



KEYS TO
DECOLONIZING

PLANT MEDICINE CULTURE

By Lorna Liana

Cover Art By Luis Tamani

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Introduction

Dear Ally in Training,

Congratulations for having the courage to undertake the uncomfortable and difficult work of deeply examining your relationship with neocolonialism in plant medicine culture; whether or not you were even aware of it, want it, or agree with it.

While plant medicines have the extraordinary capacity to connect us with our true nature – the experience of divine oneness – at the same time, it is evident that the world we live in continues to struggle with inequity and oppression.

A great many people who connect with sacred plant medicine ceremonies deeply long for a world that works for everyone, where all people can thrive, find fulfillment and live in sustainable, regenerative relationship with Pachamama.

The only way forward towards this vision is if we dismantle the systems of oppression that continue to oppress, harm and kill so many black, indigenous and people of color to this very day. One of the first steps is to dismantle internalized oppression within ourselves, including all the ways we may be complicit with it.

The purpose of this work is to help you take ownership and responsibility for dismantling the way this oppressive system of privilege manifests in yourself, your community and in white-dominated plant medicine culture.

Who this Workbook is For

This workbook is for people who use sacred plant medicines, who do not come from the cultures where such practices are native, or who do not share immediate family kinship with the indigenous peoples who are the original wisdom keepers of such practices, even those who consider themselves to be “allies.”

In particular, this workbook is for participants of plant medicine ceremonies in the Global North, which consists of the richest and most industrialized countries, which are mainly in the northern part of the world. This pertains to a spiritual community that is increasingly and predominantly white and New Age.

This also includes BIPOC from the Global North who, while being people of color, and even indigenous, are participating in a ceremonial context that has roots in a different culture. Yes it is possible for BIPOC to appropriate, extract, or demonstrate prejudice to other BIPOC, especially the closer to proximity to whiteness you hold.

The colonialism we refer to here is predominantly Western colonialism, and when we refer to “we” and “us” in this workbook, we are referring to English readers of this workbook who live in a region under the influence of Western cultural hegemony.

The legacy of colonialism continues to this day, to oppress, harm and kill indigenous peoples in the Global South, the mostly (though not all) low-income, often politically or culturally marginalized regions of Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Oceania... also known as “The Third World.”

Why "White Supremacy"?

You might be thinking, “But I’m not an extremist. I’m a good person. I object to being lumped into the same group with unhinged domestic terrorists. Why not use the words ‘white privilege’? Or ‘unconscious bias’? This feels uncomfortable / inaccurate / racist to me.”

Emotional outcry, defensiveness, and denial are all natural or normal reactions when we begin to explore and question our unexamined biases. However, if we wish to heal ourselves, our community, culture and planet, it’s important to get real and get truthful and sit in our discomfort.

White supremacy or white supremacism is the belief that white people are superior to those of other races and thus should dominate them. White supremacy also appears in BIPOC communities in the form of “colorism,” whereby paler skin tone, or someone’s genetic proximity to whiteness, might cause them to be perceived as more beautiful, qualified, or higher in status.

The belief favors the maintenance and defense of white power and privilege, and this philosophy is institutionalized in many countries where the benefits of society are reserved for the white demographic, and obstacles are intentionally put in place to bar brown, black, and indigenous access to those benefits – whether it’s access to employment, education, health insurance, or housing. This practice known as “systemic racism” or “structural racism.”

While the image of white, male militia is what typically comes to mind when thinking of the term "white supremacy," white supremacy shows up in internalized and subversive ways, which reinforces systemic control due to widespread unconscious complicity. It appears as:

- **The "right" of white people to dominate all spaces** – physical, intellectual and spiritual – including spaces that are not their own.
- **The notion that white people are better**, more deserving, expert, reasonable, qualified, and authoritative.
- **The concept that white people's emotional and physical needs, wants or desires are a higher priority** than that of BIPOC, so that whites are first in line for societal goods and services. This is also referred to as "white centrism."
- **The expectation that BIPOC exist to fulfill these needs** through uncompensated or poorly compensated labor, personal inconvenience or intellectual or emotional contribution.

White supremacy has roots in the now-discredited doctrine of scientific racism, and was a key justification for colonialism, which continues to this day.

Neocolonialism in Plant Medicine

It's easy to think that mundane divisions do not exist in unity consciousness spaces, until you learn how to recognize them. Harmful beliefs and behaviors can be seen in seemingly innocuous statements that romanticise indigenous shamans and people, or more overt displays of white supremacy, tokenization, saviorism, racism, sexism, and classism.

How does white supremacist neocolonialism appear in the plant medicine community?

- **The non-indigenous are the ones making all the money.** The economic benefits of the Psychedelic Renaissance and Global Shamanic Revival are disproportionately going to non-indigenous stakeholders who are ultimately benefiting from healing practices with indigenous origins. Owners of retreat centers, lodges and ventures are predominantly white and male.

- **Ceremony participants are mostly white and affluent.** The cost of attending plant medicine retreats and ceremonies is relatively high (because the cost of transporting medicine, utilities, labor, and goods in the developed world is also high), so medicine communities end up consisting of mostly white and affluent members.
- **Plant medicine shamans and facilitators are increasingly white.** The fastest growing demographic of emerging plant medicine shamans are self-initiated white men from the Global North.

The combination of white savior narratives, “just do it” and “ready, fire aim” aspects of white exceptionalism, access to lucrative Western markets, and higher capacity for organization, financial literacy and business management places this demographic at a higher advantage than the indigenous.

Indigenous healers may be expected to undergo years of rigorous training in order to be qualified to offer ceremonies, in a neocolonial context where many communities continue to face discrimination for indigeneity and traditional beliefs, as well as the onslaught of Christian evangelism. These are some of the reasons why the increase in white neoshamans outpaces indigenous shamans.

