As mentioned elsewhere in this work, Wonderland is a contemporary “tribe” with an animist belief system. In animism everything has a life force, a spirit, thus it is common to experience anthropomorphism and feelings of empathy towards plants, animals, rocks, rivers, etc. This kind of worldview is suggested to be key to pro-environmental behaviour (Atran, Medin, Ross, *et al.*, 2002; Tam, Lee and Chao, 2013) not only in traditional communities but also among children (Gehard, Nevers and Billmann-Mahecha, 2003) and adults (Waytz, Cacioppo and Epley, 2010; De Berenguer, 2007) in the West. Recent research into the relationship between psychoactive plants and feelings of nature-relatedness suggest that classic psychedelic substances may have lasting effects on pro-environmental behaviour, particularly in those individuals who have a lifetime experience with these substances in a natural setting (Forstmann and Sagioglou, 2017; Kettner, Gandy, Haijen, *et al.*, 2019). In these psychedelic experiences, people reported encounters with the spirit world (Kjellgren, Eriksson and Norlander, 2009; Kohek, Ohren, Hornby, *et al.*, 2020) similar to what we know happens in traditional animist communities (Luna, 1984b; Winkelman, 2013) and what I have observed in Wonderland.

We are nature. Nature is our mother, it gives us life. It is an energetic exchange. I do not doubt that all the plants around my house know more about me than I do about them. LUIS

Nature is where we live and what we are. In other words, the planet is nature. All living beings in the three kingdoms: mineral, vegetable, and animal are nature. It is the pure state of everything. And the human, well, we have already been manipulating, processing, changing, transforming. For me, nature is life in its natural essential form of being. EMMA

We are nature. If you want to be an environmentalist, you cannot go against human beings. You must forgive the human being, understand the human being, change and help to share this. AURORA

Nature is a great teacher because just by observing, it can give you a lot of answers to many things. [...] I know little about nature because its mysteries are enormous. From what little I see it shows me the cycles, the changes, there are seasons and it is circular and everything comes back again, and each moment is a new opportunity. It makes me understand myself, begin to respect myself in these cycles. [...] Here you regenerate. We are all of this. Only by walking you regenerate, you create a symbiosis in your magnetic field that cleanses you. It is magic and we are here in the middle of this magic. I feel bad that it is not respected more. [...] Because it gives us food, it gives us everything, to sleep. It is such an abundant space but, as always, so poorly distributed. LEILA

The inhabitants of Wonderland have a sense of boundlessness between themselves (as human beings) and nature (everything that surrounds them). Therefore, the notion that everything you do, you do to yourself is very strong among them. Their nature-relatedness and pro-environmental behaviour reflects also in several aspects of everyday living. They tend to buy and grow organic produce, they recycle and buy second-hand clothing, some of them live off-grid and try to be as self-sustainable as possible, most of them are not vegetarian but they consume just little amounts of meat now and then, their consumption of goods, in general, is low, etc.

The pro-social and pro-environmental role of psychedelics seems particularly important in western society where we are facing loneliness and alienation on one hand, and environmental challenges on the other. The Wonderland community might serve as an example on how to improve our personal, communal and planetary well-being.

Emotion regulation

Emotions involve a series of internal processes that result in external actions and have evolved to help us to survive (Damasio, 1999). We generate emotions when facing a personal situation (e.g., grief), social situation (e.g., help a friend), and cultural situation (e.g., support human rights movement) (Scherer, Schorr, and Johnstone, 2001) that influence our subjective experience, behaviour, and physiology (Mauss, Levenson, McCarter, *et al.* 2005). Emotion regulation helps us identify an emotional situation, deploy it, evaluate it and respond to it (Gross, 2014). Research suggests that mindfulness meditation may improve emotion regulation (Britton, Shahar, Szepsenwol, *et al.*, 2012; Hölzel, Lazar, Gard, *et al.*, 2011; Tang, Tang and Posner, 2016) while mindfulness meditation also exhibits neurologic processes resembling those of classic psychedelics (Barrett and Griffiths, 2018; Heuschkel and Kuypers, 2020; Millière, Carhart-Harris, Roseman, *et al.*, 2018; Palhano-Fontes, Andrade, Tófoli, *et al.*, 2015). The first study assessing the potential beneficial effects of ayahuasca on emotion regulation suggests that “ayahuasca may positively influence both emotion regulation and mindfulness capacities” (Domínguez-Clavé, Soler, Pascual, *et al.*, 2019).

The inability to regulate emotions due to, for example, traumatic experiences can cause emotional dysfunction that can potentially lead to the development of psychopathologies, which can manifest if the need to regulate emotions is not identified or as a consequence of selected and implemented regulatory tactics (Sheppes, Suri and Gross, 2015). Several inhabitants of Wonderland have reported obtained benefits from the use of psychoactive plants (particularly ayahuasca and cannabis) and other healing tools available in Wonderland (e.g. *temazcal*) for dealing with negative emotions.

Ayahuasca makes you come into contact with that unconscious part that gives visibility to a whole part of us that we have a hard time looking at. The first experiences were quite strong for me because I was in a difficult state. I'm super grateful for the understanding it has given me, but I always had a purpose for taking it. What is the purpose of taking medicine? On that occasion, my purpose was to get out of suffering, release the suffering. [...] When I came out of this unpleasant state in which I entered, I realized that I was the only one who made me suffer. There was no one who would take away my suffering, there was no way to let go. it was only me who had to do it. It was an immense revelation. There I saw that first I had to be very compassionate with myself because of course, the responsibility was mine. There was no going back now. Now I can't blame anyone anymore, Maja. There I understood that everything was a matter of how I would transform it, that my belief, my perception is what's hurting me.
ISABELA

In my last experience with ayahuasca, I was crying and crying. I said to the plant ‘why do you make me suffer? Let me be.’, and she said to me ‘Why don't you stop suffering? You are the one who suffers because you want to. Do you want to feel beauty? Well, it's in your hands.’ At that point, I felt relieved and started feeling better. She is right. It is I who insists on suffering. It's like I carry all my mother's and my own weight on my back. I have put her [my mother] on a pedestal all these years as a perfect woman. No, no. She did many things that have conditioned me, I have the same patterns with men. She was a brave woman, but she was alone. I have to heal a lot of his things. So, I'm at this point now and I feel super good. OLIVIA

Manuel's and Lucia's story

I chose two personal stories, that of Manuel and Lucia, which reflect on the complex relationship between substance use, emotional distress, childhood trauma, and the healing process. Psychoactive plants and other practices were used in a controlled and guided setting to facilitate the healing process. It has to be pointed out that using these substances without adequate psychological and emotional preparation and support, which is followed by an integration process can be ineffective and potentially harmful. As it is evident from both examples, the healing does not end when the ceremony ends. Actually, in many cases, it is only the beginning.

Both, Lucia and Manuel, had a difficult childhood and experiencing violence and substance abuse in their families. As they were growing up, they learned to cope with it in different ways. Lucia did not remember much of her childhood and in the adolescent years, after experimenting with LSD, she experienced a psychotic episode that led her to seek help and find a path of healing that would help her face the childhood trauma and regain emotional stability. Lucia's story is compelling also because it expresses her experience with biomedicine and conventional approaches in treating mental health disorders.

I remember little from my childhood because I had terrible experiences as a child at home with my dad who was violent towards my mother. There are things that I was told later in life, but I don't have any memory of it. Some memories came back through work with ayahuasca and the support of my mother who was always by my side. When I was 16 or 17 years there was a trigger. Many circumstances came together and the LSD I took tipped it over. I went into paranoia and fear where I thought that people wanted to hurt me, they wanted to do something bad to me. I was never aggressive towards others, but I felt that the world wanted to attack me. My mum took me to the doctor, psychologist, psychiatrists, antipsychotics... well, the whole system that we have here. After two psychologists I managed to open up and explain everything that I had lived as a child, and when I opened up, explained everything, the psychologist said ‘I can't help you, you must continue with the medication’. I felt super alone, ‘it cannot be, now that I'm finally open to share they block me’. Luckily, I also had a psychoanalysis therapist from the Gestalt side who worked super well with me every week during this time. With her support, we decided to stop the medication. First time I left it on my own and had another crisis. The [medical] system reacted to the first crisis with three more years of medication, without looking at why, nor how, it does not matter, three more years. If it [the crisis] would happen again, it [the medication] would be for life. One night I forgot to take a pill, so I took it in the morning. I was with my friends and I was really drugged all day. Not like when you take substances. I wasn't me; I couldn't think, I could hardly move my body. It was very shocking for

