

# **SHAMANS, PEYOTE, AND COCA SACRAMENTS: A PATH THAT MAINTAINS INDIGENOUS TRADITIONS AND IDENTITY IN A TIME OF GLOBALIZATION**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper examines the unique relationship between shamans and the special psychoactive plants valued in their cultures. The use of Peyote (*Lophophora williamsii*) in Huichol Indian culture of Mexico, and coca (*Erythroxylum coca* var. *coca*) in the indigenous cultures of San Pedro de Atacama in northern Chile and the Aymaras of the La Paz region of Bolivia are the focus of this discussion. This paper discusses the central roles the shamans and these plants play in traditional beliefs and practices as well as therapeutic aspects of these plants and the ways that they have come to symbolize Indian identity in a time of globalization.

**Key words:** *shamans, peyote, coca, indigenous people, globalization, Bolivia, México.*

## **RESUMEN**

## **CHAMANES Y LOS SACRAMENTOS DE PEYOTE Y COCA: UN CAMINO QUE MANTIENE TRADICIONES E IDENTIDAD INDÍGENA EN LA ÉPOCA DE GLOBALIZACIÓN**

Este escrito examina la relación única entre los chamanes y las plantas psicodélicas especiales valoradas en sus culturas. El uso del Peyote (*Lophophora*

*williamsii*) entre la cultura indígena Huichol de México, y la coca (*Erythroxylum coca* var. *coca*) en las culturas indígenas de San Pedro de Atacama en el norte de Chile y los Aymaras de la región de La Paz en Bolivia son el centro de esta discusión. Este texto trata los papeles centrales que los chamanes y estas plantas juegan en las creencias y prácticas tradicionales, al igual que los aspectos terapéuticos de estas plantas y las maneras en que han llegado a simbolizar la identidad indígena en el tiempo de la globalización.

**Palabras clave:** Chaman, peyote, coca, indígenas, globalización, Bolivia, México.

## HISTORY OF PEYOTE AND COCA SACRAMENTS

Peyote and coca leaves have been revered as plant sacraments for thousands of years. Strands of dried peyote in archaeological sites in Northern Mexico and Southern Texas, funerary sculptures, and Spanish chronicles attest to the importance of peyote and its ritual use from around 5000 B.C. (Furst, 1989; Boyd and Dering, 1996). Spanish missionaries describe peyote use among the Aztecs and other indigenous groups, referring to it as the “root of the devil”. In colonial Mexico, the Catholic church held inquisitions, punishing those who were suspected of consuming peyote in “idolatrous” practices. Despite the prohibition and punishment for peyote use, some indigenous peoples made clandestine pilgrimages to the central desert region to harvest this sacred cactus to bring back to their families and communities who found refuge far away in the sierras far to the west. Few of the indigenous cultures who have historically revered peyote continue to do so. The Huichol Indians are the only remaining indigenous people who annually make the pilgrimage to the peyote desert and continue to use peyote in their religious beliefs and practices. For many Huichols, peyote enables them to enter into a deep, profound relationship with the natural and supernatural worlds, and is a catalyst for finding meaning and purpose in their lives. In Mexico, Huichol culture and peyote are integrally linked.

The ritual use of coca leaves has an equally long history in the Andean region of South America. The radioimmunoassay of a cocaine metabolite in human hair of mummies (Cartmell, 1991) and dental evidence of coca chewing indicate that prehistoric cultures in Northern Chile (Langsjoen, 1996) and coastal Peru (Inriati and Buikstra, 2001) consumed coca leaves. Stone and ceramic sculptures from the pre-Colombian Chavin and Mochica cultures dating back 4,000 years depict anthropomorphic figures chewing coca. (Morales. 1989:14) The most detailed documentation of indigenous use of coca comes from early Spanish chroniclers in Peru. At the time of Spanish contact, the Inca elite had a well-established system of trade and tribute which included coca cultivation by indigenous people in the more tropical lowlands where certain types of coca plants flourish. Initially the Spanish clergy condemned the use of coca for the same reasons their brethren in Mexico had admonished the use of peyote; these plants and the core beliefs and rituals that surrounded them were considered heathenistic forms of devil worship. Eventually, Spanish colonizers began to see the virtues of coca use in that it induced more work in the Indian laborers. Soon Spaniards took it upon themselves to oversee the cultivation of coca plantations to supply Indians with the stimulating leaves. Due to Spanish control of coca production and exchange, coca leaves became more widely available to Andean peasants than they had under the hierarchical structure of the Inca empire. Over the centuries, coca and its use continue to have a preeminent role in the spiritual, social, and physiological well being of many indigenous peoples in the Andes. In essence, chewing coca is synonymous with being Indian (Allen).

