“CACAO AS THE KEY TO THE DOORS OF PERCEPTION”: EMBODIED SPIRITUALITY, TRANSCENDENCE AND HEALING THROUGH RITUALIZED ENTHEOGEN CONSUMPTION

by

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A THESIS

Presented to the Folklore and Public Culture Program and
The Division of Graduate Studies of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts

December 2021

THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

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Title: “Cacao as the Key to the Doors of Perception”: Embodied Spirituality, Transcendence and Healing Through Ritualized Entheogen Consumption

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Degree awarded December 2021.

THESIS ABSTRACT

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Folklore and Public Culture Program

December 2021

Title: “Cacao as the Key to the Doors of Perception”: Embodied Spirituality, Transcendence and Healing through Ritualized Entheogen Consumption

Over the last two decades, cacao has become a sacrament within increasingly popular syncretic religious ceremonies that promote the energetic healing of the sacred self. Cacao is a psychoactive substance that is regarded by members within some new religious communities as a plant medicine; when mixed with water and imbibed, practitioners believe they are ingesting the physical manifestation of a cacao spirit, a fifth-dimensional being known for her transformative “heart-opening” and “grounding” properties. This thesis considers ethnographic data and documentation of cacao ceremonies as presented by Keith’s Cacao’s, Ora Cacao’s, and Embue Cacao, as well as survey data of 118 ceremony participants and the analysis of cacao producers’ websites. This thesis explores the emergence, features, and appeal of these entheogenic ceremonies; cacao’s construction as a product and symbol; the reputed therapeutic benefits of ceremonial participation; and what it means for practitioners to achieve numinous healing experiences with cacao’s guidance.

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Western States Folklore Society Annual Conference, 2020 (Canceled due to COVID)

"'Chocolate Shamanism: From Sacrificial Rituals to Heart Healing"

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank Dr. Daniel Wojcik, the chair of my thesis committee, for your expertise, encouragement, the countless hours you have assisted me in bringing this thesis to fruition, and your unrivaled humor. Watching you learn how to use Zoom filters will surely become one of my most cherished graduate school memories. Thank you to Dr. Riki Saltzman for encouraging me to consider my research from a new angle (Chapter 4 could not have happened without you!), your critical eye, and your mentorship during my time with the Oregon Folklife Network. Finally, thank you to Dr. Leah Lowthorp for your invaluable feedback as well as support during my early stages of research; the fieldwork I completed with your support set the foundation for and helped to shape this thesis.

To my friends: thank you for your collective support over these past two and a half years. A special thank you to Sara Williams and Shea Cromwell; your check-ins, words of encouragement, and refusal to let me wallow in grad-school-induced self-pity helped me throughout this process more than you know. Thank you, Halie Cousineau and Mac Wood, for helping me maintain my sanity throughout the pandemic; you were both my home and a source of such immense joy and love. To Christian Mercado: thank you for always reminding me how capable I am, keeping me going, the hugs, and for those few attempts at making me graphs with R. Finally, thank you to Laurel Thoma for convincing me I needed to sit in a pyramid and drink chocolate.

Thank you to my coven (Christal, Erica, Maddie, Molly, Rachel, and Rebecca). Spending all of those seemingly endless days and nights with you in the proverbial trenches was an absolute honor. I love all of you dearly.

To my family: getting my master's degree was a dream you all helped make a reality through your love and support; I love and appreciate you all more than I can articulate. A special thank you to my father, Jason Burby, for always encouraging my academic pursuits and supporting me throughout the process, junior college onwards.

To all those in the cacao community: thank you for welcoming me in, for your warmth and vulnerability, and for your invaluable time. Special thank you to Rick Wessels, Moses Draper, and Jonas Ketterle for your generosity and support. My thesis would not have been possible without all of you.

Finally, thank you to Dr. Reece Henrichs-Beck and Dr. Kendall Thornton. Just for everything.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

"I've got the book in the house from the anthropologist who is the world's expert [on cacao]. And frankly, according to the Cacao Spirit, he doesn't know what he's talking about." - *Keith Wilson, "Chocolate Shaman" and creator of Wilson's Cacao, Far Out Podcast*

It was dusk and the surrounding Balinese jungle was alive with insect music. I watched the sky's color fade into darkness while our group of fifteen stood single file on the platform. Before us were two large pyramids, surrounded by a pond, which are scaled-down replicas of the Great Pyramid of Giza. That night, we would be sitting within them to experience the effects of the "Pyramid Power" and the "sacred geometry," while participating in a ceremony.

I arrived here through word-of-mouth recommendations and an interest in drinking chocolate, and I was not sure what to expect. According to my journal entry (November 25, 2018), I was ready to "be vulnerable and have an open heart." I walked down the platform towards one of the ceremony's facilitators, Luciana, who was wielding a smoking sage bundle. She wafted the smoke around my body while explaining that the Native-American-derived performance ensured we would not carry negative energies into the sacred ritual space. Once I was purified, I was welcomed into the pyramid.

The space was dimly lit by an altar of rose petals and flickering candles encircled by a ring of face-down tarot cards. The ritual space was silent, apart from the sounds of ritualists shuffling to secure their cushions around the altar. Om Ben, an American man

acting as the second host, took his seat and began to gently play the guitar. When Luciana finished purifying the remaining ceremonialists, she joined us and completed our circle of strangers. Behind Luciana and Om Ben was a gong at least five feet tall, and in front of us was a steaming pot, ladle, and collection of white mugs. Everyone could feel the building anticipation. Luciana smiled warmly and said, "Welcome to our full moon ceremony."

In 1575, Spanish explorer Giralomo Benzoni described the sacrament central to this ceremony as "a bitter drink for pigs" (Doutre-Roussel 12). During the cacao's distribution, Ben joked that it tasted like "the world's bitterest cup of $10 coffee," which was something he reiterated during our interview about one year later. Despite the taste, in the many forms it has taken throughout its theorized centuries of consumption, the beverage was and remains sacred to many. The main ingredient of this brew once stimulated entire economies and motivated elaborate river trading routes, acted as medicine, was of major cosmological value and was central in religious rites, and served as a gift to the patrons and gods. This ingredient, now widely known in its highly processed state as chocolate, is the ethically farmed, fermented, roasted, shelled, and ground up seeds of the *Theobroma cacao* L. tree, an understory tree (trees ranging in height from 15-49 feet) native to the Central and South American lowlands. Whether it be the cocktail of psychoactive properties or the anthropomorphized plant's spirit, cacao has brought centuries of civilizations and communities to engage in ceremonies, including those held within Western wellness centers in the heart of Bali. For today's contemporary new religious practitioners, cacao acts as a key to the pathway of divine healing.

Approximately one year after I participated in Luciana and Om Ben's cacao ceremony, at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, I began my thesis research and attended an Ora Cacao ceremony over Zoom. While the ceremony differed from the one I attended in Bali, the consistent element was the focus on experience; participants were attending ceremonies to achieve heart-centered healing and transformation through the use of cacao as a medicine and tool. During this online ceremony, I jotted down these notes:

> While I sipped cacao from my mug, I watched other ceremonialists enter the ceremony from their homes; each from a different setting and previously established "relationship with cacao." I thought about Eve, the ceremony's facilitator and community matriarch, who mentioned that she conducts 20-minute pre-ceremony rituals and consumes cacao as a 'tool'; through cacao, she accesses "divine guidance" into how to lead not only her life, but her ceremonies (of a fluctuating 80-100 participants). In this community, this insight is referred to as "medicine" and "downloads" which can also manifest as shared personal wisdom, a sacred song, the spiritually-informed movement of the body during ecstatic dance, and the insights and sensations provided by the "playful and grounding" plant spirit of Cacao. Through ritual, the participants are fostering this so-called powerful and deep relationship with her, entering a space (the "heart space") or inner wisdom, and healing their hearts. (Fieldnotes, March 24, 2020)

As I would later learn, the primary function of cacao for these ceremonialists was its use as a vehicle for transcendence, as a means of symbolic and chemical promotion of embodied spirituality and healing. While I have read and heard of the concept of the

"cacao ceremony" defined many ways, Ora's website offers the following, which overlaps with my findings:

> [The cacao ceremony is a process of working with cacao [...] interwoven with embodiment, creative expression, and many other healing modalities that guide us in navigating our own losses, pain, and suffering. Along the way, we have found healing and connection to ourselves, experienced depth and healing in our blood family, and discovered deeper connection with the elements, land, and ecology that we didn't experience before … Cacao has the potential to be a guide and gateway to help each one of us embrace the compass and depth of our heart as a starting point for profound healing and remembrance. ("Cacao Ceremonies")

The rise and role of these cacao ceremonies—cacao's function as a sacrament within Western ritual healing rituals and embodied spirituality and healing—have received little to no scholarly attention. As I demonstrate throughout this thesis, the subject warrants academic investigation and provides insights into contemporary spirituality, ritual entheogenic use, and vernacular religiosity. This project analyzes ethnographic data collected during my participation in the ceremonies offered by Keith's Cacao's, Ora Cacao's, and Embue Cacao and the survey data I gathered through surveying 118 ceremony participants and interviewing 20 participants. I also base my findings on the study of cacao producers' websites and emails related to cacao ceremonies, both in person and online, hosted by the facilitators of the three companies. Through the data gathered, this thesis, informed by folkloristic methods and theories, adopts a multi-disciplinary perspective to explore what it means to practitioners to

achieve numinous healing experiences by using cacao and the healing and transformative benefits of cacao as a folk medicine within ceremonies.