everyone, for me and my friends. I did not want to live like this. I was 17 years old, I had a desire to live, I was super positive. With psychoanalysis and a lot of my will too, there came a time, when we decided together with my therapist, that I could be ready to stop the medication, but we wanted to do it with the support of the psychiatrist. So, we proposed that he makes guidelines for us to reduce this substance little by little so that my brain could get rid of chemicals while having support and weekly work with my therapist, but the psychiatrist refused and said no. It was not yet possible, it had to be three more years if I would have another crisis if [the medication] had to be taken forever. It was a very hard time for everyone. My mum supported me, she was on my side, the therapist too, so we decided to stop the medication and it was super good. We did it little by little with much care, with much respect. This whole crisis was under control, it was already realigned, but something very inner from my childhood was still there, this very open wound, and I felt that I needed something else, something more profound, something more of the subconscious and not so rational. Although I had worked with constellations and other things, I needed something beyond that. Life gave me the opportunity to work with ayahuasca. I was very scared because since then I never took any substance. neither smoke a joint or anything. I thought, 'my god if I can naturally be carried away, how am I going to take something that carries me away even more?'. I cannot sustain or control that. It was difficult for me to take the step and take ayahuasca because I knew that I could enter in this altered state of consciousness and experience panic. I got in touch with a very close friend of mine, I trusted her a lot. A man came who was doing ceremonies for many years in his country. He was not just doing the ceremony and then he would leave, but he offered support via the internet if he was not in the country and a follow-up after the ceremony. We did several ceremonies; it was not just one and that's it. There I felt secure and I opened myself. I started my work with the substance, but in an already conscious and voluntary way, with an intention, with a focus. I wanted to heal this deep wound of mine. The medicine [ayahuasca] opened many doors for me. In one of the first ceremonies, I had an experience that marked me and my mother a lot. I felt my body, I saw my biological father as he punched me in the nose and felt from which side it was coming, but at the same time I knew that it was not my body. Well, the three-day ceremony ended and that moment, that experience stayed latent in my mind. What was that? I also felt that I should share it with my mum. When I came home, I went to see her and told her what happened. I told her, 'mum if you don't want to tell what happened it's OK, it's my decision to go back there and I don't know if you want to deal with all this because I don't know what it implies for you, but I need to do it'. My mum looked me in the eyes and started crying like 'wow, you remember'. And I was like 'What mum? I don't know what I remember.' Then she said, 'Look, that was the last time we saw each other'. I hurt my finger and they were already separated at the time, so she came to see me and while she was looking at me, face to face, my father punched her so hard that she went to the hospital. Of course, we never spoke about it again. Thanks to the medicine, my willingness, the support of my mother and all my surroundings I was able to work through this, which is even today not 100%. As a mother of two children things still move me, things are much deeper than I thought they were, they are still not [resolved]. For me the 'drugs', in quotes, were the trigger to say you have to do something here, if you continue like this you cannot live your life. They took me to my limit and said, 'you can lose the power to live in the society today, to be integrated, or you can take advantage of that and go internally'. I was very lucky to be able to make that change and continued the path with ayahuasca, and especially with the *temazcals*. There I felt cared for, nobody saw me, if I cried, if I laughed or screamed, nobody knew that was my voice. I opened a lot and at the same time, I understood that I could reach these altered states without taking plants. Only with the warmth, with the medicines that are in the *temazcal*, with the earth, with the water, with the air I could continue this work without depending on a ceremony or any substance external to my being. [...] I knew the *temazcal* even before ayahuasca and for me, it is the medicine with which I continue and want to continue all my life because it is where I got my voice back. To be able to express myself, to be able to speak, to be sincere, to recognize 'I'm losing it'. I still saw it as something negative, I did not see it as a very nice ability to

connect with other states. It was a wild horse, I looked him in the eye, but I was not able to ride it yet. LUCIA

Manuel was 36 years old at the time when we were both living in the Stone House. He was the one showing me how things are done in and around the house; that the drinking water bottle never should be empty, that grandfather fire is eating every meal we have first, that gardening is done according to the moon calendar and so on. He took me to the town and showed me where to buy organic food, where to wash my clothes, where to get drinking water from a spring, where to get firewood, he introduced me to his car mechanic, he took me to the best bakery and the best coffee shop in the area and so on. Meanwhile, we had all sorts of discussions and he told me stories about his life. As we got to know each other better, he became more open and sharing intimate stories with me along with his frustrations, hopes and dreams. All of these conversations were off the record until I asked him, just before I left the field in spring 2019, to do a recording where he's telling me his story once again. He was surprised and was wondering how it could possibly be of any use but agreed to do it after all. We were alone in the house, sitting comfortably in the living room. More than an interview it was a spontaneous conversation about his life and how he came to the Stone House. Manuel's mother and sister live in a town at the beach, his father was an alcoholic and died when he was still a child. His sister is battling with depression and was a cocaine user. The relationship with his mother is difficult because she does not approve of his change of lifestyle and his choice to live in the Stone House. Nevertheless, according to Manuel, family relationships are improving, and he visits them regularly. Before Manuel came to live in the Stone House he was living in the city and working in the public sector. His life was centred around working, using drugs, drinking alcohol, and having sex. Manuel's story is also compelling regarding substance use. It shows that substance use is not necessarily destructive; regular use in combination with poor nutrition and other emotional factors can potentially contribute to difficulties, in his case an anxiety attack; biomedical interventions are targeting symptoms not the cause; substance use can be a form of self-medication; using psychedelics (psilocybin mushrooms, ayahuasca, etc.) can support a change of lifestyle, but the person's motivation is key to changing negative behavioural patterns; living in the Stone House can lead to changes in values, behaviour and substance use; and a combination of therapeutic approaches and alternative practices can have beneficial effects if the individual has motivation and a supportive environment.

I was taking drugs regularly. I really liked speed, MDMA, joints, all of this. I did my work, but after that, the first thing I did was smoke a joint to get away from the situation I was living in, the work and such. I also drank alcohol. I can't say I was an alcoholic, but I did drink alcohol more or less every day. Maybe two, three beers per day. On weekends much more of everything. It is called polydrug use. I was taking everything as if there was no tomorrow. [...] [On my travel to] Brazil, I found sacred mushrooms that were precious because they were very big – they grew in the poop of the Zebu, a cow breed that they have there – and they were magical. They were golden colour on top and had a lilac, bluish ring under the cap. There I had my first experiences with mushrooms, alone by myself. I found them and ate them all. I had very pleasant experiences with nature, a lot of union, a lot of understanding, a lot of peace. On the second trip, I wanted to take ayahuasca. In Cuzco I had my first experience, there my relationship with ayahuasca began. In the first ayahuasca experience, I felt huge gratefulness to

my mother. I've never felt that way before. I have never felt a mother's love for a child and the opportunity to give life. I called her and thanked her for giving me life and it was very beautiful, one of the most emotional calls in my life. It was not just thanking my mother, no, it was to feel that my mother really was the key that I am here right now. [...] While I was travelling in Colombia I realized that it was not so easy to get high, it was not so easy to have the drug at hand, there was not so much permissiveness and I realized also that using cocaine in Colombia, well, I could end up dismembered in a room and so on. Already there I... Yes, I was using other things, but I no longer wanted cocaine because I lived it in the first person. I could feel that the consumption of cocaine, its elaboration, the traffic and such, produced that the indigenous people could not conserve their cultures, it produced jail, extortion, assassins, death, robberies, and I no longer wanted to know anything about cocaine. [...] I lived in a house in Sants²⁴ with many people, very intense. We did not sell on a large scale, but we did go to La Floresta²⁵ to buy maybe 50 grams of speed and then we sold it. Can I talk about all this, Maja? [...] We had speed at home. Of course, on the weekends we always used, but also during the week. I worked at that time with youth and everything was fine, but I consumed at night. In one of those [days], I was late to work because, of course, I could not sustain everything, and my coordinator gave me a poke. It was a pretty intense night of alcohol and speed and such. The next day, when I woke up, I realized that I was late for work and I started breathing heavily and got an attack of anxiety. I went to the doctor and they gave me a tranquillizer under my tongue that calmed me down. Of course, after this the whole story of starting to take medication, tranquillizers and such. I don't know why, but I bought some Bach flower essences and started taking it. Soon after my boss told me that, instead of being at home, what I have to do is go to work. So, I went to work, and I didn't take any medication, only the Bach flowers. Once I found a flyer that said "Bach flowers in motion" in a bar and it was like a dance thing with Bach flowers. I started to do it and began to know the Bach flowers, to know my body, to pay attention to it, to connect with the body, and also to notice all the rigidity in the body produced by drug use. [...] Even after the panic attack I did not stop using speed, I really liked speed. At best I went out on Friday and returned on Sunday afternoon. I mean I practically didn't eat; I just took drugs. [...] I already knew that I could live differently from how I lived, which was a civil servant job working in the city hall, every day from Monday to Friday. I realized that there is a different way of living. I went to a Rainbow gathering in Portugal and I loved it. There was no technology there, there were only the basics, the fire, the water, the earth, the songs, and all the therapies were done for free. Apart from making good and lasting friendships, I have met people from the [Water House] there. I continued with my normal life, consumed on the weekends and, at best, 2-3 times a year went to the [Water House] to drink ayahuasca. There I connected with this family. [...] Later I went to the men's circles. Apart from taking medicines, I got some references of what a man actually was. When I was 6 years old my father already abandoned the family and upbringing so to speak. When I was 12 my father died. I didn't know what it meant to be a man. There I also met Grandma [Estela]. I was still working in the city hall with my youths, living my life, which was getting home, sleeping, dining at the bar, drinking beer, smoking joints and not much more. I did have this relationship with the sacred, but I kept doing the same, doing what I wanted. There was a moment, I don't know if it was after a ceremony, but I realized that I was a living dead. I was living, I could travel a lot, do many things, but that in reality, I was not happy. I was living alone, and I was very distant from the earth/soil. I didn't want to know anything about the countryside, I had a good time in the city, having a lot of sex, but in reality, I was dead while alive. I wanted to turn my life around. I saw clearly that I had to leave my work and take a break. In a ceremony with grandmother [Estela], she said that if we are afraid of something, we have to face it. [...] I see life here in the [Stone House] as true. It is being alive, in contact with nature. For me, it has been a very powerful evolution, without even realizing it. I thought I am here to help the grandmother, everything physical that she needs, to give her support and learn with her. I was not aware that this was a church of Santo Daime, that ceremonies are done here,