## **PEYOTE AND COCA ALKALOIDS, HUMAN NEUROCHEMISTRY, AND PSYCHOINTEGRATORS**

Specific plants recognized by indigenous peoples as sacred commonly have unique qualities or characteristics. This is certainly true for peyote and coca leaves which produce specific alkaloids that interact with the neurochemistry of the human brain, evoking an altered sense of being.

Peyote, a spineless, low-growing cactus, contains over sixty alkaloids. Mescaline (3,4,5-trimethoxy-phenethylamine) is the alkaloid most responsible for peyote's vision-producing effects. Mescaline interacts with the brain's naturally-occurring neurotransmitters: norepinephrine, serotonin, and dopamine. Chemically it most closely resembles norepinephrine. As for coca, while it is not necessarily considered a vision-producing plant, chewing coca leaves (especially if combined with calcium or bicarbonate) has a stimulating effect that is reflected in feelings of greater vigor and strength. The effects can also produce a clearer mental state, and bring on feelings of well-being. The alkaloid most notably experienced in chewing the coca leaf is cocaine, which also closely resembles dopamine and norepinephrine, but does not appear to interact with the serotonin system in the same way as does the vision producing mescaline present in peyote. The cocaine content in the leaves is extremely low ranging from 0.1% to 0.9%, ([www.erowid.org/plants/coca/coca\\_botany.shtml](http://www.erowid.org/plants/coca/coca_botany.shtml)) or higher (<http://www.druglibrary.org/Schaffer/GovPubs/cocccp.htm>) compared to 50 to 90% of the cocaine alkaloid when extracted from the leaf and chemically processed into powder (Allen, 2002). Coca chewing involves slow mastication of the leaves releasing the alkaloids into the saliva and eventually through the digestive system into the bloodstream to reach the brain. This brings on a very different experience as opposed to sniffing or injecting much higher concentrations cocaine into the body. Indigenous peoples see no relationship between their sacred coca leaves and manufactured powdered cocaine.

Both peyote and coca leaves can be considered psychointegrator plants, a concept developed by Michael Winkelman (1996). Psychointegrator plants, as proposed by Winkelman, have a therapeutic effect on brain systems and consciousness. To paraphrase Winkelman and his reference to the work of MacLean (1990), there are three kinds of brain systems function in human beings: the R-complex or reptilian brain, the paleomammalian brain, and the neomammalian brain associated with the neocortex. The R-complex typically manages the cognition required for the body's behavioral routines, and is characterized by regulating large amounts of dopamine. The paleomammalian brain is comprised of the limbic system and serves as an integrating agent

for emotion and memory and for processing sensory and motor functions. It plays a crucial role in engendering feelings of attachment, emotional security, and identity, and functions as a link between the R-complex and the frontal cortex. The neo-cortex, which surrounds the brain, houses the vast majority of neurons in the human central nervous system (Hooper and Teresi, 1986). Psychointegrative plants function to integrate all three brain systems' processes.

Psychointegrator plants, such as peyote and coca, can serve to evoke the processing of important memories and emotions, and are instrumental in helping people integrate those parts of their unconscious mind into a more holistic understanding of themselves and the world around them. These experiences enable individuals to discover a greater sense of certainty and meaning in life, framed within the cosmological constructs of their culture. In this manner, psychointegrator plants facilitate the healing and union of the body, the mind, the soul, and the psyche (Schaefer, 2005a).