I approach the study cacao ceremonies from a behavioral folkloristic perspective as I attempt to understand the ways that the cacao ceremony "fits into a person's distinct continuum of experience that makes it relevant and meaningful" (Georges and Jones 268). The behavioral perspective as embraced by folklorists focuses on personal meanings and motivations, individual agency, psychological states and emotions, and social interaction in specific contexts, among other things. With regard to cacao ceremonies and consumption, this approach provides insight into how the individual derives meaning and significance from ritualistic events through both personal practice and communal belonging. Furthermore, this perspective enabled me to construct composites of the embodiment process within spiritual practice and ritual healing. As discussed by folklorist Brandon Barker and linguist Claiborne Rice (2016) in reference folklorist David Hufford's (1982; 1995; 2005) work, the broader perspective of folklore studies interprets embodiment studies as "experience-centered analyses of embodied practices in the context of core spiritual experiences and folk medicine," (81). Therefore, I argue the significance of the cacao ceremony is best understood through the analysis of collaborators' personal experience narratives related to—as well as participants' process of—healing and transformation during ceremony.

In following section of this first chapter, I detail the methods I used to obtain and analyze my data, including a breakdown of my survey results and findings related to participant demographics. Chapter 2 discusses cacao as a species, its indigenous history, and how modern consumption is inextricably bonded with indigenous influence and the

community's interpretation of indigenous ethos. Drawing upon previous scholarship (Coe et al. 2013; Dreiss 2008; McNeil 2006; Powis 2007, 2011; Zarrillo 2018), I consider the history of cacao and Mesoamerican culture in order to construct a foundational understanding of historical sacramental cacao use. Chapter 3 uses literature on vernacular religions and new religious movements (Primiano 1995, 2012; Bowman and Valk 2012; Wojcik 2019; Chryssides 2006; Hanegraaff 1996, 2013; Partridge 2004, 2005, 2006, 2018), the history of sacramental psychoactive substance use (Hanegraaff 2013; Leary 1970; Metzner 201; Partridge 2004, 2005, 2006, 2018), and neo-shamanism (Hanegraaff 2013; Leary 1970; Metzner 2013; Partridge 2004, 2005, 2006, 2018; Puttick 2006) to provide a summary of Western entheogen use and corresponding neo-shamanic practice. Here, I include the introduction of the main proponents of the psychedelic movement and how their influence in the late 20th century has shaped attitudes surrounding cacao consumption today. Further, this chapter draws connections between the psychedelic movement and interest in neo-shamanism as both provide the necessary context for understanding the emergence of ritual cacao consumption today. Chapter 4 explains the creation of cacao as a sacrament as well as the production of the consumable product sold by Western companies, through my case studies of the virtual ceremonies of Embue Cacao, Ora Cacao, and Keith's Cacao as well as an analysis of product advertisements. Here, I bring in concepts such as the Lucy Long's (2004, 2015, 2017) concepts of food symbolism and ethos in culinary tourism, Mary Douglas's (2013) discussion on ritual pollution, and Amy Trubek (2005) and Rachelle Saltzman's (2016) exploration of *terroir*, to explore the ritualization and performance of ceremonial cacao consumption by its Western devotees is reflective of the search for meaning and authenticity through an

imagined past. Chapter 5 dissects the cacao ritual according to contemporary ritual theory and analyzes the events that comprise and follow it (Jacobs 1990; Turner 1967, 1969, 1969, 1974; Turner et al. 1982, 1982) as well as the various performances within them (Bauman 2014; Duranti 1997). Chapter 6 expands on Chapter 5 by discussing the motivation behind and impact that participating in ceremony and ritualized consumption of cacao has on the lives of participants through transcendence and healing (Barker et al. 2016; Hendrickson 2015; Johnstad 2018; Leary 1970; Metzner 2013; O'Connor et al. 2001; Partridge 2004, 2005, 2006, 2018; Richard 2005, 2015). I outline these methods and experiences of healing through the analyze of case studies and participants' personal narratives as well as through the application of concepts within modern psychotherapy (Aleixo et al. 2021; Hestbach 2018). I then conclude by summarizing my findings as well as suggesting the potential and significance of future cacao-related work. the healing and transcendent effects of sacramental hallucinogen use.

Methods

In the section below, I outline the methods used to conduct the research for this thesis and discuss how and why I chose my sample, the process of analyzing interviews, my participant observation, and survey data. In this phenomenological-based ethnographic and behavioral study of the ritualization and performance of ceremonial cacao consumption for healing within Western New Age communities, I used a sequential exploratory approach (Creswell 41). I began with qualitative methods of data collection and analysis, including unstructured interviewing, personal narrative collection, and participant observation. Once I identified significant themes, I conducted a mixed method (primarily quantitative) survey with the goal of "enhancing the

generalizability" (Hesse-Biber 465) of my initial findings and to set the foundation for purposive sampling. This was followed by an additional round of survey-data-informed qualitative work as I continued participant observation, conducted additional interviews, and began an analysis to develop my overall interpretation of events.

Research Procedure

To enter into the community, I first contacted two of the facilitators, "Om" Ben and Luciana, and conducted unstructured interviews with them. They hosted the first cacao ceremony I attended at Pyramids of Chi in Ubud, Bali, Indonesia on November 25t, 2018. Although I was not conducting my research at that time, I use the experience and the notes I kept in my personal journal as a reference point while considering the characteristics of an in-person ceremony as well as how powerfully a ceremony can be experienced, even for the uninitiated first timer. That ceremony was the only one I have attended in person; due to COVID-19, all of the participant observation I completed occurred over the platform Zoom. I believe this worked to the benefit of my project, as the online ceremony became more common and ceremonies became more accessible. Before the pandemic, ceremonies were held in-person, infrequently, and mostly in the United States and occasionally in other places.

As noted, I attended Embue Cacao, Ora Chocolate, and Keith's Cacao virtual ceremonies. In the early stages of my research, thanks to the generosity of Rick Wessels, the CEO of Keith's Cacao, I also attended a virtual course entitled *The Power of Cacao: From Personal Practice to Ceremony: For Practitioners or Those Who Wish to Be*. Practitioner Nicole Gnutzman taught this course and held our class of five participants once per week throughout the month of March 2021. The online class covered topics

such as what ceremonial cacao was, the anatomy of rituals and corresponding practices, the history of cacao, cacao's health benefits, and how one can develop their relationship with the anthropomorphized Cacao Spirit. The program ended with an abbreviated ceremony with Keith Wilson, known as the "Chocolate Shaman" and leader of Keith's Cacao. During this ceremony, we each had the opportunity to share a concern with him and he helped us to address it at an "energetic level."

In addition to his online course, I attended two of Keith's Cacao's ceremonies, which were approximately six hours in length, and I attended four of Embue Cacao's ceremonies, which were one and a half hour ceremonies on average, and also one of Embue's two-hour cacao conferences. Finally, I attended eleven one-hour ceremonies with Ora Chocolate. This made for a total of 38 hours of participant observation.

While conducting participant observation, I had an unstructured interview with Moses, the ceremony facilitator and co-owner of *Embue Cacao*, to both introduce myself and get a better understanding of the phenomenon. As ceremonies were virtual, I found it difficult to make connections with others and locate "typical" participants for interview. I had received permission from the owners of the three companies to conduct my research, but I was uncertain whether I should privately contact individuals and, if I did, who would be most appropriate to contact. Ultimately, another ceremony attendee wrote into the Zoom chat that she lived in Eugene, and I used our shared location as reason to contact her.