24 A neighbourhood in Barcelona.

25 A neighbourhood in Barcelona.

apart from praying every day. I have transformed. Transformed in what sense? Well, drinking alcohol makes me feel bad, I no longer take synthetic drugs because, on the one hand, I have other things to do and also because I realized that cocaine has all this darkness. Nor am I interested, because of the dynamics that I had in Barcelona, to go to the bar and consume. It doesn't satisfy me. I see it as an absolute waste of time. I also get angry because I see that my friends are still in the same story. Also, medicines like *Santo Rapé*, Santa María, well, every time I take less of them. I take them to pray or if I am in a plight. Daily I use them only here [in the Stone House] because it helps to be in service, but in other places no, I do not need to take medicine. [...] Also, what concerns the economy. I realize that I am lighter, freer without money. Like the money weighs you down. On the scale of values, money does not matter to me as much. It only slows down my spiritual development because sustaining travels also costs money. [...] I was not sick, but I got cured, I transformed many things in my life. My values have changed. Most valued for me is to be in contact with the earth, be well, be happy, satisfied, continually learning new things, be present, be in the place where I have to be, be free.
MANUEL

Psychotic episodes

Psychedelics such as LSD-25 were in the 1960s believed to mimic mental states resembling schizophrenia or psychosis and were therefore researched to get a better understanding of those mental states. Psychedelics were historically referred to as *psychotomimetic* (Hoffer, 1967) and believed to be “the most effective and safest agent for inducing an experimental, but reversible, psychosis in nonpsychotic subjects” (Isbell, Belleville, Fraser, *et al.*, 1956: 468), which got later discarded as an unrealistic model of psychosis and mental illness (Nichols, 2016). In contemporary neuroscience, however, links between psychedelics and schizophrenia are being investigated, while both states differ substantially when the subjective experience is in question (Dourron, 2020).

One of the popular beliefs about psychoactive plants, and especially psychedelics, is that they can cause psychosis or mental health problems. Estela addressed this issue in one of our conversations saying:

All plants accelerate whatever you have. If you have a psychotic episode, you are going to have it with or without marijuana. With marijuana, you will have it earlier, but marijuana does not provoke it, it brings out what's there. Same as ayahuasca, same as everything. All of these plants can help with psychosis, but you have to have a team. In the Daime we often meet people who have a psychotic episode and, if there is a team of four to six people who can sustain it well and bring the person here [the Stone House] for a month, this person recovers from the psychotic episode with medicine and with prayer. The person can scream, but you are with the medicine, with the prayer and little by little the person calms down. But you need a team and time. In the beginning, many people were here, everyone who had a psychotic episode in the Daime came here. There was always someone here with these people, they were never left alone.

Mary V. Seeman (2010) presented a case study of a young woman experiencing psychosis after participating in a rave, an all-night dance party, where Ecstasy or other drugs are consumed. In the paper, she describes three separate traditions or cultures: the rave culture, the ward culture of an inpatient psychiatric program, and the spirit-healing culture of the Philippines to show how these three collided in the life of this

woman, who was involved in all three, and to provide a better understanding of how, in this particular case, the psychotic episode emerged, how it was treated and the role of spiritual healing in her recovery. The young woman's engagement in rave parties was not approved by her family, who were traditional Philippine emigrating to Canada. However, for the young woman the raves represented a "universal movement of social togetherness" (2010: 492) where she was in a group of like-minded people and that provided her with a feeling of belonging, transformation and spiritual healing. Due to the family's disapproval, she was lying to her mother with whom she was particularly close after her father died for which she felt responsible for. The author points out that raves contain several elements that are comparable to a religious experience such as rhythm, sensory deprivation and stimulation, fasting, meditation, psychoactive substances, communal rituals, and which contribute to the feeling of connectedness and transcendence, while, at the same time, they can be harmful to vulnerable people by inducing interpersonal distance due to disapproval of family members or significant others (2010: 492-493). After the psychotic episode, the young woman was hospitalised in a psychiatric ward where structure and discipline were emphasized along with antipsychotic medication, psycho-education, and family involvement. However, the woman felt like an outsider in the institution and her state was getting worse and caused friction with the staff and co-patients. The higher her dose of medication, the more symptomatic she became (2010: 495). Her family decided to consult a traditional healer from the Philippines, which diagnosed the woman's symptoms being caused by an evil spell precipitating her illness. To heal her, the traditional healer utilised a number of object and symbols, amulets, incantations and prayers, rituals, and herbs to protect the woman from the evil forces. The healer also proposed she leaves the hospital to attend a family reunion, where a group prayer would give her the needed force to heal. In cooperation between the hospital and the healer, the woman finally felt understood and was able to gradually recover. The author suggests that the family ritual of spirit-healing in an "appropriate milieu, a modification of consciousness, the invocation of powerful imagery and reliance on shared meaning and belief" (2010: 498) played a vital role in the recovery of the young woman.

The case study presented by Seeman can be compared to Lucia's story presented earlier. Lucia's psychotic episode got triggered by the use of a psychoactive substance too, LSD-25 in her case, which was a consequence of deeper emotional trauma she was only partially consciously aware of. The western medication helped her to stop the acute psychosis and got her through the crisis, but after several months on the medication, she wanted to stop with it due to the strong negative effects (feeling drugged, not able to think, not able to move the body) she had from it. By doing psychotherapy and having the support of her mother she was able to gradually reduce the medication and finally stop using it. She got off of the medication, but she did not feel healed. When she got an opportunity to take ayahuasca in a safe setting, in a group she felt secure and taken care of, she chose to try it. It was a long-term process lasting over one year, where she took ayahuasca several times in the same group with the same facilitator. She had appropriate support offered whenever she needed it and in this process, she managed to deal with some emotional trauma she had experienced as a child. In her personal opinion, her healing process is still undergoing, whereas she

is able to live normal family life without the need to take pharmaceuticals and had never experienced another psychotic episode afterwards.

In Wonderland I participated in several ceremonies with ayahuasca/Daime, peyote and cannabis. During that time, I never witnessed any unusual or worrisome side-effects. People would experience nausea or vomit, but besides that, no problems would be experienced by the participants. Most of them were experienced users, they knew what to expect and how to manage the altered states. If newcomers were present the leaders of the ceremonies would make an interview with them to get information about their personal histories. Generally, even the newcomers were already known people. They came to the ceremony via other participants and, if they had any medical problems, those were known beforehand. Each ceremony leader had assistants, who were experienced users, who were taking care and be vigilant of who leaves and who enters the space where the ceremony has been done. If someone left the space to go to the toilet, for example, the assistants would pay attention to how long the person is outside. Usually, they would exit as well, keep their distance, but take care that the person does not distance themselves too far and bring them back. No one left the ceremony before the end of it. Each ceremony begun with all the participants present and ended with all of them too.

During my stay in the Stone House, I was only listening to Estela's past experiences with people experiencing psychotic episodes. Most often that was happening in the beginning, when Estela started her journey in the Stone House. She learned what to do in such cases while she was living in the Santo Daime community in Céu do Mapiá in the Brazilian rainforest. She remembered those times in one of our conversations where she explained:

In theory, psychotic people can't take Daime. When I started with the Daime we welcomed many people with psychosis in Mapiá, but then it got overflowed and all the crazy people went there. They said that people with mental health problems could not take Daime because, if not, the community would get destroyed by people who came there from all over Europe, bad people. There are still many of them hanging around there in Mapiá.