- **Sacred ceremony spaces don't feel safe or inclusive to people of color.** Psychedelic spaces with a mostly white demographic often may not feel like inclusive, safe environments for BIPOC participants to fully surrender, or speak openly about healing racial trauma, without creating awkwardness or discomfort for other white participants. In many cases, white ceremony leaders who have not done anti-racism work unintentionally create harm in vulnerable ceremony spaces through racial microaggressions.

White Apathy in Plant Medicine Culture

Many spiritual white New Age progressives like to believe we are in a post-racial society... that systemic racism was resolved when slavery was made illegal. They often believe that focusing on negative aspects of an unenlightened past is not a good, high-vibrational use of one's time and energy.

But look no further than the War on Drug which continues to fill US prisons with predominantly black and latinx inmates, for the same offenses committed by whites, who now provide cheap prison labor for US manufacturers, and you'll see that a different form of slavery persists.

The George Floyd and Breeona Taylor murders, yet another example of a long history of daily US state-sponsored violence against blacks, was met with resounding silence, apathy and denial in the predominantly white plant medicine community.

COVID-19's disproportionate impact on indigenous communities around the world, which saw a high fatality rate among indigenous communities in Peru and Brazil, was also met with dismissal and denial by the predominantly white plant medicine community.

Contrary to the New Age belief that ayahuasca is antiviral, and plant medicines cure everything, several Shipibo plant medicine maestros died from COVID. One maestro, in his 50s, who was infected with COVID-19 twice, passed away in February 2021. Out of respect for his family, his name will not appear in print here.

Indigenous communities suffered a devastating loss of income due to the shutdown of ayahuasca tourism, a mainstay of employment for many indigenous communities, as well as widespread business and border closures. Community organizers fundraising for direct humanitarian relief expressed dismay at the apathy and denial that was prevalent in the plant medicine community of the Global North.

White apathy is a form of spiritual bypass – which we will examine in more depth later.

How to Use this Workbook

This workbook contains self-reflection exercises and resources that will help you explore, begin to heal and dismantle your cognitive biases and unexamined complicity in socially-engineered systems of oppression.

It will challenge you to examine the extent in which you may have benefited from co-opting the spiritual practices of another culture, in a way that might be more extractive than reciprocal – and how to change that relationship.

Most importantly, this workbook will offer you the chance to identify areas in which you may be subconsciously or unconsciously perpetuating the harms of racist colonization in plant medicine culture, so that you can co-create a culture that is more diverse, inclusive and accessible.

The profoundly healing work of decolonizing yourself is uncomfortable, without accolade, and emotionally laborious. Furthermore, if you are a leader who is decolonizing your own company, organization or community, you may find it involves unanticipated time investment and financial expense.

But it's the right thing to do, and non-negotiable, if you truly wish to co-create an environmentally sustainable, socially just, and spiritually-fulfilling world that works for everyone, and not for the privileged few.

With So Much Love,

Lorna Liana & the EntheoNation Team



About Lorna Liana



Lorna is the founder of EntheoNation, a media platform that publishes educational content about psychedelics, modern shamanism and visionary culture.

Ayahuasca helped Lorna heal a decade of suicidal ideation and self-hate that she had developed from a childhood marred by intense, daily racial harassment as a child of Taiwanese immigrants growing up in the US, and later, as one of the dominated Chinese majority in colonial Hong Kong, while it was still ruled by the British.

In 18 years of working intentionally with psychedelics for healing and personal growth, Lorna has come to understand the extent in which racial trauma pervades communities of color – especially black, brown, and indigenous communities in white-dominated, colonized countries – plus the promise of psychedelic medicine to heal this trauma.

Over the last 20 years, her activist work in indigenous rights and cultural preservation has brought her to Mexico, Ecuador, Brazil and Peru. While Lorna is not indigenous, nor does she claim to be a representative of any indigenous nation, she is blessed to have spent time in indigenous homes around the world, where she has shared their ceremonies, food, fires, hopes, challenges and dreams. In the spirit of reciprocity, Lorna is committed to deepening her work as an ally through financial support and by elevating indigenous perspectives through her work in media and online education.

About Luis Tamani Amasifuen



Luis Tamani is one of Peru's pre-eminent visionary artists who grew up on the banks of the Ucayali River near Pucallpa, surrounded by a rainforest wonderland of plants, trees, animals and birds, and immersed in the medicine world of ayahuasca from a young age.

He studied Art at the Eduardo Meza Saravia Escuela Superior de Formacion Artistica in Pucallpa, whose Shipibo founder Sr Meza was one of the greatest proponents of Amazonian painting and a teacher of the Neo-Amazonico, figurative, surrealist, shamanic style.

You can find his work at luis-tamani.com

What is Decolonization?

Decolonization is the process of reversing the effects of colonialism – the control of an indigenous population by a non-indigenous force.

Colonialism and its effects can be seen pretty much everywhere in human history, all around the world. Our past and present is littered with examples of countries invading and controlling indigenous groups.

Colonialism is more than just the physical control of land or resources – it also involves a control of knowledge and cultural norms. Colonizers determine what kinds of knowledge are acceptable and what kinds are outlawed; what cultural practices are permitted, and which merit punishment. Forced assimilation campaigns intended to erode local resistance have destroyed many indigenous cultures, languages, and ways of life.

The effects of colonialism can be brutal, and can carry through generations, even after the immediate threat of invaders has passed. The generational trauma from colonization, genocide, slavery and racial oppression is experienced by indigenous and communities of color to this day.

Many marginalized communities continue to struggle with the long-term economic and social impacts from systemic oppression. Low self-worth, family instability, juvenile delinquency, high substance abuse rates, high suicidality, and economic hardship can be traced to the legacy of oppression and generational trauma that many of these communities have experienced.