We set up a phone interview, which we followed with a semi-structured interview. Afterward, I sought ways of encouraging individuals to participate while also practicing reciprocity within the community by designing an incentivized survey through

Google Forms. Ora, Embue, and Keith's each assisted me in distributing the survey by posting an announcement, which I wrote, on their Facebook pages and/or including the information in their email newsletter. As an incentive, I advertised that I would provide one randomly-selected participant with a bar or bag of cacao for their help with my survey.

The survey included 26 questions that were broken into four sections: the first section required contact information; the second section asked demographic questions; the third section, which was the largest at 14 questions, inquired about the participants' history of cacao use and included multiple choice, written, and linear-scale rating questions. While studying digital communities, folklorist Lynne McNeill noted that a researcher must explore the network of connections that digital communities have in order to understand holistically "their cultural interactions" (81); if a community began offline, it is important to understand what is occurring within the community beyond the digital space. As it was not possible to attend an in-person cacao ceremony at the time, I incorporated questions into this section, as well as my semi-structured interviews, that allowed me to gain an understanding of what the cacao ceremony was like prior to COVID-19.

The fourth section asked if the participant would like to be contacted for an interview. In total, I received 118 submissions; 62% consented to being interviewed, and, after selecting 16 collaborators from this survey, I conducted semi-structured interviews over Zoom. Each interview was scheduled for an hour, and on some occasions the interviews were longer, as we addressed 14 total questions related to history of use,

ceremony, reasons for consuming cacao, effects of cacao, and the sense of community cacao usage generated.

Research Sample

Throughout this work, I will refer to those who host the ceremonies as *facilitators;* I will use *ceremonialist* and *participant* to refer to the individuals that comprise the cacao community and attend the ceremonies. Further, I refer to individuals who participated in my survey and interviews as *collaborators*. As several participants explicitly denied affiliation with New Age religion, I will deconstruct the label of "New Age" to introduce concepts that more accurately represent the characteristics of the community. Those who denied affiliation with the New Age did not offer a different label that they felt was a better descriptor, but they often referred to New Age as exploitative and did not align with their values. Such exploitation included the forced or abusive labor practices prevalent in the world of chocolate production. The acknowledgement of and refusal to participate in such practices is a major selling point within the ceremonial cacao industry.

Including the four collaborators I worked with prior to surveying, I interviewed 20 total participants, which included 13 participants who also identified as facilitators; my first four interviews were unstructured while the remaining were chosen through criterion sampling, or "selecting participants who closely match the criteria of the study" (Rudestam et al. 107). I chose the first two interviewees due to our pre-existing relationship; "Om" Ben and Luciana had facilitated the first cacao ceremony I attended. For the third, I introduced myself to and interviewed Moses, primary facilitator and gatekeeper of the Embue Cacao ceremonies. As referenced, the fourth unstructured

interview stemmed from a conversation I had with Courtney in the Zoom chat box during a ceremony.

I selected the remaining interviewees from the community survey based on demographics in an attempt ensure a diverse sample. I intended that this sample would reflect the demographic ratios presented in my overall survey data; I ultimately had to select from those that responded to my follow-up email. Of the 62% that consented to being contacted for an interview, I interviewed 16 participants. To get a representative and diverse sample, I chose these individuals based on gender, age, race, ethnicity, religious and political beliefs, socioeconomic status, level of education, history of cacao consumption, and the activities in which they partook in while consuming cacao.

Based on 118 survey responses, the following statistics offer an estimated demographic representation of the community. The majority of collaborators identified as female (83.9%), followed by those who identified as male (8.5%), nonbinary (2.5%), and 5.1% who chose the option, "prefer not to say." Additional gender options on the survey included "transgender male," "transgender female," and the option to write in one's gender identity, but none of these were selected. Participants' ages ranged on a scale from 18 to 74; from most to less prevalent: 20.3% of participants were between 30-34 years old, 18.6% were between 25-29, 16.1% were between 35-39, 11% between 40-44, and the remaining eight age categories scored under 10%. Participants were almost entirely from the "Western" world and the majority, 80.5%, were from the United States. Of the remaining participants, 5.9% were from the United Kingdom; 5% were from Canada; Ireland, Germany, and Australia each accounted for 1.6% of participants; and Cyprus, Cambodia (Netherlands national), and Iceland accounted for .8% each. For the question

“How would you describe yourself?” 75.3% answered White; 3.4% identified as Black or African America; 3.4% identified as Asian; 2.5% identified as Mixed Race; and the responses Latina and Human each accounted for 1.7% of respondents; eleven percent identified as Hispanic, Latinx, or of Spanish descent.

In terms of education, 39.8% had obtained a bachelor’s degree; 20.3% responded “some college, no degree”; 18.6% had a master’s degree; associate’s degree and high school diploma holders each accounted for 5.1% of respondents; 3.4% held a professional degree; 2.5% held doctorate degrees; and the remaining 5.2% wrote in responses such as “certifications in herbalism and yoga” and “cosmetology.” Politically, the majority of participants, or 41.3%, identified with the Left with answers such as “Liberal,” “Left,” and “Democrat - but really someone with a love-beaming heart”; in this category I also included answers such as “Left Libertarian.” Following the Left, 22% were apolitical including answers such as “none,”, “free thinker,” “all people are equal, and “none, politics scare me”; “Prefer not to say” and Moderate, including “Neutral,” “I see both sides,” and “More moderate than anything; I believe in my rights and my morals,” were at 8.6% each; the Right was at 6.8%, including one “Constitutionalist”; Independent and Green, including “I align with independent and Liberal lines; politically, I deeply care for ecosystem protection and deforestation actions,”, were 5.1% each; 3.4% submitted responses that were apolitical but referenced divine authority, including “The Divine Light” and “Spiritual; non-lover of politics”; and one international respondent submitted “Not to say as I'm United Kingdom, but it wasn't with Trump!”

Analysis

My first wave of analysis began with the fieldnotes I wrote during interviews and ceremonies in addition to my transcripts of three entirely online ceremonies; Ora Chocolate's ceremonies were recorded and posted to a private YouTube channel. To perform the first wave of analysis, I used In Vivo Coding (Saldana 51), or line-by-line marginal coding; through In Vivo, I performed a thematic analysis. Prior to coding, I first identified the main "units of social organization" (15) such as cultural practices, roles and social types, and subcultural beliefs and practices. I found that the primary themes related to different aspects of the healing of the participants' minds, bodies, souls, and transpersonal environment through entheogen consumption and relationship. Themes related to healing included: "healing is holistic; to heal oneself is to heal mind, body, and soul" and "the personal ecosystem cannot be divorced from that of the natural world; to heal oneself is the heal the natural world." Themes also included those related to authenticity and gnosis, such as what I perceived as "when cacao and ceremonies are approached with [respect], cacao grants the participant access to gnosis, or ancient wisdom held by indigenous people."

Once I had developed a codebook and list of themes through Dedoose, a qualitative analysis software, I developed the questions I asked in my semi-structured interviews. My intention was to reach *saturation, "*or gathering data until no new relevant data are discovered regarding a category and until the categories are well developed and validated" (Rudestam et al. 108). For this reason, in addition to asking general questions such as those related to ceremony structure, activity preference, and history of use, I focused on developing questions related to cacao's role in numinous

experience and personal and relational transformation and healing. These questions included two categories: “Why Cacao” and “Effects of ‘Cacao.” In the former, I asked: (1) What is the benefit of consuming cacao? (2) What is the experience of consuming cacao? (2a follow-up) How do you feel in your body while consuming cacao? (3) Why cacao rather than other plant medicines? and (4) What does cacao mean to you? In the latter, I asked: (1) Can you describe some cacao induced experiences that were important to you? (2) Have you ever experienced healing of physical or psychological issues as a result of using cacao? (3) Has cacao affected your worldview? and (4) Has cacao affected your relationships (with self or others)?

After transcribing the interviews, I used Dedoose to filter quotes into thematic categories. This enabled me to easily access quotes while writing sections based on the themes. I used these themes to organize my paper, which included investment in ideas of indigeneity, cosmology, the process of producing cacao (both as a symbol and consumable), cacao’s role as an entheogen, the experience within ceremony, and the benefits of consumption. The term “entheogen” describes a sacred consciousness-altering substance that, when consumed, leads to the “discovering [or generating of] god within” (Richards et al. 20). As a source of wisdom through which one channels divine energy, cacao in this context is considered a tool that can be used to generate divinity within.