Estela stressed that in most cases the drug-induced psychosis disappears in three days. During these three days, the psychotic person is monitored closely, and precautions are taken so the person does not cause harm to himself/herself or someone else. Depending on the situation, the person is taken for a walk in the forest, to the chapel to pray, or spends time in the garden. The person is given a micro-dose of ayahuasca every day and rituals including praying and singing are done regularly. If after three days the person does not get any better, the person is taken to a medical doctor to abruptly stop the psychosis with medication.

In the first three days, the person does what he/she wants. We just take care that there is no harm done because sometimes there are people who can be aggressive. Santa María is not being used at this point. We utilize it later when it's over. During the psychotic episode, we use only Daime. Very little every day. Sometimes they scream. You keep your distance, but you also never leave them alone. Psychotic episodes don't manifest when there are no spectators. When there is nobody around, there is no psychosis. In one of the ceremonies here we had a very crazy person. After the ceremony, the man wanted to kill everyone, and he came to me and said, 'I want to kill

myself'. I was alone with him, I gave him Daime, kept calm and went to sleep. I didn't really sleep, but he thought I was sleeping. He started doing his things, but he stopped since there was no one watching him, he wasn't getting anyone's attention. Often these things happen because they capture people's attention. Let him scream, if he wants to scream, you just take care that no one gets hurt. It usually passes. Normally, when there is a serious psychotic episode as was this one, after three days it passes, and you can start working with the person. There are cases that you can't solve, so they end up at the doctor and with antipsychotics. When a certain amount of time passes, and the person doesn't recover you have to go to a doctor so that they stop it quickly. If not, the whole mental system degenerates, many cells can die and can't be recovered. The important thing is that they don't get harmed more. On the fourth day, you have to see a change, if you don't, you have to look for help outside. So far this has not happened here. [...] A micro-dose of Daime is given every day to people with mental health or drug abuse problems. One spoonful, like we did when we went for a walk in the forest. Every day you take a little, you go to pray, you go to the chapel that has a very clean very healing energy, you take them for a walk to see the nature, apart from their daily life. The most important thing here is to walk with the people. Take a little medicine, pray a little and then go outside, work in the garden. Many people heal by touching the ground. They can be busy the whole day with planting one lettuce, but it's good as long as they touch the ground and move and breathe. Psychotic episodes are imbalances. This is how we have done it here. I don't know if that has any official value or it really is like this. It is how we have been working whenever people came here, but it is not a rule. [...] In the beginning, a lot of people got trapped [in these states] and then they came here. Every night we got together and prayed and sang, so they were going through their crises like that. All the crazy people came here. When people were trapped, they needed a shock. We have great faith in the Daime. It will never harm you, but it will bring out what's in you. It brings it out, it doesn't create it.

The examples presented here can be explained in the context of symbolic healing. According to Dow (1986), there are three components of symbolic healing. The first component is that the healing takes place in a culturally meaningful context and is based on shared beliefs. The second component is the therapeutic relationship between the person and the healer. The third component is the person's specific situation. Through symbolic healing, the person can reformulate the personal experience and place it into a different context and give it meaning. It is important that the person is familiar and has trust in the practices utilised. The presence and support of family members, significant others, and other people emotionally close to the person reinforce the power of the symbolic healing.

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE FUTURE OF DRUG POLICY

I feel that the plants appear in the profound evolutionary changes that exist on earth. All these beings come to accompany this change so that we do not lose consciousness of who we are and to help us wake up. Of course, as they can wake us up, they prohibit them. It's bad for your health, you're going to go crazy, I don't know what... They take away your plants and give you morphine, methadone. That is not how it grows naturally. [...] Marijuana is planted in Spain since the Arabs. It is here for many years. It is from here. Marijuana taught us to be self-sufficient. She commands us to live in the countryside again, in contact with nature, planting our food and not depending on the system. A global moment was created. In the United States, people didn't go to war, there were millions of people at festivals in peace and love, with music... You travelled the world and you could always go to someone's house. All over the world. A large relationship among humans was being formed around the world. When things began to get powerful, the system prohibited plants. [...] They don't want people to be healthy and awake. Everything that can help to improve physical, mental and spiritual health is prohibited. [...] We have to go with our face, presenting that, not hiding. Because we are not doing anything wrong, we are not hurting anyone, we are not making ourselves rich, it is not a thing for personal gain, it is about everyone being well. Because if you're okay, I'm okay.
ESTELA

The fact, that most of the substances utilised in the rituals are scheduled substances and therefore illegal, is being actively addressed in Wonderland on occasion (see the Manifesto on page 90). According to my knowledge, only Mateo had legal trouble lasting three years before the case against him got dismissed. The prosecution charged him for production of an illegal substance with the intent to traffic and demanded a four to six years prison sentence. His sin was ordering two kilograms of coca leaf from Colombia to Spain in a time when coca tea is being sold in some shops in Barcelona. The theoretical yield of cocaine from two kilograms of leaf, that was seized from Mateo, would give around 10 grams if the alkaloid content in the leaf is around 1%²⁶. The legal team in ICEERS helped in Mateo's legal defence and he was acquitted, but all this time of uncertainty took a toll on his health, according to Estela.

I had a problem with *mama coca* (*Erythroxylum coca*). For several years I have consumed *mambe*, which is a way of using the coca leaf that is traditional in the area of the Colombian part of the Amazon. Basically, it is powdered coca leaf mixed with an alkaline part that is obtained from the ash of another Amazon leaf for the extraction of the alkaloid. So this plant was sent to me by mail from Colombia and here in the mail service in Spain, they detected it as a suspicious substance. I was taken by the police, I spent a night in police custody and then I had a judicial and criminal process because this plant is prohibited here in Spain. There are three plants that are prohibited and they are opium, coca and cannabis. In Colombia, the use of the coca leaf is authorized at the traditional and cultural level. It is completely normal for anyone to consume coca leaves, whether they are indigenous or not (westerners). I had a criminal and judicial trial of about 2 and a half or 3 years. [...] You always trust that everything will be fine because you are not doing anything wrong, but you can never have certainty how the person who processes you interprets the law. In fact, I was always certain that everything was going to be okay, that I was not doing anything wrong. I was not attacking anyone, wanting to indoctrinate anyone with the plant. It was exclusively for personal use. I always trusted a lot in

26 Retrieved on October 19th 2020 from Erowid: <https://erowid.org/archive/rhodium/chemistry/coca2cocaine.html>

the spirit of the plant, which is something that the indigenous people teach you a lot, and what it teaches you and the protection that the spirit can give you. In the end, everything went well, I was acquitted of all charges. The judge asked the tax authorities to drop all the charges because he didn't find any reasons to maintain the accusation of drug trafficking and damage to public health. There were no grounds to uphold the accusation. [...] I still use *mambe* when I feel like I need it.

Mateo's story had a happy ending, and it was due to his case that we learned about the Wonderland community, but it is also an example of how contemporary drug policy can ruin people's lives, criminalise and stigmatise innocent people. Not everyone is as lucky as Mateo was. During the time I was conducting fieldwork, the Dutch court prohibited the use of ayahuasca as a sacrament in the Santo Daime religion. Several indigenous leaders were detained worldwide because they were travelling with their sacred medicines. The increasing interest in psychoactive plants and substances, the globalisation and commercialisation of them, are making an increasing number of people – from indigenous peoples to medical professionals and westerners who seek pleasure, healing and well-being²⁷ – vulnerable to possible criminal prosecution (Sánchez-Avilés and Bouso, 2015). It is necessary to face these emerging complex scenarios, not any more as philosophical issues, but as lived and felt realities that need to be addressed pragmatically and in a meaningful intercultural dialogue (May, 2017; Aronovich, 2017).

Psychoactive plants (e.g. coca leaf, cannabis, poppy plant) or their active compounds (e.g. DMT, mescaline, psilocybin) are prohibited by law due to their assumed harmfulness and a high dependency risk, as well as no medical value. Scientific evidence, however, suggests that the above-mentioned substances have a low abuse and dependency risk (Nutt, King and Phillips, 2010), which is what I have seen among Wonderland's inhabitants and discussed in length in the previous chapters. Generally, substance abuse is a behaviour that affects only a minority of users (Comas Arnau, 2019: 211; Müller and Schumann, 2011; Sullivan and Hagen, 2002), which is in direct contradiction with the international drug control system that is based on the assumption that drugs pose a danger to the whole society and must therefore be criminalised, controlled, prohibited, and prosecuted. Moreover, several psychoactive substances, particularly psychedelics, exhibit potential benefits for maintaining mental health (Jungaberle, Thal, Zeuch, *et al.*, 2018; Begola and Schillerstrom, 2019; Nichols, 2016; Oña, Kohek, Massaguer, *et al.*, 2019), which is what I have observed among Wonderland's inhabitants as well. Furthermore, among tribally organised people, where the ritual use of psychoactive plants is integrated into the society, no substance abuse is being documented (Aberle, 1966; Dobkin de Rios, 1984; Furst, 1972) even when the substance is used nonceremonially (Myerhoff, 1983: 220). It has been shown before that social rituals play an important role in safety and efficacy of psychoactive substances not only in indigenous communities but in western contexts (Grund, Kaplan and Vries, 1993), which reinforces the need for legal integration of ritual use of psychoactive plants into society at large (Martínez-Oró, Apud, Scuro, *et al.*, 2020).