The first steps of decolonization often involve establishing greater political sovereignty, through independence movements or the establishments of autonomous regional governments within a colonized territory. The longer work, however, involves restoring basic rights and freedoms, and dismantling the legacy of oppression so that BIPOC can live in dignity, have equal opportunities and thrive.

Why is Decolonization Important?

The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights maintains that the “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.”

Decolonization is an important aspect of human rights, because native peoples deserve to have autonomy in their ancestral land, and every human deserves to maintain their personal freedoms and way of life, without fear, oppression, hardship or violence.

Because human rights violations around the world are intrinsically linked to colonization of land and ethnic violence, decolonization and antiracism are integral to the human rights process.

The process of decolonization aims to repair the damages that colonizers have done to indigenous populations, and dismantle the oppressive systems established by colonial governments.

What is the Process of Decolonization?

The United Nations lists several important rights that need to be restored in the process of decolonization. These include:

- The right to **autonomy and self-government**, including being free of the reliance on foreign aid for this function.
- Freedom from forced removal of **children**.
- Protection of **cultural and historical sites**, and the return of stolen artifacts and remains.
- The right to provide **education** in their own language.
- State-owned **media** should reflect indigenous cultural diversity.
- Legal recognition of traditional **lands, territories and resources**.

The restoration of indigenous freedoms will also involve the examination of the effects that colonialism has had on art, language and culture, and the reversal of these effects to ensure there are no remnants of the influence of ethnic dominance or racism.

Indigenous scholars maintain that the process of decolonization needs to also be accompanied by the process of indigenization – the active reviving of indigenous practices and culture.

An important part of both decolonization and indigenization is the acknowledgement that indigenous ways of knowing and doing are considered at least equal to Western ways of knowing and doing.

Decolonization is a long process and may never be fully completed to everyone's agreement.

While the damages and influences of colonialism may be impossible to completely repair and remove from indigenous groups, engaging in decolonization efforts can have dramatic and lasting benefits for everyone.

How to Support Decolonization

You might be wondering, “All of this looks like it’s the work of governments and politicians. I’m just an ordinary individual who consumes plant medicines once in a while. Why should I be concerned about decolonization? I have no authority to change laws or give back land to the indigenous!”

While military forces were indeed the instruments of colonialism, the colonial system, once established, has been predominantly maintained covertly and overtly by settlers. In the modern era, descendants of settlers and new settlers participate in and maintain these systems and institutions, many of which continue to be unfairly structured to benefit the dominant group.

Because these systems are entrenched in society, many of us are not even aware of them; nor do we perceive how they may be set up to disadvantage another group. We were born into these systems, and we participate whether or not we agree with it. All of us are complicit in some way.

Complicit participation of the population gives tremendous unseen power to a socially-engineered system of control. For this reason, every individual in society can make an impact and support decolonization, simply by withdrawing complicity.

As a non-indigenous person, there are many ways that you can support decolonization:

1. **Awareness.** Reflect on the ways in which you, individually, may be perpetuating systems of colonialism, primarily through your internalized, inherited belief systems – and then change these behaviors. This is one of the purposes of this workbook.
2. **Learn.** Learn about the history of indigenous peoples in the country where you live, or the indigenous who were the wisdom keepers of the practices that now make up the fabric of your life. Learn about the experience of BIPOC in your country, how this experience may have changed over time, what their current struggles are, and how government policies affect them.
3. **Value.** Diversify your friendship network and get to know more BIPOC. Participate in cultural events and gatherings in a way that fosters respect, mutual exchange, and friendship. Explore how your life might change if you valued indigenous knowledge and culture to the same extent that you value your own.
4. **Act.** Act in meaningful ways that support the dignity of BIPOC, such as voting for government officials, laws and regulations that promote a more equitable distribution of resources. Increase the diversity of your own organization. Provide financial support for diversity-oriented social justice campaigns.
5. **Reciprocate.** There are myriad ways to support the indigenous movement, especially around land sovereignty, food sovereignty, economic sovereignty and access to clean water.

There is a selection of resources at the end of this workbook that could help you support the decolonization efforts of indigenous peoples and increase your awareness of antiracist practices.

In Honor of Maestra Olivia Arévalo

The cover art for this workbook features Maestra Olivia Arévalo: a healer, human rights defender, and spiritual leader of the Shipibo-Konibo indigenous people. In 2018, at the age of 81, she was shot to death just steps away from her home in the community of Victoria Gracia, in Coronel Portillo Province, Ucayalí, Peru.

This tragic incident came at the heel of numerous unsolved murders of indigenous activists who had been repeatedly issued death threats for their actions of protecting their ancestral lands. In fact, on the same day that Olivia was killed, another Shipibo woman, Magdalena Flores Agustín, received an anonymous envelope with two bullets and a threatening letter directed to her and her husband.

The principal suspect in this case was a 41-year old white, male Canadian visitor by the name of Sebastian Woodroffe. Witnesses claim that Woodroffe came to Olivia's house, demanded she sing an icaro (ancestral healing song) to him, and then shot her twice in the chest – with a pistol he had bought from a local police officer.

Olivia was described as a “walking library of [Shipibo] traditional knowledge, the maximum expression of [their] culture,” and was revered as a powerful healer greatly adept at singing icaros. The murder of a pillar of the local community infuriated the locals and motivated them take justice into their own hands.

Not more than hours after Olivia's death, Woodroffe was captured and killed by a group of angry villagers, who knew they could not count on the authorities to take the matter seriously – the lack of trust being the result of generations of indigenous oppression by the Peruvian law. Woodroffe was lynched in broad daylight, and it was all recorded by mobile cell phone video.