## **HEALING ASPECTS OF PEYOTE AND COCA**

There are many levels of healing that occur with the use of peyote and coca leaves in traditional indigenous cultures. Both peyote and coca leaves enable people to endure physical hardships. They act as stimulants that assuage hunger, thirst, and fatigue. Peyote has antibiotic qualities, alleviates stomach discomfort, dulls physical pain, and is sometimes used in childbirth to quicken the delivery and reduce the loss of blood (Schaefer, 1996d). Masticating coca leaves or consuming them as tea can slightly increase the heart rate, which in turn, produces a mild vasoconstriction in the extremities. The physical effects brought on by coca leaf consumption can help maintain the body's core temperature and can offset the symptoms of dizziness, nausea, and headaches caused by high altitude and depleted oxygen. Coca consumption has unique, beneficial qualities that enable people to physically adapt to the high altitudes and harsh cold climate of the Andes (Allen, 2002). The author can attest to

the beneficial qualities of coca leaves in adjusting to the high altitudes where many Andean people live. Coca leaves are also nutritional. Scientific studies show that in the high Andean puna where the people live almost exclusively on potatoes, coca provides Vitamins A, B, calcium, iron and phosphorous. Coca leaves chewed with calcium carbonate provide Vitamin C. Another salutary quality of coca use is that chewing coca leaves after meals most likely regulates the body metabolism, a very important function in people who subsist on a diet rich in carbohydrates (Allen, 2002).

Shamans in these indigenous communities recognize the healing powers of these sacred plants and holistically integrate this knowledge into their practices that require botanical, medicinal, pharmacological, psychological, and esoteric understanding of the natural, human, and supernatural landscapes that surround them. Shamans act as healers and counselors, they purify individuals, interpret and divine dreams, visions, and omens that appear for their patients. They are experts in these plant sacraments, advise on the quantities and admixtures to be used, are experienced in navigating the terrain opened by these mind-altering plant life forms, and facilitate the communication process with the divine. The empirical information I have gained through ethnographic fieldwork on the importance of shamans, their relationship with sacred plants, and the vital roles they play as specialists in Huichol, Atacameño and Aymara communities are further elaborated in the following sections.

## **HUICHOL SHAMANS AND PEYOTE SACRAMENTS**

For the last 30 years I have been carrying out long term fieldwork among the Huichol Indians of Mexico in the community of San Andrés Cohamiata in the remote Sierra Madre mountain range slightly south of the Tropic of Cancer. Due to the rugged terrain of their homelands. Huichol people have maintained many aspects of their culture that date to Pre-Colombian times, including the pilgrimage to collect the vision-producing peyote cactus that inhabits the desert in the Mexican State of San Luis Potosí. Huichol beliefs and traditions

lie in the hands of the shamans. In Huichol creation myths, the first gods were shamans. This oral tradition speaks of the major role of the shaman to lead the pilgrimage to the peyote desert. Huichols who make this arduous journey enter into sacred time to retrace the steps of their ancestor gods and recreate the world year after year.

Before a shaman leads a pilgrimage to the desert, he or she must undergo an initiation that includes five or more years of training. Some children are believed destined from birth to be shamans; a child or baby's actions may indicate to family shamans and elders it is destined to follow this path. The manner in which the child's destiny may manifest can vary. A child who shows an affinity for peyote is looked upon as having the calling to become a shaman and will be encouraged to follow this path.

Making the pilgrimage to the peyote desert is not an absolute prerequisite for the shamanic training; however, this journey through sacred time and space in the Huichol universe and the experiences gained from ingesting peyote over the course of the apprenticeship are intrinsic to the learning process of becoming a shaman. Often the guiding shaman will select specific peyote tops for the apprentice to consume; afterwards the initiate will describe the experience, and the shaman will interpret its meaning and what course of action, if any, should be taken.