27 For more information follow the work of the Ayahuasca Defense Fund, a project run by ICEERS: <http://www.defendayahuasca.org/>

Contemporary drug policy is based on social norms and power relationships rather than on actual pharmacological effects of the substances (Kushner, 2010). The socio-cultural components of substance use and the frequent intertwining of medical, religious and recreational use are being largely neglected by decision-makers, including its potential to induce pleasure (O'Malley and Valverde, 2004) and its positive social role as “markers of identity, occasions of conviviality, talismans of faith” (Courtwright, 2012: 489). Biased perception of the user communities, global political pressure and medicalised western health-care system are prevailing issues in this field. Legal barriers, which prevent access to these plants and compounds on one hand and cause mass incarceration on the other, are based on “demonization of people who use drugs, and unscientific notions of addiction that dominate the public mind” (Burke-Shyne, Csete, Wilson, *et al.*, 2017: 247). Furthermore, prohibition is not only denying access to these plants and compounds but also paralyses research. While international control bodies such as the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) and Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) are starting to acknowledge evidence-based public health measures on a declarative level, there is still a great gap between current approaches and an objective health- and human rights-oriented drug policy, which embraces the idea that these plants and compounds can be beneficial for human health and wellbeing (Burke-Shyne, Csete, Wilson, *et al.*, 2017; Bouso and Sánchez-Avilés, 2020). What is needed in drug policy and democratic society is a non-hierarchical consideration of evidence and the recognition of personal liberties of all people to express our nature and experiment with our lives as long as we do not harm others. In the first place, drug policy should give us, both men and women, the liberty to govern our affairs and make our own decisions. Policies must take recommendations of the scientists into account, but also the feelings and emotions of the people to ensure success (Thoumi, 2014).

On my journey through Wonderland, I was learning not only about the ritual use of psychoactive plants, as I expected upon arrival, but about how to be in the world in attunement with the body, the mind, the spirit, and the environment. As I was learning about the inhabitants, I was learning about myself. The Wonderland community is, more than anything else, seeking a way of life that brings happiness, health, good relationships, and good conditions for living – a way of living that heals the individual, the society and the planet from suffering, guilt and pain. Wonderland’s inhabitants found their place under the sun in a global tribe that is incorporating ancient wisdom, traditions and rituals into western society to heal the individual, recover identity, strengthen social bonds and enhance functional behaviours that develop respectful and responsible communities. Prayers and ceremonies are integral parts of the Wonderland way of life, and in most of them, psychoactive plants are used as guides in the quest for answers, inspiration, and/or healing.

Final conclusions

The conclusions that can be drawn from the study are several. First, it shows that socially integrated and accepted use of psychoactive plants does not pose a threat to public health. On the contrary, it is decreasing not only stigma and marginalisation of users, but the potential harms these substances could cause. Secondly, The rituals have a double function. One is the spiritual and healing function and the other is ensuring safety and control of substance use regarding quality, dose, as well as sett and setting. The guardians of Wonderland are teaching the inhabitants how to use these plants to obtain the desired beneficial effects and minimise the potential harms. I have never witnessed serious adverse reaction at any time during fieldwork, as many existing studies suggest. Several inhabitants reported a series of benefits they attained from the ritual use of psychoactive plants and/or an extended stay in one of the community places (Stone House or Water House). Most commonly reported benefits were a more positive outlook on life, disengagement in addictive behaviour, healing from trauma, establishing more meaningful relationships, having a healthier lifestyle, gaining more awareness about one's actions, enhancing pro-environmental sentiments, introducing spirituality in their lives, changing their priorities and values in life, and other.

The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), the United Nations' (UN) entity that interprets international drug control treaties and evaluates compliance by state parties, considers the use of psychoactive plants in the western culture as non-authentic and non-legitimate. The board warns that the growing popularity of these plants outside of their original context is a case of drug users being taken advantage of and that the spiritual elements of these drugs are promoted only to help conceal the reality that these substances are being consumed only as another way of "getting high" (INCB, 2010 and 2012). Although the INCB confirms that no plant or plant-based preparation containing psychoactive ingredients scheduled by the 1971 Convention is subject to control (INCB, 2010 and 2012), new ritual uses of psychoactive plants are regarded with mistrust, while the motives and benefits reported by those who participate in these rituals and ceremonies are discredited (Sánchez-Avilés and Bouso, 2015). The international agencies, by questioning the legitimacy and authenticity of ritualistic and spiritual uses outside of their original contexts, disregard viable uses that have emerged in modern communities. After all, all traditions are invented (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983). Culture is not a static, non-changing phenomenon, and "the cultural history may well be written as a history of borrowing and lending, inspiration and imitation, amalgamation and hybridization of cultural skills and meanings" (Eriksen, 2007). All social encounters involve processes of hybridization or creolization, diffusion, colonization, innovation, imitation, syncretism, etc. (Harris, 1995), where various symbols and practices are integrated and adapted to the present time and place, as it is the case in Wonderland. The question remains: What are we, as a global community, willing to accept as a "good state of consciousness" (Metzinger, 2006) and what do we consider as well-being? Do we want to integrate the concept of *buen vivir* – "a way of doing things that is community-centric, ecologically-balanced and culturally-sensitive" (Balch, 2013) – into the worldview of the western society? The global

“de-growth” movement with its focus on ecological sustainability, social equity and anti-consumerism (Flipo and Schneider, 2008) is aiming in that direction. On a micro-scale, Wonderland is an example of *buen vivir* in the midsts of western capitalism. There the question is not “if”, but of “how”.

In Catalonia, we can find spaces in which these practices are increasingly considered legitimate or at least a matter of discussion. Psychoactive plants are viewed positively in a growing number of places and used ritually by an increasingly diverse public. Even relevant public institutions in Catalonia, such as the Health Department of the Generalitat and Casa América (American House), have hosted events on this subject, gathering speakers and experts from multiple disciplines to speak before large audiences. Such a dialogue between disciplines and analytical perspectives articulates and discusses different positions and points of view that can advance new research questions and hypotheses (Esteban, 2006). Anthropology, in particular, can explore how global processes affect local communities and help counteract three dominant trends in public policy. Firstly, it can challenge the paradigm of positivism, which treats public policy as existing outside of the sociocultural context and incorporate a more reflexive approach to policy. Secondly, it can highlight ideological discourses and provide a counterweight. And thirdly, it can surpass dichotomous frameworks that obscure the processes behind public policies by analysing the actors and activities in the construction of policies (Wedel, Shore, Feldman, *et al.*, 2005).

The future of drug policy depends on the education of regulatory bodies about the shortcomings of current policies and it is the responsibility of researchers to do it (Fotiou, 2020). We need a paradigm shift that will bridge science and spirituality/religion, we need to legitimise different knowledge systems and protect them as “cultural heritage, but also within the frameworks of the right to science and the right to health, in compliance with multiple international treaties and United Nations declarations” (Bouso and Sánchez-Avilés, 2020: 149).

At the end of the 19th century, the white man banned the feasts (*potlach*) and the dances (*Sun Dance*) of the Native American communities to suppress their culture and force assimilation to Christian-European culture. It was only in the 1950s when Canada lifted the ban and even later, in the 1970s, in the United States that the indigenous regained sovereignty and basic civil liberties. Soon after the ban the anthropologist Franz Boas declared the government's policy as an utter failure:

The second reason for the discontent among the Indians is a law that was passed, some time ago, forbidding the celebrations of festivals. The so-called *potlatch* of all these tribes hinders the single families from accumulating wealth. It is the great desire of every chief and even of every man to collect a large amount of property, and then to give a great *potlatch*, a feast in which all is distributed among his friends, and, if possible, among the neighboring tribes. These feasts are so closely connected with the religious ideas of the natives, and regulate their mode of life to such an extent, that the Christian tribes near Victoria have not given them up. Every present received at a potlatch has to be returned at another potlatch, and a man who would not give his feast in due time would be considered as not paying his debts. Therefore the law is not a good one, and can not be enforced without causing general discontent. Besides, the Government is unable to enforce it. The settlements are so numerous, and the Indian agencies so large, that there is nobody to prevent the Indians doing whatsoever they like (Boas, 1888: 635-636).

What Boas wrote over a century ago about banning *potlach*, can be applied to contemporary global drug policy. The use of psychoactive substances has always been part of human society and no government in the world can enforce laws that will prevent people from using them if they please to do so. Prohibition did not eliminate drug use, on the contrary, it marginalised and criminalised users, it increased violence and deaths, and it made substance use a secretive and dangerous endeavour. The prohibition of psychoactive plants and substances is just another expression of centuries-long suppression of the Other and has little to do with scientific evidence. The female emancipation movements, the indigenous rights movements, the environmental protection movements and the anti-prohibition movements are in its core fighting for the same recognition of basic human rights.