Woodroffe had first traveled to Peru with the financial backing of a crowdfunding campaign he had organized so that he could learn about plant medicine in order to become an addiction counselor. Apparently, throughout his time in the region, he had built up complicated relationships with Olivia's cousin and son, which eventually turned sour and obsessive as he himself was said to have slipped into a mentally unstable state.

The villagers had on several occasions taken Woodroffe to the authorities, as his harassment had heightened to the point of assaulting a villager who was guarding a healing ceremony. But the police did nothing.

It appears as though at some point he became fixated on sitting in ceremony with Olivia, and once he managed to locate the elder healer, witnesses recount that he came insisting she drink ayahuasca with him. She declined, possibly setting him off on a spiral of delusional need for retribution, which ended in both of their deaths.

This story is one of the most tragic examples of the clash between Western and indigenous cultures; the economic disparities that create toxic expectations between whites and natives; the persistence of white supremacy, colonialism and privilege in Peruvian criminal justice; and the precarious relationship between mental wellness and the promise of psychedelics.

Primarily, this violent event is a surfacing of the white supremacy and neocolonialism that never ended with the modern era, and continues to this day to oppress, injure and kill BIPOC.

Source: [Descent Into Darkness](#)

Image: [The Temple of the Way of Light](#)



Self-Reflection Questions

This section of the workbook offers you a chance to personally reflect on several topics of decolonization, by answering questions about yourself and your opinions.

The more truthful you are with yourself, the more value you will receive from answering these questions with complete honesty. Be aware that your instinctual impulse for self-preservation might kick in to shield you from the discomfort around a painful realization about yourself.

This discomfort may show up as the urge to:

- **Deflect** harmful actions to “other people,” or “what about China / Russia / Brazil?”
- **Counterattack** or **retaliate** by disparaging this document, the authors or the importance of decolonization in general.
- **Minimize**, through justification, dismissal or excuses – such as “well, everyone dies” or “they were old and would have died anyway.”

It may be difficult, but it’s important that you are completely honest when answering these questions if you truly wish to heal that which deeply needs healing in society, starting with oneself. No one else needs to see the answers – but you do need to openly question yourself, even if it’s uncomfortable. It’s also important to engage in self-care as you go through this process.

This is a living workbook. Your answers might change, and you might notice new aspects of yourself that you never acknowledged before. The work of dismantling systemic racism is a lifelong endeavor.

If you revisit this work at a later date, read through your answers and write down any additional thoughts you have: How have you changed? How have you applied the realizations you have come to through this work? Which areas do you still struggle with, and why?

Why Decolonize?

Colonialism has resulted in the genocide of many BIPOC around the world. In the Western mind, much of that happened long ago; slavery has been mostly abolished, BIPOC and women have gained the hard-won right to vote, and in many countries labor laws have made discrimination based on ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation and religion illegal.

Yet in reality, discrimination and racism are dominant in Western societies, and colonialist attitudes continue to cause harm to indigenous populations.

Because colonialism can seem like something of the past, non-indigenous people, especially whites, may struggle to recognize that there is much more work to be done to combat colonialism, systemic racism, and white supremacy.

The fact that you are here indicates that you recognize that there is a need for decolonization in plant medicine culture. These questions will help you explore the benefits to BIPOC, society as a whole, and you for doing this challenging, yet deeply needed work.

What inspires you to embark upon this journey of decolonizing yourself?

How would engaging in the process of internal decolonization help you personally?

What benefits can you imagine indigenous people receiving from settlers doing decolonization work?

What benefits can you imagine BIPOC receiving from doing decolonization work for themselves?

What would society look like to you if every member engaged in personal antiracism training and internal decolonization work?

How We Are All Colonized

Socially-engineered systems of control have existed since the dawn of human civilization. Empires have risen and fallen, cities and countries have sacked and been sacked. Ideologies of control have emerged, evolved, or are replaced by new forms of thought and control.

Think about all the social constructs that govern your life. Taxation. Capitalism. The politics of your country. Your spiritual or religious beliefs. Have you ever explored where these systems came from? Who invented them? When did you personally, if ever, agree to participate?

While you may not be a colonist personally, as a citizen of a colonized world, you will likely have benefited from resources that have been extracted forcibly or in an exploitative manner. These resources may include things like the gasoline you use, the food you eat, the mineral components in your mobile phone, as well as the land you live on. You probably purchased products that were manufactured through forced labor and modern day slavery, without knowing, such as cheap clothing, household appliances and electronics.

While you may not be a colonist personally, your belief systems might be shaped by the legacy of colonialism. Whose cultural norms have you chosen to adopt? What values do you consider to be essential? What forms of knowledge do you believe to be superior? How do people who do not share these norms appear to you? Exotic? Inferior? Less qualified? Where do these beliefs come from?

List all social constructs that govern your life. For example: taxation, capitalism, materialism, the politics of your country, your spiritual or religious beliefs, your family narrative.

How often do these constructs dominate your thoughts? How often do you think about money? Your “performance” in your job? Who you are in relation to familial expectations?

How do these constructs affect how you perceive yourself? For example, how often does your self-worth or identity hinge upon what you do for a living, and how much you earn doing it?

Have you ever explored where these systems came from? Who invented them? When did you personally, if ever, agree to participate?

Can you imagine exiting these social constructs, and the consequences of those actions? For example, what would the impact be if you refused to pay your taxes, or renounced your citizenship? What does this tell you about the power of these constructs?

Settler Colonialism & the Indigenous

Settler colonialism is a form of colonialism that seeks to replace the original population of the colonized territory with a new society of settlers. It is an ongoing system of power that perpetuates the genocide and repression of indigenous peoples and cultures that can be found across the world.

This form of colonialism is specifically designed to facilitate the dominance of one group of people over another, and it legitimizes ways of thinking and doing held by the dominant group, while devaluing, demonizing, or violently oppressing the ways of thinking and doing of the indigenous group.