One shaman, Rafael Pisano, describes his first peyote experience:

*"The first time I ate peyote I ate a small amount to see if it would bring me luck... then I felt this way... some animals appeared, they were like dinosaurs, and a big snake; they were all huge, really big! I was surprised to see them...they asked me what I was thinking, what I was feeling".*

*"Well, at that time I lost myself [traveling with the peyote]... [The creatures told him] 'we will clean [purify] you'. And they cleaned me*

*with their tongues. Their tongues were enormous! They cleaned me all over. Then a light like a star appeared, it came from other there, where the sun rises. First they cleaned me, then the light fell all around me and cleaned me all over. Then I appeared like a bright light, a really beautiful light... then they took me... up to the sky".*

Another Huichol pilgrim described a peyote experience in which she saw peyote turn into a deer. She said she realized the deer was talking to her when she and the deer looked each other directly in the eye. Such profound images and symbols that appear to Huichol pilgrims with the ingestion of peyote reaffirm to them the truth their beliefs hold, and they make very real the profound importance of their rituals and ceremonies to uphold this shared ideology and cultural identity (Schaefer, 1996b).

## **HUICHOLS, SHAMANS, PEYOTE AND GLOBALIZATION**

Ironically, globalization has functioned to reaffirm the intimate link between peyote and Huichol identity. Mexican military checkpoints to deter drug trafficking and the spread of social discontent from antigovernment groups have only strengthened the resolve of some Huichols to continue to practice their peyote traditions. Peyote use among indigenous peoples in Mexico is technically illegal because of conflicting national and international laws and treaties (1). On more than several occasions, entire groups of pilgrims have been incarcerated (women and children included) and charged by the authorities for transporting and intent to sell illegal drugs. Some Huichol pilgrims have also been questioned about possible ties to the Zapatista movement.

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA; Tratado de Libre Comercio), has opened the borders between Mexico and the U.S. to a greater flow of goods and people. Indigenous peoples in the United States have investigated the harvesting or purchasing of peyote for their Native American Church ceremonies because of the growing number of members and the

shortage of the peyote supply on the U.S. side of the border. Because the use of peyote is essentially illegal even for Huichols, and because it is classified as a schedule 1 drug as well as an internationally protected cactus, members of the Native American Church have not been successful in obtaining peyote as a free trade item from Mexico.

On the other side of the continuum, the Mexican government has appropriated Huichol culture and its symbols, including peyote, to attract international tourism. Now, in addition to promoting peyote-inspired art, officials who work in the government department of Indian affairs encourage Huichols to reenact parts of their ceremonies, including peyote ceremonies, to crowds of tourists in the resort town of Puerto Vallarta and the regional government center of Mezquitic, Jalisco. Of course, shamans are at the center of these ceremonies and act as Huichol ambassadors with tourists, many of whom are intently curious about peyote and its use.

### **CHILE: ATACAMEÑOS AND COCA LEAVES**

My research in San Pedro de Atacama is more recent. Much of the success of this fieldwork is due to the generosity and guidance of Dr. Constatino Manuel Torres and Donna Torres who have been working in this community for close to thirty years, and to my husband, Dr. Jim Bauml, an ethnobotanist who has accompanied me and worked collaboratively with me in these travels. To date my research includes four visits to San Pedro de Atacama, beginning in the summer of 2003.

San Pedro de Atacama is situated 23 degrees south latitude at an altitude of 2390 meters above sea level. Its location near the Tropic of Capricorn, makes it the southern hemisphere counterpart to the Huichol peyote desert which lies close to the Tropic of Cancer. Like the peyote desert, San Pedro de Atacama is surrounded by dormant volcanoes, however the Atacama desert is at a much higher altitude and has the reputation of being the driest desert in the world.

Peyote does not grow here, nor do San Pedro cactus (*Trichocereus* spp.) or coca, for that matter. The life-giving features of this vast desert are the river systems that flow from the snowpack of the volcanoes and create a small oasis. This oasis is near the contemporary political boundaries of Bolivia to the north, Argentina to the east, and Peru to the northwest.

Since pre-Colombian times, llama caravans carrying exotic goods passed through the oasis of San Pedro de Atacama (also the name of the town) which served as a center for regional and long-distance trade (Llagostera, 2004). Archaeological excavations have uncovered mummy bundles dating from 1200-1100 A.D. that contain the remains of the deceased along with well-preserved artifacts (2). When Spaniards arrived in this region, they encountered mines of precious copper, tin and other desirable metals. Quickly they appropriated the land, treated the indigenous people with cruelty and forced those who survived into submission with assimilative practices. In spite of this violent history, some of the native inhabitants of this region continue to identify with their Indian heritage.