In the end, Wonderland is yet another of such movements that aim to transform our human perceptions, attitudes, and practices related to health and well-being, as well as ethical and egalitarian recognition of interconnectedness between individual, society and nature, like several other cultural movements such as feminism, organic farming movements, alternative healing movements, spiritual movements, and various other philosophical, scientific, or religious movements (Metzner, 2006: 258). Wonderland represents the intersection between indigenous/traditional and western/capitalist way of life and is a sphere where different systems and traditions coexist. It is the bridge between two worlds and a learning ground of true intercultural dialogue between the two worlds, which in fact is just one.

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ANNEXES

Annex 1 El Virolai

Rosa d'abril, Marena de la serra,
 de Montserrat estel:
 il·lumineu la catalana terra,
 guieu-nos cap al Cel.

Amb serra d'or és angedlets serraten
 etxos llurons per fer-vos un palau.
 Reina del Cel que els Serafins baicaren,
 deu-nos abric dins vostre muntell blau.

Alba naixent d'estrelles coronada,
 Ciutat de Déu que somnià David,
 a vostres peus la lluna s'és posada,
 el sol sos raigs vos dona per vestir.

Deis catalans sempre sereu Princesa,
 deis espanyols Estrella d'Orient,
 sigueu peis fors pilar de fortalesa,
 peis pecadors el port de salvament.

Doneu consol a qui la pàtria engorera
 sens veure mai els cims de Montserrat,
 en terra i mar oïu a qui us implora,
 torneu a Déu els cors que l'han deixat.

Mística Font de l'aigua de la vida,
 rugeu del Cel al cor de mon país;
 dons i virtuts deixeu-li per florida;
 feu-ne, si us plau, el vostre paradís.

Ditxosos ulls, Maria, els que us vegem!
 ditxós el cor que s'obri a vostra llum!
 Roser del Cel, que els serafins vollegen,
 a ma omicció doneu vostre perfum.

Cedre genil, del Líbano corona,
 Arbre d'entens, Palmera de Sion,
 el fruit signat que vostre amor ens dona
 és Jesucrist, el Redemptor del món.

Amb vostre nom comença nostra fístioria
 i és Montserrat el nostre Sinai:
 sien per tots l'escala de la glòria
 etxos penyals coberts de romaní.

Rosa d'abril, Marena de la serra,
 de Montserrat estel:
 il·lumineu la catalana terra,
 guieu-nos cap al Cel.

Moderato maestoso

Tornada

f Ro - sa d'a - bril, Mo - re - na de la ser - ra,
 de Mont - ser - rat es - tel: il - lu - mi - neu la ca - ta - la - na
 ter - ra, gui - eu - nos cap al Cel, gui - eu - nos cap al Cel.

Andante espressivo

Estrofa

p Amb ser-ra d'or els an-ge-lets ser - ra - ren, amb ser-ra
 d'or, ei-xos tu - rons per fer - vos un pa - lau, per fer - vos
 un pa - lau; Rei - na del Cel que els Se - ra - fins bai -
 xa - ren, Rei - na del Cel, deu-nos a-bric dins vos-tre man-tell
 blau, dins vos - tre man - tell blau.

The image shows a musical score for the song 'El Virolai'. It is divided into two main sections: 'Tornada' and 'Estrofa'. The 'Tornada' section is marked 'Moderato maestoso' and features a melody in G major with a 2/4 time signature. The lyrics are: 'Ro - sa d'a - bril, Mo - re - na de la ser - ra, de Mont - ser - rat es - tel: il - lu - mi - neu la ca - ta - la - na ter - ra, gui - eu - nos cap al Cel, gui - eu - nos cap al Cel.' The 'Estrofa' section is marked 'Andante espressivo' and features a melody in G major with a 3/8 time signature. The lyrics are: 'Amb ser-ra d'or els an-ge-lets ser - ra - ren, amb ser-ra d'or, ei-xos tu - rons per fer - vos un pa - lau, per fer - vos un pa - lau; Rei - na del Cel que els Se - ra - fins bai - xa - ren, Rei - na del Cel, deu-nos a-bric dins vos-tre man-tell blau, dins vos - tre man - tell blau.' The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics (f, p, pp), articulation (accents, slurs), and phrasing marks.

ANNEX 2



MANIFIESTO DEL MOVIMIENTO CIRCULO DE MUJERES UNIDAS POR LA LIBERACIÓN UNIVERSAL DE LA CANNABIS”

En nombre del rescate espiritual de las
Tradiciones y Ceremonias Ancestrales,
como legítimas defensoras de la
naturaleza como dadora de salud,
declaramos que esta es una,
Planta Sagrada y Curadora.

Manifestamos nuestro compromiso
De defender su correcto uso.
Como Planta Entéogena, conecta con el ser interno, el ser Divino.
Como Planta de Poder, despierta la fuerza espiritual.
Como Planta de Luz, nos impregna de su vibración.
Como Planta Curadora, sana dando oxígeno al cuerpo.

Su plano es el espiritual y su canal, es el corazón.
Conecta con el sonido cósmico.
La planta es curadora, libera y conecta al femenino,
devuelve la conciencia de sí, generando buena disposición.
Se usa la planta completa: su raíz, el tronco,
las ramas, sus hojas, el polen, su flor, olor y humo.

En su buen uso es disposición de atender, de silenciarse,
De escuchar y percibir. Da como resultado el entendimiento
Para ayudar podemos: educar en familia, activar grupos de oración,
de conexión con el cuerpo y el espíritu, grupos académicos y grupos de acción.

La **Cannabis Sativa** es, la más universal de las Plantas Sagradas.

Al estar marginada de las leyes, cae en manos inescrupulosas,
dificultando educar sobre, su buen uso. Solo bajo el amparo de la ley
podemos protegerla. Rechazamos las leyes que penalizan el uso de esta planta.
Pedimos a los gobiernos del mundo, que no la restrinjan.
Llamamos a trabajar para su liberación.
Llamamos a vivir y difundir, cultura de PAZ.

Instalemos la bandera de la PAZ en nuestras casas
Convocamos a todas las mujeres del planeta,
para que junto a su familia, cuiden del buen uso de esta Planta Sagrada.
Con este manifiesto, lanzamos el movimiento...

**“Circulo de Mujeres Unidas por la
Liberación Universal de la Cannabis”**




ACCIONES A DESARROLLAR

- 1. Difundir mundialmente este manifiesto.**
- 2. Acompañar la campaña para el libre cultivo en escala restringida.**
- 3. Difundir sus efectos positivos, promoviendo el tema dentro de la familia y activar una amplia discusión social sobre el tema, partiendo desde la familia.**
- 4. Organizar encuentros, con las madres que son favorables a su liberación, para educar y educarse, sobre el uso curador de ella.**
- 5. Organizar grupos voluntarios de estudio en investigación académica y terapéutica. Promoviendo debates jurídicos y científicos que, respalden la regulación de su liberación.**
- 6. En aquellos países donde su uso está liberado parcialmente, promover eventos con su uso ceremonial.**
- 7. Conformar grupos de oración que celen espiritualmente, para que ella cumpla su misión de reflejar la luz interna de cada persona.**

“Circulo de Mujeres Unidas por la Liberación Universal de la Cannabis”

¡¡¡Movimiento de mujeres unidas por la planta de poder cannabis,
la gran fuerza universal,
en el servicio de trabajar por su liberación!!!

Annex 3

		<h1 style="margin: 0;">Certificate of Analysis</h1>																																																						
<p>346 York Road, Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory K0K1X0 6137074538 Laboratory Extension 108</p>		<p>Date Received July 19th, 2019 Maja Konek Flower LOT #190719-CS-02-MK Date of Analysis July 22nd, 2019</p>																																																						
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<p><small>Photo represents sample received by the Laboratory only.</small></p>																																																								
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Annex 4

NIMCA Lab Area Percent Report

Data Path : C:\msdchem\1\data\Further Data\Terpenes\
Data File : MK-A-1.D
Acq On : 27 Jul 2019 10:06
Operator :
Sample : HS terpenes
Misc : 0.1 gram in HS 20ml vial
ALS Vial : 1 Sample Multiplier: 250

Integration Parameters: autoint1.e
Integrator: ChemStation

Method : C:\msdchem\1\methods\TERPENES-P-3.M
Title : terpenes

Signal : TIC: MK-A-1.D\DATA.MS

peak #	R.T. min	first scan	max scan	last scan	PK TY	peak height	corr. area	corr. % max.	% of total	
1	1.813	253	277	310	BB	8403625	226245650	100.00%	59.574%	alpha-pinene
2	2.050	341	367	396	BB 3	255119	7146717	3.16%	1.882%	camphene
3	2.390	468	497	520	BV	2210419	53236088	23.53%	14.018%	beta-pinene
4	2.492	520	535	562	VB	553978	11243705	4.97%	2.961%	myrcene
5	3.032	720	741	768	BB 3	840096	16058099	7.10%	4.228%	limonene
6	3.277	812	834	859	BB	1456970	25018315	11.06%	6.588%	ocimene
7	4.560	1301	1322	1347	BB 2	255264	4862067	2.15%	1.280%	fenchone
8	8.285	2710	2739	2761	BB 4	923366	21734342	9.61%	5.723%	caryophyllene
9	8.618	2846	2866	2882	BB 3	196062	3277267	1.45%	0.863%	geraniol
10	8.830	2917	2947	2970	BB 3	226488	4570194	2.02%	1.203%	humulene
11	9.964	3360	3378	3403	BB 4	363490	6381445	2.82%	1.680%	maaliene

Sum of corrected areas: 379773888

TERPENES-P-3.M Sat Jul 27 10:23:21 2019

Annex 5



Certificate of Analysis

346 York Road, Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory
 K0K1X0
 6137074538
 Laboratory Extension 108

Date Received July 19th, 2019
 Maja Kohek
 Flower
 LOT #190719-CS-03-MK
 Date of Analysis July 22nd, 2019

B



Photo represents sample received by the Laboratory only.