CHAPTER II: THE BEAN AND ITS HISTORY

Cacao melted for the creation of the sacramental beverage originates as a "bean," or seed, of the *Theobroma cacao* L. tree's fruit. The cacao tree grows within a range of 20 degrees north and south of the Equator, including in Ecuador where the Maya-Chinchipe first domesticated and began consuming it between 5,450 and 5,300 years ago (Zarrillo 1879). The Maya-Chinchipe introduced cacao to Mesoamerica where it was consumed by the Mokaya and Olmec before being passed to the Izapan, Maya, Zapotec, and Aztec. To these civilizations, cacao was a crop of immense religious, social, and economic value. Cacao is native to the lowland regions of Central America, including Southern Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador in addition to those countries within the Amazon Basin, including Brazil, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Peru. According to anthropologist Rene F. Millon, the tree prefers an average temperature of 80 degrees Fahrenheit, a "'heavily humid atmosphere (over 90 percent) with a heavy annual rainfall (70 inches [or more])'" (qtd. in McNeil 8). Each tree annually bears between 20-30 pods directly from its trunk, or cauliflorously. Individuals employed by the companies pick, process, and then mold these beans into bars or blocks for consumption.

Swedish taxonomist Carl von Linné gave the cacao tree the Greek genus title *Theobroma*, meaning "food of the gods," in 1753. Linguists believe that the word *cacao*, referring to the fruit species, derives from the proto-Mixe-Zopuean loan word, *kakawa* (Coe et al., McNeil 3). Subsequently, once the Olmec passed their knowledge of cacao to the Izapan, and the Izapan to the Maya, *kakaw* became "the most commonly used ancient Maya term for cacao" (McNeil 3). At the time of the Spanish conquests, the Spanish

adopted both the terms *kakawa* and the familiar term, *chocolatl*, from the Atzec language, Nahuatl. A Spanish-Maya dictionary from the 17th-century lists *chacau haa*, or "hot water," as the official word for "ordinary chocolate." In addition to the Spanish accounts of the Aztec consuming cacao as a cold drink, this supports theories that Mesoamericans did not consume cacao as a solid product, but strictly imbibed it (Coe et al. 26, 93).

Mesoamerican Roots

In this work, I consider the emergent tradition of sacralized cacao consumption and ceremony participation from the perspective argued by folklorist Richard Handler and anthropologist Jocelyn Linnekin (1984). From their stance, as a new cultural phenomenon, the cacao ceremony is to be regarded as a "wholly symbolic construction" rather than "an inherited body of customs and beliefs" (276); it is a tradition that cannot be bounded nor inherited, but rather is dynamic, lacking boundaries, and constantly negotiated. However, cacao use appears in other creation stories throughout Mesoamerica, and while this thesis focuses on the cacao ceremony in its contemporary manifestation, the practice of consumption is imbued with ideas of indigenous gnosis and the power of "archaic" practice. Further, I argue that the phenomena of ritualized cacao consumption would not have developed as a spiritual practice if not for its indigenous roots. Just as respected facilitators do within cacao ceremony introductions, I will start the discussion on the ceremony's history with a brief discussion of its history within Mesoamerica.

Much of what is known about the earliest uses of cacao, a byproduct of the *Theobroma cacao* L. tree's fruit, shifts with new developments within the fields of archeology and ecology. Researchers long believed that indigenous peoples first

domesticated within the fertile and humid wombs of lowland Mesoamerica. This was primarily due to the lack of archeological evidence beyond the Mesoamerican regions and the work of anthropologists, linguists, and ethnohistorians who held evidence of cacao's economic and ritual significance largely in Mayan culture. However, in late 2018, researchers discovered theobromine-positive stone and ceramic artifacts in southeast Ecuador, revealing that indigenous peoples of this region began consuming cacao between 5,450 and 5,300 years ago (Zarrillo 1879). These findings were "identified in ceremonial, mortuary and residential contexts at the archaeological site of [Santa Ana-La Florida (SALF)]" (Zarrillo 2019); and substantiated earlier genomic research that suggested the genus Theobroma evolved in the upper Amazon region of South America. According to that research, the upper Amazon holds the greatest variety and number of Theobroma species (McNeil 5). Although this appears to solve the mystery of cacao's origins, researchers are not unanimous in their beliefs as to how cacao migrated north or which society was the first to domesticate the cacao we know today.

Early findings initially dated cacao's earliest cultivation and consumption at around 600 BC. However, in 2007, a leading New World archeologist, Terry Powis, and his team located one vessel at Chiapas, on Mexico's Pacific Coast, at the dig site of Paso de la Amada, and another at Veracruz, on Mexico's Gulf Coast, at the dig site of El Manati. The analysis of these vessels revealed traces of theobromine. As cacao is the "only Mesoamerican plant that contains [this bitter alkaloid] as the primary methylxanthine" (Powis, "Cacao Use" 8595), theobromine is a "unique marker" in the analysis of pre-Columbian artifacts, which makes the researcher's process of identifying such artifacts easier. The vessel collected at Paso de la Amada suggests that the Mokaya

peoples, a pre-Olmec group theorized to be of the first sedentary settlers in Mesoamerica, were consuming cacao around 1900 BC. The vessel collected at El Manati suggested that another group of pre-Olmec peoples were consuming cacao around 1750 BC.

Those peoples who followed are referenced as one of the first independently developed civilizations of Mesoamerica, and according to *The National Geographic*, are considered the "'mother culture' of many other cultures [appearing] in the region in later years" ("Olmec"). What is known about their society and culture is derived from artifacts; no texts, if they were to have existed at all, survived this prehistoric period. These artifacts suggest that the Olmec dominated the aforementioned Mexican Gulf Coast's humid lowlands, namely the state of Tabasco as well as southern Veracruz, from their rise between 1500 BC to their fall in 400 BC. In 2011, Powis and his team located cacao residue in vessels uncovered in the capital of San Lorenzo, the oldest center of the Olmec; and the hinterland "Loma del Zapote, located in the lower Coatzacoalcos drainage basin of southern Veracruz State, Mexico" (Powis 8595).

As stated previously, due to the unsuitable humid conditions of their region, archeological artifacts, or those that comprise the evidence of cacao worship, consumption, and trade, were rarely preserved. Rather than through archeological evidence, early theory regarding the Mesoamerican connections to cacao was partially derived from the efforts of ethnohistorians and historical linguists who made contact with contemporary predecessors of the Olmec.

Mesoamerican Ritual Significance

As "the mother culture," Olmec folklore permeated other Mesoamerican cacao-producing and consuming societies through a potentially monogenic dissemination of the

cacao-related cultural practices. Due to the decay of evidence, nothing is known about the ways in which folklore within these cultures proceeding the Olmec resembled their foremother. Rather, what is known today regarding the “multilayered complexity of ritual and chocolate in Mesoamerican cosmology” (Dreiss et al. 1) is derived from Izapan, Maya, Mixtec, and Aztec “art, mythology, and glyphic text” (1) in addition to contemporary research and select colonial accounts. In this context, mythology seems intrinsically intertwined with art and glyphics.

The Izapan were a community of Mixe-Zopueans of the Late pre-Classic era who were the first to adopt the Olmec folklore as well as much of the Olmec’s land. It is hypothesized that this group was the first to grow cacao in the land that would later become the province of Soconusco, an area known as the “diamond in the crown of the Aztec Empire" (Coe et al. 40) due to the fertility of the region. Within this land, centuries prior to Aztec rule, lay the Izapan type site, Izapa. Due to stone stelae located in Izapa, researchers theorize that this group not only passed the term kakaw, and the cacao itself but also aspects of their cosmology to the Maya as well.

The etchings within these ancient monuments were narrative episodes important to Quiche Maya cosmology and were found within the Quiche Popol Vuh, or the sacred “Book of Council.” The epic begins with the universe's creation and “ends with the conquest and the imposition of Spanish rule" (Coe et al. 41). Interestingly, the book was not documented in writing until after this Spanish imposition. Although it is believed the Spanish may have transcribed since-lost Maya hieroglyphs, how the Spanish truly came to document the epic, and therefore the complete detail of the Maya Popol Vuh, is only speculation.