Settler colonialism legalizes and encourages the occupation of indigenous peoples' land by settlers, and permits the exploitation of their resources. Settlers may try to pass laws that make it illegal for indigenous people to own the land they have lived on for centuries, or laws that make it easy for settlers to buy indigenous land. This happens today most notably in countries like South Africa, Palestine, Australia, Canada, and the US.

In territories colonized by Western colonial powers, settler colonialism is intrinsically linked to white supremacy – because settlers are usually Eurocentric, they assume that European values and morals are superior. This may also be accompanied by racist propaganda campaigns that create fear and distrust of the marginalized groups.

Settler colonialism includes interlocking forms of oppression, including racism, white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, and capitalism. This intersection of oppression furthers the dispossession of indigenous peoples' lands, resources, and cultures, the oppression of BIPOC in general, and the establishment of white dominance in society.

Are you a settler living on land that was forcibly seized from another group of people? Were those people indigenous to the area, or were they also settlers?

What examples of settler colonialism do you observe in your country? Are indigenous land rights and intellectual rights undermined or protected by your legal system?

Can you think of any indigenous resources that you may have benefited from in your life?

What privileges do you enjoy today that are the result of this acquisition at the expense of BIPOC?

How have you rationalized or justified these extractive actions? Have you been taught that Western knowledge and practices are more 'enlightened' or 'true' than indigenous knowledge and practices?

Do you think you have been brought up with a fair view of the rights of indigenous people to keep their resources and culture?

Can you identify in your behavior some mechanisms you use to absolve yourself from guilt of our ancestors' actions, or, more simply, ignore it? This may be hard to identify, but think about how you might react to an article in the news about an indigenous group struggling to reclaim some resource that has been stolen by your community.

Settler Colonialism & the Psychedelic Renaissance

Settler colonialism can be observed in the phenomenon of cultural appropriation. Examples include:

- White people wearing Native American war bonnets at raves and music festivals.
- Three white female entrepreneurs redesigning and rebranding MahJong tiles, then selling the centuries old game to a white audience at a luxury markup.
- Native American team mascots in sports, such as Chicago Blackhawks, Cleveland Indians, Washington Redskins, and Edmonton Eskimos.
- A white-owned fashion brand that sells festival clothing made in Bali, printed with sacred Shipibo kene (symbols), rather than Fair Trade sourcing of Shipibo textiles from indigenous artisans in Peru.

Consider the expansion of yoga in the West: while the ancient spiritual discipline originated from India, it is now predominantly practiced in the Global North as a fitness routine. And when we think of a yoga instructor, how often does a young, conventionally attractive, white, Instagram celebrity come to mind over an Indian yogi? Do Western yoga fitness instructors owe reciprocity to India?

Cultural appropriation is a deeply nuanced topic, because in an increasing multicultural world, traditions, practices, spiritual and intellectual systems are continuously, naturally and organically being shared across cultures.

Humans have also been trading food, game, agricultural goods and medicinal plants across regions since the dawn of humanity. So the thought that we are appropriating from Yemen every time we drink a cup of coffee, or exploiting Peruvians every time we eat French fries seems ludicrous.

This is why the issue of non-indigenous consumption of plant medicines like ayahuasca, peyote or iboga can be complicated to unpack... and deeply contentious.

However, the extractive practice of bioprospecting continues to this day, and has disproportionately benefited pharmaceutical companies in the Global North, who have developed and patented drugs from ethnobotanical medicines shared with them by the indigenous, who are rarely, if ever, compensated for sharing this knowledge.

This sense of entitlement is pervasive in the Psychedelic Renaissance and can be seen in the efforts of drug development companies to patent synthetic versions of naturally occurring psychoactive compounds in order to profit from a more market-efficient drug delivery system than natural medicines.

Because these patents are part of the company's intellectual property, research is not shared with the greater psychedelic science community. These practices are igniting heated debate in the psychedelic community on the ethics of this kind of behavior.

Biological and spiritual extractivism can be seen in the plant medicine world: from the unsustainable poaching of iboga for ibogaine manufacture, to the co-opting of indigenous ways of working ceremonially with sacred plant medicines by self-initiated shamans.

It's tricky to judge whether a plant medicine facilitator, who might be an MD or a psychotherapist, pouring ayahuasca sourced from Hawaii and leading a ceremony that has no cultural connection to specific indigenous traditions, is guilty of cultural appropriation. Would they owe any reciprocity to the indigenous?

It's important to examine, however, the underlying sense of permission or entitlement that justifies the practice of spiritual extractivism, and especially imagine what this might feel like to the indigenous, who have been extracted from by colonial powers in a multitude of ways – oil, timber, gold, medicines; and now spirituality.

Have you seen indigenous plant medicines being used by non-indigenous facilitators? Did they receive permission or the blessing of indigenous teachers? If not, how did they justify their right to lead and be paid for ceremonies based on ancestral plant medicines? How do you feel about this?

Have you noticed non-indigenous facilitators picking-and-choosing aspects of indigenous culture in their ceremonies? Do they incorporate aspects of other cultures that have nothing to do with the culture the plant medicine originated from? How do you feel about this?

Would you prefer to be in ceremony with a Western or indigenous facilitator? Why?

How do you feel about the possibility of self-anointed shamans of the Global North *outnumbering* actual indigenous and mestizo healers?

Do you believe plant medicines and plant medicine ceremonies should be free of charge? Have you noticed any indigenous people making this argument? Why do you think non-indigenous people might make this argument?

Do you believe that indigenous people still live in harmony with Nature, sustainably hunting, gathering and fishing in the wild, with no need for money or the internet? Where do you think this idea comes from?