Atacameños, who are descendants of these ancient indigenous people, still reside in San Pedro de Atacama and the nearby countryside. Strands of hair from mummies pertaining to pre-Columbian cultures north west of the San Pedro desert, indicate that coca was in use. It is highly probable that coca leaves held sacred meaning to the ancestors of these Atacameños as they do today in ceremonies, rituals, social reciprocal exchange, as medicinal remedies, as offerings, and in divination practices. The coca trade in ancient times came from the coca growing areas of the lowlands of Bolivia, Peru, and the highlands of Argentina (Allen, 2002). While llama caravans may have brought coca leaves from these far lowlands to San Pedro de Atacama, today coca leaves, or *molantor* in Kunza the language spoken by Atacameños, are transported clandestinely. Coca is illegal in Chile but the nearby porous borders of Bolivia allow for Atacameños to acquire this precious cargo and use it much in the same ways as their ancestors, the original inhabitants of San Pedro de Atacama (Álvarez, 1996: 42) (Gómez and Suárez, 2004: 27).

I was introduced to Atacameño coca traditions and the role of the shaman, *yatiri*, in association with a sacred miniature bag called *chuspa*, which is woven to carry the sacred coca leaves. One of the few traditional Atacameño weavers in this region, Evangelista Sosa, agreed to discuss her weaving knowledge with me (3). I was particularly drawn to the *chuspa* because it is traditionally made on a backstrap loom (a traditional weaving system that was a focus of my fieldwork among the Huichol Indians). When I discussed the anatomy of the *chuspa* I learned that the tassels at the bottom of the bag are called *flores*, and that these same kinds of tassels are attached to the ears of their llamas in the ceremony, *floramiento de las llamas*, which coincides with the mating and birthing season of llamas in early January. Also during this ceremony, there is a ritual exchange of *chuspas*, coca, and coca offerings. I was eager to see the *chuspas* in use, in the context of the *floramiento* ceremony. Evangelista graciously invited me and Jim Bauml to attend. We accepted her invitation, and in January, 2005, we took part in the *floramiento* ceremony sponsored by her godson.

The ceremony was held high up in the puna, near a salt lake called Tara, over 13000 feet above sea level. When we arrived we found the extended family had herded close to two hundred llamas into a stone corral. A table altar was one of the focal points, it was covered with a tablecloth and a number of textile bundles made up of sacred carrying cloths (*inkuñas*) that enveloped dyed raw wool, multi-colored tassels, and mounds of coca leaves. Also on the table were bottles that held alcohol, a bell, and cups. The ceremony commenced with the burning of a desert shrub, *coa*, which provided a fragrant incense-like smoke. The host gave an elegant speech thanking everyone for coming and explaining the reason for the ceremony to keep these traditions alive and to pass them down from one generation to the next. He took some coca leaves from the *chuspa* that he wore around his neck and gathered some coca leaves from one of the bundles on the table. Holding these leaves in his hand, he circled them around the cups, and then along the rim of the cups he passed the coca in the four cardinal points and placed the leaves inside the cups. Others followed after him, some also sprinkled coca leaves on top of the bundles on the table.

The officiating shaman anointed the sacred earth, *Pachamama*, with alcohol and then flung more alcohol to symbolically anoint the herd of llamas in the corral. Coca leaves were scattered on the ground at either end of the table altar. We learned that the left hand held coca leaves for *Pachamama*; the right hand held coca leaves for the spirit of the ancestors.

Several members officiated as the musicians played guitar, *charango*, drum, and accordion, and sang throughout the ceremony. While the music was playing, the people ritually exchanged their *chuspas* and partook of the coca leaves inside them. A mat was placed on the ground in front of the altar and four strong, fertile llamas, two white and two brown, were brought to sit down upon it. The two llamas in the center were male and female and were to be ritually married. A male llama to the side of the groom, and a female llama to the side of the bride held the ritual role of *padrino* and *madrina* to the couple.