That which the Izapan documented in their hieroglyphs is reflected in the Maya book; that in the beginning of time, there lived two sets of divine and heroic twins. The significance and complete stories of these twins, as known by the Izapan is not certain, but in Maya culture, the second set of twins, the Hero Twins, are the central point of "an elite mythological cycle" (Coe et al. 43). The old couple, who were responsible for the creation of the universe, birthed the twins. After entering Maya underworld, Xibalba, for a ball game, the twins were murdered and the severed head of one twin, known as the Maize God, was hung from a tree. In the Popol Vuh, this is a calabash tree, or that which produces the woody gourds used by the elite Mesoamericans to drink cacao. Some preserved Classic Maya ceramics (Coe et al. 41), depict this tree as a cacao tree.

After this slaughter, the book introduces Xquic, the daughter of an Underworld lord. The Maya knew this woman as Blood Moon, Moon Goddess, or Blood Maiden. During the search for food in the predawn time, Blood Moon, partially responsible for both human and ecological fertility, called forth goddesses such as Cacao Woman, the guardian of cacao, for assistance. These stories depict Cacao Woman as a supernatural figure whose grew cacao from her body, mimicking how cacao grows from *Theobroma cacao*'s trunk. According to Dreiss et al. (12), this occurred sometime before Blood Moon stumbled upon the Maize God's head, which had returned to life as a fixture of the tree. Whether having touched the head of the god, or having been spit on by him, Blood Moon was magically impregnated. In some interpretations of this story, she is subsequently banished to the earth where she births Hunahpu and Xbalanque, the Hero Twins. After facing challenges and feats reminiscent of Hercules', the Hero Twins returned to and defeated Xibalba, resurrecting their father, and "[rose] to the sky in glory

as the sun and the moon" (Coe et al. 41). Therefore, the story continues as a discussion of the symbolic connection of burial, "(that is, the planting of the seed), growth, and the fruition of maize" (41) that acts as the staff of life within Mesoamerican culture.

The Popol Vuh contains additional references to cacao, not as revered, but as one Mesoamerica foodstuff that aided in the creation of mankind. In one such reference, after the gods' failed attempts to create humans with compounds such as mud and wood, they located foodstuffs within the Split Place, also known as the Mountain of Sustenance. Throughout Mesoamerican iconography, a split place represents space through which life is birthed and the gods dwell. There is a cave or, depending on the region, a sinkhole within this manifestation of the split place; a pair of landscape features sacred to and central within Mesoamerican creation stories. The openings in the earth offered a portal through which gods emerged and access to the Underworld in granted. They offered mortals access to the place "where the gods live ... [and allowed them to travel] to pay homage, ask for favors, or have a dialogue with [the gods]" (Dreiss et al. 18). It was also within these portals that the revered and feared jaguar, potentially perceived by Mesoamericans as guardians of cacao, was thought to dwell.

In the cave of the Mountain of Sustenance, the gods found a bounty of food. Through the ambiguous lore of the Popol Vuh, it is implied that this food, which included "sweet things, thick with yellow corn, white corn, and thick with pataxte [Theobroma bicolor] and cacao …" (Coe et al. 43), was used to "[form] the flesh and corpus of human beings" (Dreiss et al. 18). In Aztec lore, there lies a similar myth. Rather than entering a mountain cave to access those life-sustaining domestic plants, the god Quetzalcoatl employed ants to receive maize seeds that would sustain humanity.

Just as the cacao tree appears in variations of the Hero Twins lore, cacao has an instrumental function in Postclassic codices of the Maya and Aztec. The diagrams found in the codices "all share … in common … [the illustration of union between] time and space by charting … the sun spatially through time" (Dreiss etl al. 25). In Codex Fejervary-Mayer a cosmic diagram displays trees positioned in the cardinal directions. Cacao has the positioned of the Tree of the South, which represents the Underworld. On one side of the tree stood the Lord of the Underworld, Mictlantecuhtli, and on the other stood the Maize God. It appears that the sculpture of a man adorned in jewelry, positioned in the center of this mandala, is connected to the tree via a divine umbilical cord. As this hypothetical, symbolic umbilical cord emerges from the cacao tree, researchers theorize that this "cord [is connected] to the gods, symbolizing his right to rulership" (Dreiss et al. 27). In addition, a macaw tops the tree, which may signify that it is the World Tree that sits at the universe's center as "the primordial source of all life" (22), holding up the sky, and acting as a highway for gods and the dead to traverse the three, vertical realms: Sky, Earth, and Underworld. The depiction of this tree is dependent upon region, but in areas significant to cacao growth, this tree is the *Theobroma cacao* L.

In the Dresden and Madrid codices, those Maya almanacs used to chart eclipses and the cycles of Venus, deities use cacao pods in divination rituals. Collaboration, negotiation, and alliances between the gods was required to maintain cycles essential to human life. For example, in the Madrid Codex, a scene depicts the rain god, Chac, exchanging cacao with Xquic, the aforementioned moon goddess. This negotiation could symbolize the importance of cacao in appeasing the gods, ensuring that rain will continue

to fall and that the moon will continue to cycle through phases. In another display of cacao's use in divination rituals, the maize god sits next to K'awil, a god associated with abundance, who is holding bowls of cacao beans. K'awil additionally represents "precious [substances] such as sap, blood … [and other fluids] offered to the divine as a token of appeasement" (Dreiss et al. 35). In a later section, "Power of Symbolism," in the third chapter, I will continue a discussion on the power of metaphor and cacao use.

Indigeneity in the Contemporary Ceremony

While contemporary Western practitioners of the modern manifestation of cacao practices state that they have reimagined their connection to cacao, Mesoamerican folklore provides the powerful and resonating meaning and essence of cacao, which shapes their connection. This stated, while cacao is still used to access divinity via ritual, the Western practitioners use cacao as a tool to "move into the heart," or come to a mentally and emotionally grounded place wherein holistic healing and transcendence can occur. Rather than acting as a sacrament in fertility or sacrificial rituals for centuries of pre-Colombian societies, cacao has been co-opted to meet the spiritual needs of small sub-communities within new religious contexts.

One such underlying practice of the New Age Movement is the adoption, consumption, and commercialization of indigenous culture and spiritual practice. Through this adoption, the community can disengage from or reject dominant, mainstream culture. From both an outside and etic—or analytic —perspective, through the harnessing of indigenous ideology and material culture (i.e. sacra such as Native American skin drums), members of new religious movements, such as neo-pagan or New Age community experiences may exoticize interpretations of the culture; they believe

that they are gaining access into "a world conjured up by the promises of [these] advertised products – such as the consumption of cacao and a subsequent spiritual journey), but with no history, social relations, or contextualized culture that would make for a sense of real belonging" (Aldred 329) or authentic experience. From an emic—or insider—perspective of participants, cacao is viewed as a loving entity that wishes to have her message spread, as stated by the facilitator who referred to her as "promiscuous"; cacao is a spirit attempting to spread her message of unconditional love across the world, one person at a time regardless of ethnicity or cultural background.

In the discussion on the New Age and the creation of tradition, work has been done to analyze the "contemporary musical spiritual interpretations" (Midbar et al. 204) that manifest when the "Others'" musical works are reinterpreted into an unrecognizable and Westernized product known as "world music" (among other titles). While world music is relevant due to its use during cacao ceremonies, cultural scholars Marianna Ruah-Midbar Shapiro's and Omri Ruah Midbar's (2017) overall discussion in their article reflect how various aspects of the Other's folklore have been recontextualized for use in Western spiritual practice. This is because, through the lens of perennialism, New Age enthusiasts often see every religion as existing on a spectrum in relation to proximity to an "original truth." Those more so archaic and "mystical" religions of the Other, whether indigenous or Eastern, are regarded as the purist manifestations and are therefore closest to this source. This belief directly correlates to the postmodern condition, or that which relates to "issues of identity, community, memory, tradition, multiculturalism, the individual's relationship [and lifestyles correlating] with hegemonic establishments" (Midbar and Shapiro 220).

In their desire to fill the void that corresponds with these issues of the West, New Age groups often reach for perceived ancient traditions to adopt and reify. The irony here is that the Others' practices are divorced from their original context and therefore, the original tradition; through their adoption, they are detraditionalized and reimagined as symbols of an authentic spirituality, but within a Western framework. This suggests that the Western world, which New Age believers are attempting to distance themselves from, is still reflected in the reified byproduct. Some of the ways in which the traditions are reinterpreted include the attempt to preserve tradition, the seeking of one's heritage through the perceived ancient work of the Other, and blatant appropriation of tradition that disregards its context in turn for music produced for an "ecstatic" experience of here and now.