Do you think that ayahuasca tourism is harmful to or exploitative of the indigenous that work in this industry? What would happen to them if all the retreat centers shut down, there were no tourists to the area to purchase crafts, eat in restaurants, visit ecolodges? What employment prospects would remain for the indigenous of these regions?

List all the expenses that an ayahuasca retreat center might incur, from electricity, food, housekeeping, and other staffing expenses.

List all the expenses a single ayahuasca ceremony might incur, from food, to candles, guitar strings, toilet paper and staffing.

What effect do you think the industrialization and monopolization of plant medicine and psychedelics will have on the Psychedelic Renaissance movement? Do you think the Western version of 'medicine' is truly the best way of ensuring everyone has fair access to psychedelic healing?

What do you think the War on Drugs is fundamentally about? Do you believe it's a successful venture?

Could you imagine a future of the Psychedelic Renaissance where BIPOC are still imprisoned for using plant medicines outside of Western ideas of acceptability? Would you be comfortable with this future?

Recognizing Neocolonialism in Plant Medicine Culture

Psychedelics can bring us to a state of "Oneness", a feeling of connectedness with all things and all beings – an experience of unity consciousness that is pure, free of division, labels, and judgments. However, despite us all existing 'as one' on a 5D cosmic level, the lived experience of different groups of human beings occupying a 3D world where intersectional discrimination continues to exist, can vary tremendously.

This kind of willful ignorance to visible and pervasive social injustice is an example of 'spiritual bypass.' Spiritual bypass or spiritual bypassing is a "tendency to use spiritual ideas and practices to sidestep or avoid facing unresolved emotional issues, psychological wounds, and unfinished developmental tasks".

Spiritual bypass in plant medicine communities can be seen as another expression of Western neocolonialism, because it reflects the Western orientation to the individual's experience and an absence of compassion or ability to process the hardship of others. Compare this to other cultures that elevate the importance of other people's experience, or the collective experience over the individual.

Neocolonialism in plant medicine communities can be observed immediately by the income disparity between owners of retreat centers and businesses, who are predominantly white, and local staff. It can be seen by the income disparity between indigenous ceremony facilitators and white ceremony facilitators.

It can be seen by the relative entitlement of relatively inexperienced white plant medicine facilitators and coaches to move into a space to profit from and establish thought leadership in booming psychedelic sector, without permission, training, or initiatory apprenticeship.

It can be seen by the refusal of a white ceremony facilitator to acknowledge that racial oppression exists, and that it continues to harm and kill BIPOC, while erasing medicine that was indigenous medicine, in a ceremonial framework that was originally indigenous, praying to grandmother, grandfather, all the ancestors, "Aho!"

Have you ever used the concept of oneness to explain away a complex, nuanced issue? Example: 'All lives matter,' 'We are all brothers and sisters,' or 'I don't see color.' Why do you think this is such a common type of spiritual bypass, and what do you think its consequences are, especially in spiritual and plant medicine circles?

Have you noticed non-indigenous facilitators using spiritual bypass in ceremony? How did you react?

Think of any examples in the past where you may have romanticized, tokenized, or belittled indigenous knowledge. Where did this come from? How do you feel thinking about it now?

Can you recall any recent instances in which a non-indigenous facilitator has expressed neocolonialist attitudes to plant medicines? What was your reaction at the time? Could you imagine that it might be harder for a BIPOC to speak up about it compared to a white person?

In an ideal world, how do you think you would like to stand up to facilitators who abuse indigenous knowledge and perpetuate colonialism? What barriers stand in the way from you practicing this now?

What do you think the consequences are of the West's yearning for unique and 'authentic' indigenous experiences? Can you foresee a way in which non-indigenous people can access plant medicine healing, without enforcing indigenous culture to adhere to Western frameworks?

Healing Ourselves from Colonization

Becoming aware of how our thoughts and behaviors have been molded by white supremacy and European cultural hegemony is the first step in supporting decolonization.

To someone who has never done any antiracist work, it may seem that educators are trying to tell you that every thought you've ever had is racist, and that there is no escaping white supremacy – even if you're a good person.

While that may be hyperbole, there is a deep truth to the reality that Western society has been founded on white supremacy. You have been brought up in a white supremacist society that values white knowledge and experience over black, brown and indigenous knowledge and experience. It's highly unlikely you've made it this far in life without accepting some of these perspectives as normal... until you had the awareness to question them.

Although this work won't require you to completely restructure your personality, or – as critics sometimes suggest – see everything as racist; it *will* require you to have an open mind, and consider that while you are still a good person, you may have picked up biased and prejudiced views from your culture.

Do you sometimes feel fragile or uncomfortable when topics of race are brought up? What is your reaction to this discomfort – do you freeze, fight, or flee? How might this prevent you from doing antiracist work? Do you think you've been taught to believe that conversations about race shouldn't involve you?

Have you ever ignored or belittled a BIPOC viewpoint because they did not express themselves in a way you considered appropriate? Or have you ever felt that a BIPOC belief was based in superstition?

When have you remained silent on issues of racism or indigenous rights?

What was the driving force behind this silence? Who benefited from it and who lost out?

Have you ever felt as if you don't need to do antiracist work? Why is that? Is it only BIPOC who need to do antiracist work, or simply the most racist people?

During your childhood, do you remember seeing many BIPOC in stories, media, or positions of authority? How do you think this may have subconsciously affected you?

Have you picked up any racist stereotypes throughout your life? Reflect on how these stereotypes exist to minimize the experience and opinions of BIPOC.

Do you feel differently about BIPOC who are more 'assimilated' into Western culture compared to those who maintain more freedom? Who might that prejudice serve?

Have you ever argued that cultural appropriation doesn't exist, or that its harms have been overblown? Who loses out when we can't have discussions about cultural appropriation?

Have you ever requested that a BIPOC moderate their tone or language because a conversation about race was making you uncomfortable? Where did this discomfort come from?