The shaman oversaw that the men held the llamas in place while the women tied colored wool to the fur on the llamas' backs and necks. Then the women attached multicolored tassels to their ears by inserting a large sewing needle into their ears and pulling the thread of the tassels through and tying them in place. The ears of some of the llamas bled from this procedure. Then the shaman prayed over the four llamas, blessed them by anointing them with alcohol, and scattering coca leaves over them. When the principal llamas were released back into the corral, the family members danced to the music, and shared in the alcohol offered to them. The shaman anointed everyone's check with the blood that had flowed from the llamas' ears when the tassels were attached, and the sponsor of the ceremony put coca leaves into the mouths of all the participants. Throughout the day and into the following day, the participants in groups of two gathered the llamas and together attached the colorful tassels to their ears. There was also much merriment, music, singing, drinking, and the sharing of coca.

When all the llamas had bright new tassels in their ears, a mound that replicated the distant mountain on the horizon was created in the center of the coral with

the earth from the ground mixed with the blood of a llama that was sacrificed. Coca leaves were scattered on top of it. The creation of this microcosmic image of the sacred mountain, and the offerings that were left to it mirrored the actions of some of the members who later climbed to the top of the mountain, Offerings or *pagos*, were left with white corn, coca leaves and fat from the chest of the llama. At the end of the ceremony each *chuspa* is tied up inside the sacred carrying cloth and safely stored until the next year when the ceremony will hopefully include even more llamas because of the success of this year's *floramuento*.

On several occasions during the *floramuento* ceremony, both the sponsor and the shaman impressed upon me that coca is part of Pachamama, and that this ceremony is to honor her and ask that she look after the family, that she look after the llamas so they will be healthy and multiply. It was brought to my attention that this ceremony really is effective in increasing the number of llamas in the herd. This host started off with few llamas, but year after year their numbers grew exponentially. This year he has around 200 llama, next year it could be 400. They emphatically communicated to me the overall importance of this ceremony, so that their children, their children's children, and future generations of children will continue the traditions and retain a proud indigenous cultural identity as an Atacameño. Ensuring that the future generations of the family keep their cultural heritage strong, also means that *Pachamama* will be appeased and look over them, their ancestors, and the animated world around them.

The role of the shaman is to be a religious specialist, healer, and botanist; he officiates over the ceremony and communicates on behalf of the participants to Pachamama and the ancestors. He blesses the earth and the llamas with coca leaves and alcohol, he also oversees the ceremonial use of coca leaves and the bonding that takes place between the people through ritual exchange and the euphoric affect that is brought on by chewing the leaves. The immense amount of physical stamina required to successfully carry out this ceremony in such a high altitude is greatly facilitated by coca use.

## ATACAMEÑOS, COCA, AND GLOBALIZATION

Despite centuries of exploitation, and attempted extermination by Spaniards and the repressive, assimilating programs put forth by the national government of Chile, particularly during the Pinochet regime, and the continued illegal status of coca, it is impressive to see in the 21st century the perseverance of ceremonies such as *floramiento*. Underlying the resiliency of some Atacameños and their cherished traditions are the shaman and the vital importance of several key elements – coca, llamas, and Pachamama. Globalization has strengthened Atacameño identity. Greater contact and commerce with Bolivia brings more coca into their communities and stimulates the exchange of ideas, including the legal status of coca in Bolivia, and the interaction Atacameños have with traveling shamans for this country situated on their northern border. With the blessings offered by the shamans in prayer and sacred coca leaves, Pachama looks over the fertility of their llamas, which now means they will be able to sell the surplus of their camelids to markets in Chile, Argentina, and to middlemen who sell them to the U.S.

## LA PAZ, BOLIVIA: AYMARAS AND COCA LEAVES

Following the trail of sacred weavings, coca and shamans has led me to the La Paz region of Bolivia. After all, I had learned that the coca leaves used by Atacameños come from Bolivia where there continues to be a rich weaving tradition, too. And Bolivian shamans were known far and wide for their powers as religious specialists – some even traveling through San Pedro de Atacama region to heal and divine for those in need. At the airport El Alto above La Paz the elevation is 4050 meters, while central La Paz lies at a dizzying 3631 meters above sea level. Near the bustling city of La Paz is the ancient site of Tihuanaco, a vast empire that dominated Bolivia and influenced cultures in southern Peru and northern Chile (including San Pedro de Atacama) from 100-1000 A.D. (Kolata, 1986).