From an etic, analytical perspective, scholars may view the ritualized consumption of cacao as another harmful white-community, appropriated trend. Just as in the case of marketing "single-origin" craft coffees, one could argue that companies that boast ceremonial grade and fair-trade practices as a craft culture do so as marketing ploy to "satiate the ... drinker's desire to be an ethical participant with good taste" (Jackson) and to push a white savior narrative. It could also be argued that companies promote the appropriation of cacao as a Mesoamerican cultural element by exoticizing cacao and othering those that produce it.

This research can speak to three of the companies selling ceremonial cacao, Keith's, Ora, and Embue, and it appears that they are each dedicated to "[embracing] the stories behind the facade [that typically upholds "craft culture"], the ones about individual people and specific histories and ongoing traditions" (Jackson). Both in

ceremony and through their websites, each offers historically accurate, although selective, information about cacao's roots, including the traditions held by the indigenous people of Mesoamerican, what traditions are still held today in the region, and the effects that colonialism had, and continues to have, on the people, region, and practices.

While there is a fine line between presenting oneself as an ally and selling "white lies," Ora's website offers an "examination of the complex power structure that surrounds ... appropriation" (Kim) and discusses methods of decolonizing cacao; Embue is partnered with the non-profit Alliance for International Reforestation (AIR) Guatemala and is a 1% for the Planet member; and Wilson[1] establishes fundraisers for his all-female team of Kaqchikel Mayan *tostadoras*[2] during challenging financial periods.[3] While we cannot rule out that the dispersal of this information is a marketing tactic, many ceremonialists believe the companies offer an important cause to support. As stated by a collaborator, "we already all have a relationship with chocolate. We don't necessarily think of it in those terms, right? But when you were a kid, what was the big treat? She's been with us for a long time, all of us ..." (Mikki). People will continue consuming chocolate so these companies, and those that support them, must "[use cacao] as the powerful tool to unite that they claim it is [and be] of service" (Kim).

Much more can be said on this topic,[4] and in following sections, I will provide additional analysis of the connection between authenticity, religious practice, and

[1] Wilson also openly discusses that he is not a Mayan shaman. This contrasts with other modern, white "shamans" claiming to practice *ancient ways*; instead, Wilson claims that his practices stem from his own personal relationship with cacao and are mainly related to quantum healing.

[2] *Tostadoras* refers to those that make the cacao.

[3] For example, he established a COVID-19 Relief GoFundMe page that raised $15, 033 for the community.

[4] While this work does not delve into the subject of appropriation and cacao, this subject deserves its own thesis.

perceptions of indigenous peoples and cultures. But first, the next chapter will introduce the history of entheogen use in the West.

CHAPTER III: SPIRITUALITY AND ENTHEOGENS IN THE WEST

According to folklorist Leonard Primiano, "One of the hallmarks of the study of religion by folklorists has been their attempt to do justice to belief and lived tradition" (41). In this chapter, I begin this attempt at doing justice in the representation of cacao ceremonies by discussing the theory of the "subjective turn" in analyses of spirituality and religion. I then discuss vernacular religion as folklorists understand it, which is followed by an overview of the psychedelic movement and a discussion of shamanism and neo-shamanism. My argument throughout is that sacramental cacao consumption is an expression of vernacular religiosity and a continuation of the psychedelic movement, with neo-shamanic aspects.

The Subjective Turn and Vernacular Religion

When presented with the statement: "I am spiritual, not religious," using a linear scale, 76.5% of my collaborators responded that they "strongly agreed" while 12.4% "agreed." Those three that strongly disagreed described their spiritual/religious affiliation as "unitive"; "Catholic, Buddhist, and Indigenous"; and, interestingly, "Spiritual." In the open-ended question, "What is your religious and/or spiritual affiliation?", 44% overall answered with the term "spiritual" within their response (i.e. while some simply listed "spiritual," others specified, such as: "Spiritual, believer in Great Mystery and that all individuals have a personal, individual connection to source energy which is unique and beautiful to them and their circumstance." When asked to write in their religion and/or spiritual affiliation, answers greatly varied: 11.8% referenced implicitly New Age answers, such as "eclectic" or those related to the worshipping of an unnamed divine

force; 9.3% identified with neo-paganism; 8.5% identified with the religious traditions they were raised in, including Christianity and Catholism; 7.6% answered "none," including "religion is made up"; 6.7% identified with Eastern religions, such as Buddhism or Baha'i Faith; 5.9% identified as "seekers" or as being on a "personal journey"; and the remaining categories, "agnostic," "shamanic," "mysticism," and "love," accounted for less than 5% of responses each. This data suggests that using the term "New Age" would not be sufficient in encapsulating the complexity of their community's belief systems, which I will discuss.

When asked to explain the difference between religiosity and spirituality during an interview, one of my collaborators defined being spiritual as "just [cutting] through all the layers of bullshit to the heart of consciousness—of feeling of what really *is*" (Joanna). My collaborator, Raven, shared a similar definition through contrasting monotheism and spirituality:

> Any religion can constrict you a little bit. I've noticed—just being honest—there are a lot of hypocrisies about [Catholic] beliefs and their way of being. Over time, I just didn't align with it, and so to me, spirituality is still having a connection to the divine without putting that that box around yourself ... [spirituality is] just finding your own flow, whatever they may mean. And it may mean incorporating parts of other religions in it—certain beliefs—but not necessarily restricting yourself to one way of thinking.

Another individual provided the following metaphor while bridging the connection between cacao and spirituality:

> ...There was a Muslim woman speaking, and she said religion is like if you're climbing up a mountain, but you have a guide, and they've done it before, and they're like handrails and they tell you in their signs. And I say go this way, do it like this; this is how you connect to God. And like your job is just climbing up the mountain. But you figure out how you get there, and what it is you do. So, I would think one way to think of cacao as a modality, like a technology that people have access to that is divorced from a set of guidelines and rules and a tradition. (Bri)

Cacao use and its correlation to ideas of spirituality were also seen in collaborator Kim's response:

> I'm a psychic; I work with the Akashic Records, so I channel source essentially. So, for me [spirituality is] much more a recognition of the energy of spirit or source of the universe or cosmos; like I've been seeing God as this lately because that's just what jives with me ... Yeah, connect with source straightaway, and cacao one of the ways of doing that and a very delicious way of doing it.

Regarding connecting "with source" through consumption, 83.8% of survey participant either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I consume cacao as part of my Spiritual and/or religious practice (i.e. in tandem with ceremony, prayer, meditation, kundalini, etc.).

This display of a strong connection to spirituality over religiosity, as well as such answers that highlight the individualist nature of spirituality and direct connection with a "source," reflect what Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead (2005) refer to as the subjective turn, and in the context of sacramental psychedelic use, perennial philosophy. First, the

subjective turn theory sought to describe why individuals began shifting from organized religion to vernacular religious beliefs and practices. Vernacular religion in this context is understood as "lived religion"—the ways that individuals interpret, embody, and express their beliefs in the context of everyday life, often apart from institutional doctrines and authorities (see Primiano 1995; Bowman and Valk 2012, Wojcik 2019). Primiano proposed the concept of vernacular religion in 1995, defining it as "religion as it is lived: as human beings encounter, understand, interpret, and practice it" (44). In this and subsequent articles, Primiano emphasized an interdisciplinary approach in studying religion, with a focus on the creativity and agency of believers with regard to existing religious traditions and institutions, and the specific ways that individuals "create and re-create their own religion [through] . . . "the continuous art of individual interpretation and negotiation of any number of influential sources" (Primiano, Afterword 384). This emphasis on religious creativity is especially applicable to contemporary cacao ceremonies as well as other new religious movements, although the scholarship by folklorists on such movements has been relatively limited (Panchenko).[5]

In relation to vernacular religiosity, the s*ubjective turn* is defined as "the turn away from life lived in terms of external [sources of transcendent authority] ... and obligations [to this authority], and a turn towards life lived by reference to one's own subjective experiences**"** (qtd. in Partridge, *Vol. II* 2)**.** According to Partridge, this turn can be traced "back through punk culture to the 1960s [wherein] a strong grass roots, self-

[5] Notable exceptions in this regard are Magliocco's work on neo-paganism (2010), Primiano's description of Father Divine's International Peace Mission movement (2004), Margry and Wojcik's study of the Saint John Coltrane Church (2016), Panchenko's analysis of the Vissarionovtsy sect in Russia, and Wojcik's discussion of UFO-based religious movements (2021).

oriented, ecologically aware health…" (7) movement emerged, and the New Age Movement gained traction. This was also during the "second phase" of the psychedelic revolution during which "psychedelics and spirituality … became inextricably linked" (97), and beliefs were centered on the interconnectedness of mind and universe as an organic whole. The use of psychoactive substances as an adjunct to mystical experiences suggests the desire to subvert control of religious institutions; use is motivated by a desire for a spiritual life where spirituality becomes "about *me*, *my wellbeing*, *my personal journey*, and the fulfilment of *my potential*" (12). Here, the individual positions the body as the source of sacred truth and authority, and it is therefore through holistically healing the body, particularly through psychoactive substance use, that the individual is enabled to experience gnosis and the mystical, as the fifth chapter will further discussed.