Decolonizing Sacred Medicine Space

The work of decolonizing your psychedelic retreat business, company, ceremony space and community will be difficult, uncomfortable and require time, energy and resource investment. If it's not, this is a good sign that there is more profound healing work to be done.

Firstly, you should know how to recognize tokenism and white saviorism...

Many organizations attempt to improve their reputation by hiring more BIPOC staff – yet do not significantly change the structure of their organization so that power, influence, compensation or respect is shared.

This kind of surface-level diversity is called 'tokenism,' and actively harms BIPOC by giving white people an excuse to shut down antiracism conversations ("But we are a diverse company!") without necessarily decolonizing the organization.

In a similar vein, white saviorism is the misplaced satisfaction that a white person might feel upon employing or uplifting BIPOC – while simultaneously perpetuating the white supremacist myth that BIPOC require saving, or that they will benefit from being brought into white spaces.

Decolonizing your psychedelic organization will require you to identify the traps of tokenism and white saviorism, and actually learn to share space, power and abundance with the BIPOC in your organization.

This will look like using your platform to center BIPOC voices, diversifying your organization, and promoting more BIPOC staff. You may be criticized for not doing enough, or for not doing things in the right way.

Nobody will give you a laurel wreath. But it is only when you come into true leadership that you realize that these changes are non-negotiable. And you do them, not because you will be paid more money, or be applauded on stage.

You do this because deep down, you wish for healing to be accessible to all and for a world where everyone can thrive.

Have you previously noticed tokenistic diversity in other psychedelic organizations? Which organizations? How might you ask an organization what antiracist practices they have implemented, in addition to surface-level diversity?

Have you ever felt the pull of white saviorism? Can you think of ways in which your white saviorism may have harmed BIPOC?

Have you ever thought about why BIPOC may feel uncomfortable entering into a plant medicine ceremony in which all other participants are white? List the reasons why that would make BIPOC uncomfortable.

Have you ever reacted badly to the idea of a BIPOC-only ceremony? Why would that trigger a bad reaction for you? Try to reflect on what a BIPOC-only ceremony offers people that a mixed ceremony could not.

What is your main barrier for hosting BIPOC-only ceremonies, or hiring BIPOC facilitators? If you are concerned about monetary cost, consider if you would still make a profit.

Try to list the things that you, as a non-indigenous or white facilitator, might struggle to provide for BIPOC who are trying to heal from racial trauma in a ceremonial setting.

What could you do, right now, to make your sacred medicine space more welcoming and accessible to BIPOC?

Activating Reciprocity

Reciprocity is the practice of engaging in fair exchange for the resources and knowledge you draw from indigenous people. It is a crucial part of decolonization, as without reciprocity we are simply taking from indigenous people in the extractivist tradition of colonialism.

It's important to distinguish between 'optical allyship' and authentic allyship. Optical allyship, also known as 'performative allyship,' may achieve the appearance of reciprocity, usually through one-off donations; yet indigenous perspectives, values and rights are not given center stage.

Authentic allyship, which some people call sacred reciprocity, elevates indigenous voices and restores the indigenous right to have control over how their plant medicines and shamanic knowledge are shared with the world. This process costs money, but can do enormous good.

Any form of reciprocity also involves donating to organizations that empower the indigenous movement – such as those that restore indigenous sovereignty, or preserve the lands that are being threatened by extractivist governments.

Sometimes, it can be more effective to donate to local communities rather than large NGOs that represent them – this will depend on the situation, and it's always best to defer to the opinions of the indigenous people you are in relationship with.

Do you feel your current or past relationships with BIPOC have been fair and mutually beneficial? Try to list some of the benefits and downsides that both you and your BIPOC contacts have experienced in your relationships.

Have you ever centered the opinions and wishes of BIPOC in your work?
Can you think of some ways you could improve this?

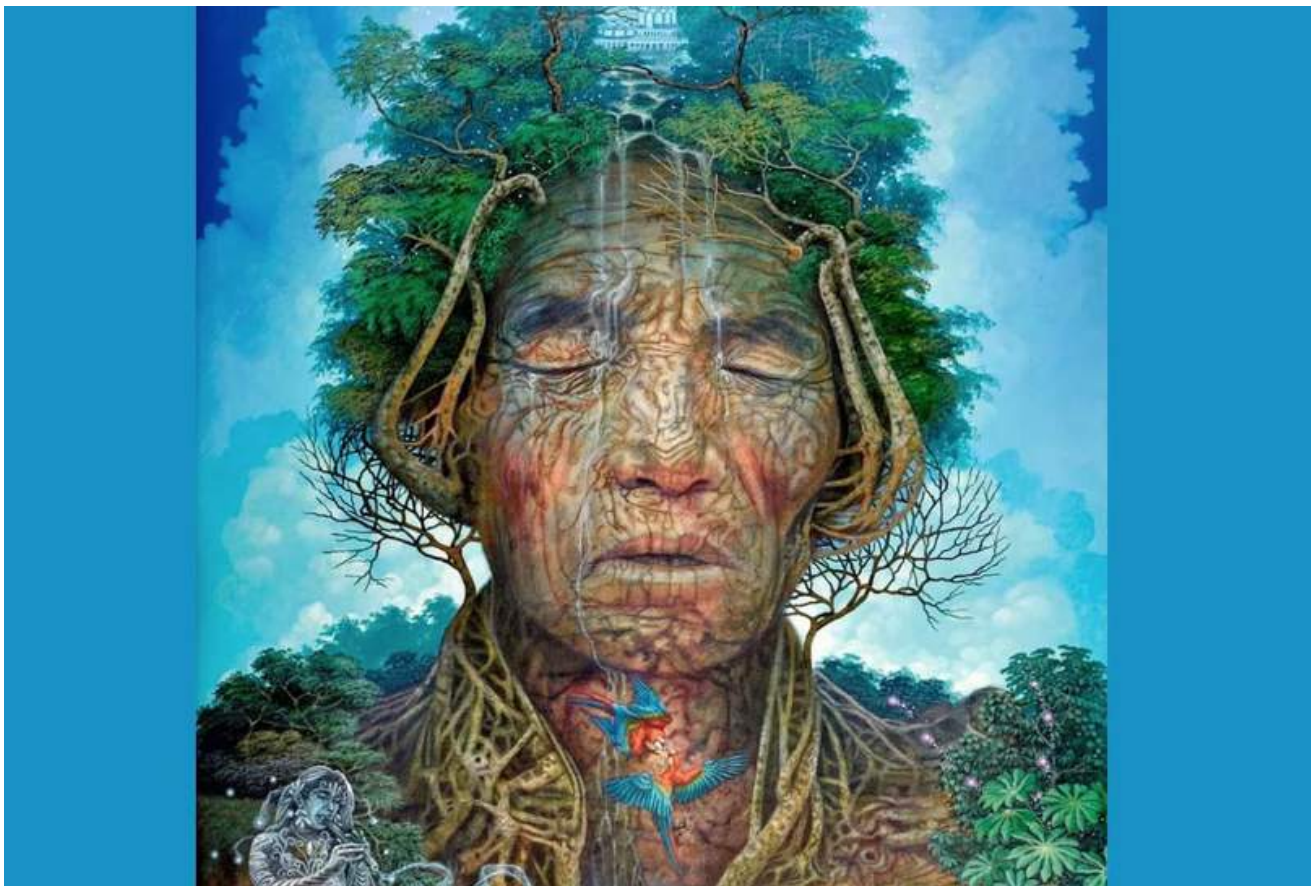
Have you asked any indigenous people how they feel about the globalization of plant medicines?