Cannabinoid Analysis

Analyte	%w/w	mg/g
CBG	0.22414	2.2414
CBD	0.01002	0.1002
CBDa	0.11454	1.1454
THCV	0.02792	0.2792
CBC	0.04395	0.4395
CBN	0.04010	0.4010
Δ8-THC	0.11271	1.1271
Δ9-THC	2.21548	22.1548
THCa	12.47768	124.7768

Microbial Analysis

Not Performed

Analyte	Limit (CFU/g)	Mass	Status
Aerobic Bacteria	10 ⁶		
Bile-Tolerant Gram-Negative Bacteria	10 ³		
E. Coli	Not detected		
Salmonella	Not detected		
Total Yeast and Mold	10 ⁴		

Total THC = THCa *0.877 + Δ9-THC

Total CBD = CBDa*0.877 + CBD

n/d = Less than 0.001% w/w or not detected in sample analysis

Pesticide Residue Analysis	Microbial Analysis
Water Activity	Foreign Material

13.15841% Total Δ9-THC	0.11047% Total CBD
----------------------------------	------------------------------

Angela Marineau
 Analytical Technologist

Ethan Holder
 Biotechnologist

All pass limits are as specified by the American Pharmacopeia. All samples are tested according to methodology produced by the NIMCA Laboratory. Values reported relate to the product tested only. NIMCA and Legacy420 do not make any claims regarding the safety and other risks associated with any detected or non-detected compounds.

Annex 6

NIMCA Lab Area Percent Report

Data Path : C:\msdchem\1\data\Further Data\Terpenes\
Data File : MK-B-1.D
Acq On : 27 Jul 2019 10:39
Operator :
Sample : HS terpenes
Misc : 0.1 gram in HS 20ml vial
ALS Vial : 1 Sample Multiplier: 250

Integration Parameters: autoint1.e
Integrator: ChemStation

Method : C:\msdchem\1\methods\TERPENES-P-3.M
Title : terpenes




Signal : TIC: MK-B-1.D\DATA.MS

peak #	R.T. min	first scan	max scan	last scan	PK TY	peak height	corr. area	corr. % max.	% of total	
1	1.812	253	277	312	BB	6756151	179659280	100.00%	55.653%	alpha-pinene
2	2.054	338	369	395	BB 2	261002	6873633	3.83%	2.129%	camphene
3	2.389	469	496	521	BV 2	1842716	44808074	24.94%	13.880%	beta-pinene
4	2.492	521	536	562	VB 2	509545	10346217	5.76%	3.205%	myrcene
5	3.032	721	741	763	BB	1257004	23468283	13.06%	7.270%	limonene
6	3.277	813	834	858	BB 2	1083870	18403079	10.24%	5.701%	ocimene
7	4.560	1300	1322	1347	BB 4	172571	3321552	1.85%	1.029%	fenchone
8	8.285	2707	2739	2761	BB 3	967154	22116404	12.31%	6.851%	caryophyllene
9	8.617	2847	2866	2881	BB 3	189521	3032893	1.69%	0.939%	geraniol
10	8.830	2917	2947	2970	BB 3	236829	4564082	2.54%	1.414%	humulene
11	9.964	3357	3378	3401	BB 4	348953	6229722	3.47%	1.930%	maaliene

Sum of corrected areas: 322823220

TERPENES-P-3.M Sat Jul 27 11:01:42 2019

Annex 7

		<h1 style="margin: 0;">Certificate of Analysis</h1>																																																					
<p>346 York Road, Tyendinga Mohawk Territory KOKIX0 6137074538 Laboratory Extension 108</p>		<p>Date Received July 19th, 2019 Maja Kohek Flower LOT #190719-CS-04-MK Date of Analysis July 22nd, 2019</p>																																																					
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<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; width: 150px; margin: 0 auto;"> <p style="color: red; font-weight: bold; font-size: 1.2em;">4.01311%</p> <p>Total Δ9-THC</p> </div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; width: 150px; margin: 0 auto;"> <p style="color: red; font-weight: bold; font-size: 1.2em;">7.96925%</p> <p>Total CBD</p> </div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; width: 150px; margin: 0 auto;"> <p style="text-align: center;">Pesticide Residue Analysis</p> </div>																																																					
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Annex 8

NIMCA Lab Area Percent Report

Data Path : C:\msdchem\1\data\Further Data\Terpenes\
Data File : MK-C-1.D
Acq On : 27 Jul 2019 11:18
Operator :
Sample : HS terpenes
Misc : 0.1 gram in HS 20ml vial
ALS Vial : 1 Sample Multiplier: 250

Integration Parameters: autoint1.e
Integrator: ChemStation

Method : C:\msdchem\1\methods\TERPENES-P-3.M
Title : terpenes

Signal : TIC: MK-C-1.D\DATA.MS

peak #	R.T. min	first scan	max scan	last scan	PK TY	peak height	corr. area	corr. % max.	% of total	
1	1.812	225	277	313	BB	6683094	179875102	100.00%	60.782%	alpha-pinene
2	2.389	468	496	521	BV 2	2042198	49756469	27.66%	16.813%	camphene
3	2.492	521	535	561	VB 3	262527	5412680	3.01%	1.829%	myrcene
4	3.032	721	741	764	BV	1033269	19733218	10.97%	6.668%	limonene
5	3.277	807	834	859	BB 2	703455	12952152	7.20%	4.377%	ocimene
6	3.895	1021	1069	1094	BB 2	681985	11902061	6.62%	4.022%	terpinene
7	8.286	2710	2740	2760	BB 2	590681	12604449	7.01%	4.259%	caryophyllene
8	9.964	3358	3378	3401	BB 3	213980	3697643	2.06%	1.249%	maaliene

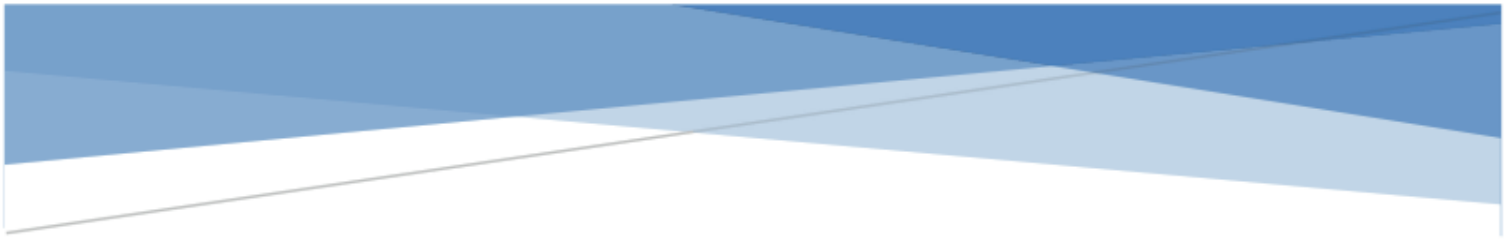
Sum of corrected areas: 295933776

TERPENES-P-3.M Sat Jul 27 11:34:49 2019

Annex 9

Data File Name: C:\MSDCHEM\1\DATA\PESTICIDES\Snapshot\MK-POOL-PESTICIDES-1.D
Acquired Date: 27 Jul 2019 12:20
Method Name: C:\msdchem\1\methods\Pesticide-P-2-sim.M
Sample Name: Pooled A,B & C MK samples