The following information is based on preliminary fieldwork that Jim Bauml and I carried out in January and July, 2006. With the assistance of Michael Moretti and his wife Ximena who live in the city of La Paz, we were able to travel to two Aymara communities, the ayllu of Chálla on Isla del Sol in Lake Titicaca, and the ayllu of Pirapi in the region of Achiri, south of the city of La Paz. Unlike Chile, the use of coca leaves here is legal. The leaves for domestic use are grown primarily in the middle-elevation zone in the Chapare region and are transported to La Paz and further south for sale. On our way to these villages we were able to buy coca leaves to share, as it is an expected and much appreciated gift in these Aymara communities. In Chálla, our host, Esteban Quelima, was the mayor of the ayllu. Upon arriving to his home, we provided him with a gift of coca leaves and a small bag of bicarbonate. He was very grateful for the gift and immediately opened up the bag, held some coca leaves in the air and prayed over them as an offering. Then he instructed us to chew coca with him. This was a ritual way of getting to know each other. He explained that we bring new, different energy to the ayllu, it is important for him to know us via chewing coca together and talking for a while. He said that if the coca leaves were sweet it would be a good visit. Fortunately for us, the coca leaves were what he considered to be sweet. He also instructed us on the proper way to chew coca, to take a certain number of the leaves in our hand, fold them together, and stick them into one side of the mouth along with a small amount of bicarbonate. Do not chew on the leaves, but moisten them with your saliva, gently place them between your upper and lower teeth and slightly bite down to soften them, then suck the juices that accumulate in the mouth from the coca and the saliva. The effects of the coca make the participants talkative and sociable. We learned that our host's nephew is a shaman who divines with coca leaves and is an effective healer.

On our way to Pirapi our host, Jaime Chambi, indicated that we needed to stop along the way at several sacred spots to leave offerings to *Pachamama* by anointing the ground with alcohol and gently scattering coca leaves from our hands onto the earth. Pirapi is located at the base of an extensive mountain dotted throughout with *chulpas*, stone towers built in pre-Colombian times

presumably by the ancestors of this village, as burial chambers and possibly to store food. The villagers were cautious in their dealings with outsiders because a number of the *chulpas* had been looted by people who were not from there. After inviting us for a meal, a well known older shaman divined for us using coca leaves we had brought as a gift. The shaman had a sacred carrying cloth (*inkuña*) in he placed on his lap and opened up to reveal loose coca leaves. He had me ask a question and sifted the leaves gently through his fingers, letting them fall onto the textile. All of them fell with the inside of the leaves facing up. Some leaves has holes in them. The shaman commented that the holes are eyes and that, look, look, they were looking up at me. The answer to my question was affirmative, things would go well for me with my new responsibilities at the university where I work.

The shaman continued to divine coca leaves for Jim, Michael, and other villagers. When it came time for us to return to La Paz, a highly unusual storm approached that brought torrential rain, hail, and snow. We tried our best to drive the dirt road from the village to the highway which was better maintained, but our vehicle was caught in the flash flood of water that appeared seemingly out of nowhere. Stuck in the mud, with water up to the doors of the vehicle, we had to abandon it and make our way back in the mud and icy water to the village. The older shaman scolded us saying that the coca leaves had told him we should not leave, we should stay the night. And that is what we did.

On our second visit to Pirapi was in July, 2006, when the weather is tranquil and more predictable. This time we wanted to explore the *chulpas* on the mountainside. Our host, Jaime, indicated upon our arrival to his village that we must first show respect to the elders. We joined everyone in the community house. The mayor of the village was there holding his staff of power. Since this was a much more serious request, it required that we sit and chew coca leaves with everybody and talk. After much discussion and handshaking we were given permission to hike up to the *chulpas*. With the altitude and the strenuous hike we needed to replenish the coca leaves in our mouths frequently. They were most definitely effective in adapting to the thin air and the strenuous exercise.