If you've stayed with indigenous peoples while attending medicine ceremonies, what actions of reciprocity did you take?

If you're planning on travelling to another country to experience an indigenous ceremony, what methods of reciprocity are you planning?

Imagine that you were to attend an ayahuasca ceremony in Peru, and then used elements of that indigenous shamanism in your own ceremonies back home. What would your reciprocity look like? Would you check with the shaman before using their knowledge?

Do you think Western facilitators that profit from using plant medicines, even if they do not use indigenous shamanic wisdom, should donate money to indigenous groups?



Reading List

Now you've made your way through this workbook, you may have identified areas you'd like to continue to research, or things about your practice that you'd like to change. Here is a collection of resources that should help you take the next steps:

Online Resources

[Decolonizing Plant Medicine](#)

[Decolonization: Indigeneity Education & Society](#)

[Oxford Bibliography of Settler Colonialism](#)

[The Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture](#)

[Is it Cultural Appropriation for White People to Drink Ayahuasca?](#)

[Neocolonialism in Amazonian Ayahuasca Communities](#)

[It's 2020 and White Men Still Dominate Psychedelic Conferences](#)

[Why is psychedelic culture dominated by privileged white men?](#)

[Is Good Psychedelic Therapy Too Inaccessible to POC?](#)

Recommended Books

Me and White Supremacy by Layla Saad

A vital part of any white person's antiracist work. Helps you examine the prejudices and biases you have likely picked up from being raised in a white supremacist society, and shows you how your behaviors have probably been influenced by racist thought.

White Fragility by Robin DiAngelo

DiAngelo examines how white supremacy is so powerful in the US, mainly through white people who don't consider themselves racist but who experience "white fragility" in response to criticism and invitations to reflect on their behaviors. An important account to understand how racism can be unconscious and based in a defense of a fragile identity.

Chasing the Scream by Johann Hari

Examines the racist history of the War on Drugs, especially in the US - and how its legacy continues to this day, incarcerating and killing millions of black and latinx Americans. An important piece of history for anyone working with plant medicines and psychedelics.

Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race by Reni Eddo-Lodge

While this book is written from a British perspective, it is important for anyone who feels challenged by the conversation about racism. It examines why white people make antiracist work so difficult, and why claims like "I don't see race" empower and embolden white supremacy.

An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz

Challenges the historical education you may have received in school, instead highlighting the many indigenous struggles for freedom against colonization in the US. Outright genocide is shown to be fundamental to the founding of modern America, and the echoes of this are seen in indigenous subjugation today.

For Indigenous Eyes Only: A Decolonization Handbook edited by Waziyatawin Angela Wilson & Michael Yellow Bird

A crucial resource for indigenous groups, this workbook helps people identify colonization and develop effective ways of fighting back and reclaiming power. It breaks down complex jargon into meaningful plans for community action.

Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples by Linda Tuhiwai Smith

This essential volume explores intersections of imperialism and research – specifically, the ways in which imperialism is embedded in disciplines of knowledge and tradition as 'regimes of truth.'

My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies by Resmaa Menakem

Written by a therapist, this book faces the immense racial trauma that untold generations of Americans suffer from. Focused on the recovery from bodily trauma, it can help all of us heal from the ancestral and current damages of racism.

Radical Dharma by Lama Rod Owens, Angel Kyodo Williams & Jasmine Syedullah

For anyone interested in how antiracist work can best exist within Buddhist practice, and how we can challenge the overwhelming whiteness of contemporary Western Buddhism.

Introducing the Keys to Decolonizing Plant Medicine Culture Workshop



Deepen Your Plant Spirit Apprenticeship with Integrity, Inclusion, & Awareness

What You'll Get:

- Live 2-hour workshop, with on-demand access
- Study guides and handouts
- 4 master classes with guest teachers
- 10+ hours of bonus interview recordings
- 20-min guided soul retrieval brainwave meditation

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