Regarding the influence of perennial philosophy on psychoactive sacralization and spirituality, Aldous Huxley's aptly titled 1945 book, *The Perennial Philosophy*, "helped to contextualize the spiritual basis necessary to connect mystical consciousness with the psychedelic experience" (Shipley 377). His work states that "each world religion, unburdened by its cultural or historical context, simply expresses a different interpretation of this wisdom that, at its core, remains the same" (377). This ties to participant's desire to connect with a "source" through cacao consumption; regardless of religious or spiritual background and practices, participants are accessing the same source. One collaborator, who wished to remain anonymous, shared how her history with Bahá'í Faith tie with her practices with Chinese medicine and cacao consumption, stating each are reinforced by one truth; "like all these spiritual writings [and practices] are based on the same truth." Due to the foundation of perennialism in psychedelic spirituality,

there is no one community source for practices; instead, practitioners drawn upon a bricolage of traditions.

Spiritual Bricolage

Cacao ceremonies and the corresponding community are both eclectic by nature. While there is a ceremonial blueprint that practitioners use, the nature of each ceremony and motivation for partaking in it vary based on the facilitators and participants. Due to the eclectic nature of ceremonies, it initially appears that the phenomenon should be categorized as a New Age. New Age can be defined as an umbrella term; New Age ideology is not homogenous; rather, it is a heterogenous bricolage of elements (Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion* 515). Further, "New Age thought [could be considered] a cluster of diverse ideas [that] 'conspire': that is, breathe together symbiotically" (Chryssides 235). As Wouter Hanegraaff argues, while difficult to pin down what specifically unites these elements, scholars can be recognize the movement by its criticism of "dominant [religions and] culture trends" (235) and the formulation of such criticism through the lens of western esotericism. Due to this rejection, this thesis uses the term "New Age" as proposed by Hanegraaff to suggest a movement that rejects an "Old Age," and institutional religious dogma.

Eclecticism is a uniting factor within the NAM. Due to the nature of this spirituality; the New Age movement is built around an "eclectic amalgam of beliefs and practices, often hybridized from various cultures … [that focuses] on what [is referred] to as personal transformation and spiritual growth" (Aldred 330). Ceremonialists pick from practices they consider to best facilitate the process of self-transformation, and they could therefore be considered "occulture bricoleurs" (Partridge, *Vol. II* 20); Partridge defines

occulture as an umbrella term for those "often *hidden*, *rejected*, and *oppositional* beliefs and practices" (68), such as those related to "... spirit guides and channeled messages... the spiritual significance of ancient and mystical civilizations, chakra therapy, crystals, healing, [and] shamanism" (70), and psychoactive substance consumption, as is the case within cacao rituals. In the case of cacao ceremonies, the purpose of sacralized cacao consumption is to receive supernatural assistance through channeling "her" ancient and loving energy through consumption.

Redefining the Community

While these occultural bricoleurs appear New Age, my collaborators did not identify with the title of "New Age." This thesis posits that the New Age umbrella does not encompass the entirety of the cacao-related practices nor community. In fact, sociologist Adam Possamaï (2000) argues that there "is a tendency in everyday life and in certain fields of knowledge to generalize every new and alternative spirituality under the label of New Age" and states that the misnomer "does not reflect the panorama of rather different spiritualties, including neo-paganism, what I call Aquarian perennism and presentist perennism" (111). He classifies these misrepresented spiritualties as

> elements of what I call perennism, i.e. a syncretic spirituality which interprets the world as monistic (the cosmos is perceived as having its elements deeply interrelated), whose teleology for its actors is the Integral Self (actors work on themselves for personal growth), and whose soteriology is sought through gnosis (the way to develop oneself is through a pursuit of knowledge). (112)

While the cacao ceremony is related to the psychedelic era and emergence of the NAM, cacao ceremonies cannot be understood without consideration of neo-paganism, Aquarian

perennism, and presentist perennism; dissecting the "umbrella term" into such subcategories enables one to understand the motivations behind cacao consumption in terms of participants' desired outcomes more accurately. As occultural bricoleurs, participants do not pull inspiration from a single category and that these categories are porous.

As suggested by the anthropomorphizing of cacao and the interest in ritual as well as ancient civilizations, characteristics of neo-paganism are also present within ceremonies and overall communal ideology. While neo-paganism and the concept of New Ageism can be easily conflated, Giselle Vincett and Linda Woodhead offer three main characteristics of neo-paganism:

> (a) focus on, and reverence for, nature (itself a modern construct); (b) interest in occultism and spiritual beings, including spirits and ancestors; and (c) concern with ancient pre-Christian European cultures and rituals, places gods, and goddesses—and their revival. (330)

Neo-paganism differs from New Age in that it focuses more on community and communal well-being, cycles, and animism, rather than the individual and their transcendence, which acts as the central focus within New Age religion.

This is not to say that individual healing is never a priority; in the eclectic witchcraft tradition of "Reclaiming," the individual focuses on their healing because they realize that they are "not separate from the system of which [they] are a part of" (Magliocco 82). As the journey to wellness is viewed as "fundamentally holistic" (Partridge, Vol. II 43), practitioners see their healing as extending "eclectically beyond the self" (43); while this applies to the other methods of and the overall significance of

healing within this community (and the remainder of the cacao consuming community), in this case, the individual benefits their family specifically through healing oneself to positively impact their lineage.

In my collaborator Bri's family, she acts as the healer; she tends "to the ancestors and [helps] to clear blockages in the line," or lineage. Through her consumption of cacao, Bri has deepened her relationship with her ancestors as well as developed a greater "inner capacity—in the space of my body, like theoretically—so I can hold more, which is why it was impactful with my mom; I could actually hold more space for her and hold more space for myself." This space Bri refers to is the capacity one has within their inner, emotional world for the types of difficult emotions and experiences that are typically confronted during cacao ceremonies. In Bri's case, her mother's father died from lung cancer when her mother was in her late twenties, and her maternal grandmother died ten years ago. Her mother is

> the only surviving member of her immediate family ... she was born in 1956; she grew up in a different time, there were just different protocols for how people dealt with stuff. And there's a lot she's hasn't shared with me about her life, and the stuff that she has shared is just like, 'Oh trauma with a capital T,' you know?

It was important to Bri to assist her mother in healing this trauma through holding cacao ceremonies for her. Bri references the "there's a lot of stigma in the black community about healing and mental health, just like all the traumas of just being enslaved and, you know, how all that stuff comes together." By sharing cacao with her mother, they were able to share impactful moments of healing for her family unit.

Therefore, this healing makes "things whole" and has the power to "heal the oppress dysfunctional system we are a part of" (Magliocco 82). Further ideas of Reclaiming have been expressed within the community, such as one collaborator, Courtney, who posted to their Instagram account stating, "Fuck your 5D if you aren't addressing the 3D." This was in reference to what she called the "spiritual bypassing" of real-world (3D) events in favor of 5D discussions, such as those related to "leveling up in consciousness." The 3D reality she urges other spiritual leaders to consider include "how many children get raped and trafficked every fucking second; how the oceans are dying, and we are over-polluting Mama Ocean; or how our soil is dying." This further highlights the difference between the individualistic thinking of New Age (specifically the category of Aquarian perennism, which prioritizes this approach to healing) and the community-based motivation behind neo-pagan healing; in the latter, the healing individual is an embodied participant of a respected sacred and physical world.