The initial experiences I have had in Bolivia with shamans and the use of coca confirm to me that, as in San Pedro de Atacama, chewing coca together provides people with a sense of unity and solidarity. It is an important element that, through divination, allows shamans to communicate with Pachamama and the ancestors. Leaving coca as offerings ratifies a relationship between the people, the earth and the mountains, all of which are considered alive and animate.

## BOLIVIA, COCA AND GLOBALIZATION

Coca is synonymous with being Indian. While in Bolivia, I was able to witness this and, through the media, was able to view the powerful symbol coca has become for the Indian population with the democratic election of Evo Morales, the first Indian ever to hold the presidential position in South America. Morales, an Aymara Indian, is well aware of the vital importance of coca in indigenous communities. He began his ascent to the presidency as a coca farmer and then as a leader in forming the coca growers union that opposed the U.S. backed coca-eradication program which, in many ways, parallels Plan Colombia. Morales and the coca growers union were instrumental in legalizing coca in Bolivia. There were two inaugural ceremonies for Morales that were broadcast via the media into the homes of many people – indigenous, national, and international. One of the ceremonies took place at the government palace in La Paz, the other in the ancient site of Tihuanaco. In Tihuanaco he was dressed in clothing reminiscent of the formal attire of past rulers, held a staff of power from pre-Colombian times, and most importantly, he wore a large necklace of coca leaves around his neck to symbolize his Indian identity and his accomplishments in helping legalize coca in Bolivia.

## CONCLUSION

The role of the shamans and the importance of plant sacraments in the cultural traditions of indigenous communities are indeed influenced by globalization.

The increasing flow of trade, finance, culture, people, and ideas brought by sophisticated technology, communication and travel under the worldwide spread of neoliberal capitalism has reached indigenous people in their local communities. As a consequence, many of these people have greater awareness of other indigenous peoples and communicate with them across borders in what has been termed a larger globalized indigenous village. Through the efforts of Evo Morales and the strength of the Indian rights movement in Bolivia, local communities are networking transnationally with Indian communities throughout the Americas. Coca, as a symbol of Indian identity, helps unify Andean people throughout South America, for they share many of the same struggles, the same hopes, and destiny. Likewise, peyote is a symbol of Indian identity for many people in North America. Indians in the United States and Canada who are members of the Native American Church now seek out Huichols and peyote in Mexico. It is becoming more common for Huichols who enter the United States to meet and sometimes participate in Native American Church peyote ceremonies. In this time of globalization, shamans are major players in these transnational exchanges, as they keep the traditions and knowledge of their plant sacraments alive and well in a transforming world.

## NOTES

1. The 1971 UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances ratified in Mexico was based on the United States' Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act of 1970 in which peyote was classified as a schedule one drug along with other 'hallucinogens' and potentially addictive drugs. Unlike the United States' 1970 Drug Act, the 1971 UN Convention does not have a clause that addresses the special rights of indigenous people to use peyote in their religious ceremonies. The wording on the UN Convention is vague, it merely states that there are diverse indigenous groups that use wild plants, some of which may contain psychohropic substances.

A further UN Convention ratified by the Mexican government and the

International Labour Organization decrees that the values, social, cultural, religious and spiritual practices of indigenous peoples should be safeguarded and protected.

An additional piece of legislations, Article 4 in the Mexican Constitution, states that the law protects and promotes the development of indigenous languages, cultures, customs, and so forth. Unclear as these bodies of legislation may be, other Mexican drug laws such as the Federal Penal Code and the General Law of Health, specifically state that peyote use is illegal in Mexico for everyone (Rajsbaum, 1996; Schaefer, 1998).

2. See Torres (1987, 2006) for detailed information on Anadenanthera and the iconography of the snuff trays found buried with some mummy bundles in San Pedro de Atacama.

3. I have extensively studied backstrap loom weaving, its technology symbolism, and religious meaning among Huichol women (Schaefer, 2002). Evangelista was fascinated with my backstrap loom and the information I shared with her about Huichol weaving and was eager to talk with me about her experiences as a weaver.

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