Comp #	Compound Name	RT (min)	Area	Amount	Units	Qvalue
1	alpha-bhc	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
2	Benzeneacetic acid, 4-chloro-.alpha.-(1-	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
3	Benzeneacetic acid, 4-chloro-.alpha.-(1-	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
4	2-[2-(1-Naphthyl)vinyl]-3-(4-nitrophenyl	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
5	Coumaphos	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
6	Tributyrin	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
7	Phenothrin	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
8	001759-58-6 Cyclopentane, 1,3-dimethyl-,	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
9	2-(2-Ethoxyphenyl)-(7H)1,3,4-thiadiazolo	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
10	lindane	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
11	1-(1-Ethyl-2,3-dimethyl-cyclopent-2-enyl	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
12	1,4-Benzenediol, 2-methoxy- \$\$ 2-Methoxy	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
13	105882-92-6 1,2-Ethanediamine, N,N,N'-tr	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
14	trans-lindane	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
15	aldrin	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
16	2H-1,3-Benzoxazine, 6-chloro-3,4-dihydro	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
17	Stirofos	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
18	heptachlor epoxide	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
19	Endosulfan I	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
20	1,9-Dioxa-4,12-diazadispiro[4.2.4.2]tetr	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
21	4-(Trifluoromethyl)acetophenone	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
22	chlordane	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
23	cis-chlordane	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
24	pp-dde	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
25	endosulfan II	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
26	Fenthion	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
27	endrin aldehyde	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
28	endrin ketone	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
29	000584-79-2 Bioallethrin	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
30	endosulfan sulfate	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
31	Methoprene	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
32	068614-67-5 3,6-Dibutyl-1,2-dihydro-1,2,	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
33	004401-71-2 2,4(1H,3H)-Pyrimidinedione,	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
34	Pirimicarb	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
35	Benzene, 4-chloro-2-fluoro-1-methoxy- \$\$	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
36	Phosphoric acid, 2,2-dichlorovinyl dimet	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
37	2,6-Difluorobenzoic acid \$\$ Benzoic acid	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
38	002593-15-9 1,2,4-Thiadiazole, 5-ethoxy-	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
39	.beta.-Mevinphos	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
40	1,3-Cyclopentadiene, 1,2,3,4,5,5-hexachl	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
41	020797-56-2 2,4,6-Trimethylmandelic acid	0	0	0	ug/ml	0
42	000061-80-3 Zoxazolamine	0	0	0	ug/ml	0



Annex 10

Data Summary Report
Prepared for Maja Kohek
by Dr. Paul Hornby
(Chief Scientific Advisor Laboratory Quality Control, NIMCA)



Submitted by: A. PAUL HORNBY, PH.D.
Chief Scientific Advisor NIMCA

Date: July 2020
Rev 1 - July 16, 2020

Introduction:

We are an Indigenous laboratory located at a dispensary in the heart of the Mohawk Nation in Ontario, Canada. The primary instruments in our laboratory are High Pressure Liquid Chromatography (HPLC) and Gas Chromatography/Mass Spectroscopy (GCMS), that are used mostly to meet the quality control parameters set out by Health Canada for the processing and sale of cannabis on the legal market. Health Canada set standards and legal limits for various quality control parameters, these include:

Standardization; determination of the amounts of various cannabinoids: delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (Δ -9-THC), cannabidiol (CBD), cannabinol (CBN), etc. Essentially we are looking for the most abundant cannabinoids present in any cannabis; strain, extract, edible, or vaporizer fluid, plus other preparations. These are called cannabinoid profiles. Our head scientist (Dr. Paul Hornby) has been doing this type of cannabis profiling and quality control, for more than 20 years, and claims more than 20,000 cannabinoid profiles in his data banks. He has been terpene profiling for a lesser time but also has accumulated much data regarding terpene profiles and it is with pesticide analysis under contract with Agriculture Canada, that Dr. Hornby had his early beginnings with analysis by GC/MS, that took the laboratory to a new level in analytical capability and this was governed by rigorous QC checks with split samples with the Government agency, to maintain standards and quality of result.

To summarize, the testing laboratory performing the work done for Maja Kohek was done with the correct equipment and by experienced personnel.

The analytical methodology used was modified from that recommended by Health Canada or developed in-house and validated by third party labs, such as the department of medicine, University of Ljubljana or Lumir Labs, Tel Aviv, Israel. Both of these institutes are collaborators with the NIMCA Lab, helping to validate methodology and results.

We will run through and summarize the accumulated data collected from the samples submitted by Maja Kohek in and accepted chronology of reporting: Cannabinoid Profiles, Terpene profiles, pesticides, and mention of heavy metals and microbiology.

Cannabinoid Profiles:

To be honest, and in no way disrespectful, the cannabinoid profiles of all the flower samples submitted were as they would have appeared in the sixties, with roughly 10% Δ -9-THC and minimal CBD <1%. These concentrations would not be acceptable for the legal marketplace today, where at least 20% Δ -9-THC is required by dispensary owners in Canada.

The strains (not determined) appeared to be grown outdoors and not under ideal conditions. Accounting for the low THC amount and the relatively less abundant terpene profile in terms of concentration. The THC concentration, may be useful for pain relief, anxiolytic and anti-depressant properties.

Interesting was the relatively high abundance of Tetrahydrocannabivarin (THCV) in sample A, making this particular cannabis useful for treating everything from diabetes to spasticity. THCV, is a potent anti-inflammatory making it useful for treating neurodegenerative disease and seizure disorder plus anxiety, panic attacks and is showing promise in the treatment of PTSD.

THCV is not typically an abundant cannabinoid in any strain. Also to mention the relative abundance of cannabigerol (CBG) in flower sample A, making these strains useful for treating inflammatory disease. Strains high in CBG will be beneficial treating conditions such as inflammatory bowel disease, Crohn's disease, and cancer.

In terms of medical value, Δ -9-THC is by far the most studied, CBD running a close second and catching up and definitely the most salable at this time in history.

Like most cannabinoids Δ -9-THC and CBD, possess anti-inflammatory, anti-emetic, and anti-depressant properties and bring about pain relief and sleep. And they do this by activating receptors of the, newly discovered, Endocannabinoid System. This system is poorly named because in its function it is actually the 'regulator of regulators', bringing into homeostatic balance to systems such as the CNS, immune system and endocrine systems. And in so doing is treating systems rather than symptoms. Making cannabis a unique type of medicine, with few side-effects and toxicities.

One strain had what we call a 50:50 at a 1:1 profile, meaning roughly equal Δ -9-THC and CBD. The strains are useful medically for seizure disorder, pain and depression. And for those with low Δ -9-THC tolerance.

Terpene Profiles:

As with the cannabinoid profiles the terpene profiles were rather mediocre, as well. Over the past thirty years all of the cross-breeding and hybridization of cannabis has led to more potent medical strains and less pleasant recreational strains. It's the synergy between the cannabinoids and the terpenes that makes for the cannabis experience (the high).

For the recreational market we are often looking for strains high in limonene or myrcene, characteristic of Sativas and Indicas, respectively. Limonene in combination with Δ -9-THC brings about a stimulatory effect (considered a "head high") and high concentrations of Myrcene, bring about a sedatory effect (considered a "body high").

In the medical realm, what we are often looking for is a relatively equal abundance of both Limonene and Myrcene. This indicates a cross between an Indica and a Sativa, bringing the best of both worlds into the medicine.

If we're looking for a strain that will put you to sleep, best to choose a high Myrcene strain or Limonene for an anti-depressant, like effect.

Again in the medical realm, often we like to see a high Caryophyllene content. Since in combination with Δ -9-THC or CBD has powerful anti-inflammatory effects, helps for pain, mood-disorder and seizures.

Pesticides:

None were detected and this is not uncommon in the cannabis. Dare to say that cannabis growers are more environmentally conscious than commercial growers of corn, for example. Pesticides are the farmers choice, not the plants and, as a rule, we rarely find pesticide contamination in Cannabis flower or extract and, indeed, concentrates.

Even rarer, in our experience, is heavy metal contamination. In more than twenty we have only found one sample with "Lead" contamination. This came from well water that was run through lead pipes on its way to the garden.

The source of the cannabis samples and the growing methodology used did not suggest heavy metal contamination. Our quick colorimetric test for, the heavy metal Arsenic came back negative in three separate tests.
Microbiology

All of the samples submitted by MK, were visually inspected for microbiological contamination. The greatest offender being mold that can normally be detected with by an experienced eye or microscope. We did not find any microbiological contamination in any of the samples.

In conclusion, this data summary report has been prepared to serve a number of purposes. Firstly I was asked by Ms. Kohek to write it based on the fact that my Ph.D. training was in human pathology, resulting in my always taking a medical approach to cannabis. Therefore as well as studying the profiles I also study the medical effect (efficacy and safety). Most of my interest, over the years, had been pain issues and seizure disorder.

We are aware that analysts do not traditionally interpret results but as a result of my background and experience was best suited for the task.

In a final summation of the cannabis samples submitted by Maja Kohek, They were definitely of medical value and could be used to treat a number of different disorders and contained no detectable contaminants. Meaning: Safe and predictably efficacious.



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