There are additional ways that neo-pagan influence manifests and shapes the cacao community and its ceremonies. First, there is the appeal to and reverence of ancient folklore and ritual tradition; within most respected ceremonies, cacao's history is directly acknowledged, and there is signaling of cacao's connection to select Central and South American indigenous groups' mythologies, spiritual life, and practice. The envisioning and refurbishment of general cultural elements is due to the communal interest in the "re-awakening" of traditional gnosis rather than "awakening" and transcending. Throughout cacao ceremonies, there is mention of helping to heal Earth and re-awakening to society's more "archaic roots," as promoted by Terrence McKenna, the ethnobotanist who famously championed psychedelic use throughout the late 1980s and 90s. Through

participation within cacao ceremonies, ceremonialists assist this awakening through their focus on healing spiritual, communal, and nature connections, or the overall re-enchantment of the Earth and re-animation of the cosmos through imagination and experience.

In contrast to neo-paganism, Aquarian perennism is an individualistic, astrology-based spirituality. Central to this spirituality is the belief in the Age of Aquarius, a zodiacal period that believers view as an era of unification. It is believed within the community that this era, the 'new age,' will emerge once enough individuals achieve a higher-vibrational, enlightened state, "eventually [coalescing] into a planetary quantum leap of collective consciousness" (York 309). While opening a cacao ritual the facilitator stated,

> [We] have the strength; now we have the ability to go [inward], and it's really important for us now to come together in community and support each other. You know that's what the Age of Aquarius is about. [It] is the collective and coming together, and it's no longer about individuality so much as it is about coming together. And of course, that starts with ourselves.

Thus, by focusing on looking inward through ceremony, a person can transcend negative energies. By dispelling them, the individual may join the collective responsible for transforming the world. When defining her spiritual community, my collaborator Niamh stated,

> New Age would never have come to mind for me ... [Instead, we are] like a community of people who are waking up and want to help the rest of the world to wake up ... I suppose you could say that the group are like leaders in what this

> New Earth is going to be like, you know? This group is needed to help other people who maybe haven't woken up yet or are questioning their reality.

These ideas about worldly transformation coincide with classic notions about a coming New Age and exemplify the concept of progressive millennialism which asserts that collective salvation and a golden age will be brought about by human beings acting in cooperation with a divine authority or superhuman plan (Wessinger 5–7, 15–17; Wojcik, *End of the World* 34–35). As folklorist Daniel Wojcik observes, unlike most previous movements with millennialist themes, "New Age beliefs usually offer a kinder and gentler approach to apocalypse and tend to emphasize shifts in global consciousness rather than inevitable cataclysmic destruction ... [focusing on] the gradual evolution into a new age of harmony and peace brought about by human effort and new forms of spirituality (Wojcik, "Avertive Apocalypticism" 74).

The reality that is viewed as "needing questioning" is referred to within Keith's Cacao ceremonies, as well as by my collaborator Lyndsey, as the "3D", or the 3rd dimensional reality; the "New Earth" corresponds with the "New Age" and referred to a fifth-dimensional reality, or the *5D.* Lyndsey defined the two dimensions as so:

> ... The 3D [is] the physical; like this table and this computer and this tree. You know everything is here, and when I'm able to access my Higher Self and my soul and my spirit, then I can leave that and be a little bit more. I guess get in touch with my true purpose ... the five D is like the ultimate, but the five D is being as awakened as you could get, I guess.

As stated during one ceremony, the 3D references a lower-vibrational human experience; in this state of consciousness, individualism and the material world are the individual's

main focus. The individual may leave the 3D over time or through an instantaneous "ego death," having overcome what is referred to as their personal *density* or *pain-body*.

The concept of the pain-body (also representing *density*) derives from Eckhart Tolle, a New Age spiritual teacher who is sometimes referenced within ceremonies (depending on who is facilitating). According to Tolle, the pain-body is an accumulation of unprocessed emotions, such as pain, fear, or hate; when unrealized, pain-bodies "inflict and suffer pain" (Tolle 149) whether for the individual, causing dysfunction in their social and emotional lives, or the collective, such as a nation. In this case, "the heaviness in the energy field of certain countries" can be felt by its citizens who find themselves "[acting] out in an endless and insane cycle of perpetuation and retribution" (158). Once the pain body is acknowledged and attended to by the individual, they may experience an *upgrade*, or evolution in consciousness, to the 5D. In the 5D, the egocentric, materialistic priorities and experiences are replaced by an emphasis on communal ascendance.

Finally, unlike neo-pagans and Aquarian perennists, presentist perennism is a group "which has no concern with the past, no vision of a succession of age [respectively]: it is perennism which focuses exclusively on the present" (Possamaï 117). Members of this perennist group are "concerned with developing their divine spark but often in an altruistic way, helping others, hoping to build a better world without transforming it radically" (119). In early gnostic texts, the concept of the *divine spark* represented revelations inspired by the surfaced knowledge of God (Partridge, *High Culture* 12).

Ceremonies, interviews, and survey responses suggest that participants do not typically subscribe to a single perennist orientations; certain beliefs and attitudes were

more common than others. Rather, the community's uniting motivation for partaking in ceremony was the ability to use cacao as a tool to access internal gnosis and healing for personal liberation in the here and now.

Healing as well as connecting with the divine through the consumption of entheogens is a practice that, within the West, has strong roots in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. The 1960s was a period of post-war "utopian idealism, of free love, of religious and political optimism of recreational, intellectualized, sacralized, experimental drug used, of talk about bright countercultural futures" (Partridge, *Vol. I* 101). This future was the New Age; in this new era, "attractive, healthy, free, uninhibited, peaceful individuals of the Aquarian age - would live as one" (102). Through the subjective turn, this era also presented the holistic milieu, which will be discussed in chapter five and is the through line and uniting factor of Aquarian perennism, neo-paganism, and presentist perennism. Finally, this period was that of the psychedelic revolution, or the movement that sought to catalyze a massive shift in societal consciousness through psychedelic use. This strive and hope for unification and the "internal liberation" of the masses through personal psychedelic experiences underpins cacao use today.

Entheogens, the Psychedelic Revolution and Sacralization

The following sections offer an abbreviated look at prehistorical psychedelic use and the contemporary history of the psychedelic movement. and offers an explanation as to how cacao has become culturally significant within contemporary spirituality.

The consumption of psychoactive substances to transcend the mundane to experience the mystical and numinous has occurred throughout history. One of the earliest mentions of psychoactive substances "appears in the *Rig Veda* (c. 1200-900

BCE)" (Partridge, *Vol. II* 85) and features *soma*. While there is no consensus as to which psychedelic plant *soma* is, researchers know through Vedic hymns that the plant was regarded as a deity due to its powerful properties. In addition, cave paintings of mushrooms from 5000 BCE have "been found on the Tassili Plateau in Northern Algeria" (Richards 7); shamans in Siberia would use *Amanita muscaria*; Korean shamans would consume large quantities of alcohol to enter trance states; and the Aztecs consumed "the mushroom *teonanacatl* [,] the vine *oloiugui*, [and] *peyote* cactus which they revered as 'the flesh of the gods'" (7). In the ancient Greek ritual of the Eleusinian mysteries, the central and sacred beverage, or the *kykeon*, contained "ergot, the rye mold from which LSD" (7) would eventually be produced. While this does not capture the breadth of sacramental use of psychoactive substances, it suggests that the consumption of such substances has been integral to religious practices spanning cultures and history.

While it was not until 1950 that the Western interest in psychedelic religion and psychoactive substance sacralization took form, the contemporary movement arguably began with Albert Hofmann in 1938. Hofmann, a Swiss research chemist, developed LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide) while working for a pharmaceutical laboratory and discovered it was a "sacred drug" after accidentally absorbing some through his skin. While Hofmann's discovery broke ground for the impending psychedelic movement, the movement did not gain traction until 1952 when psychiatrist Humphrey Osmond's work on understanding schizophrenia through mescaline[6] consumption caught the attention of Aldous Huxley. In 1953, after offering to be a test subject, Osmond "administered 300-

[6] Hallucinogen found in peyote.

400 mg of mescaline to Huxley" (Partridge, *Vol. II* 87) and he experienced his first of many "trips."

Based on his experience with mescaline, Huxley wrote *The Doors of Perception*, which became "one of the most influential occultural, [psychedelia] texts of the 20th century" (Partridge, *Vol. II* 95). The title references a quote from William Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, "'If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it really is–infinite" (Partridge, *Psychedelic* 371). Within the cacao ceremony, facilitators such as Wilson have expressed the notion that, "Cacao will open the door to transformation for you, but you must decide to walk through it." I find there to no coincidence that these doors of transformation parallel the concept of "doors of perception," especially as Huxley's book is considered to be one initiator of the psychedelic revolution and hippy counterculture of the 1960s. Notably, this work informed psychologist Timothy Leary's "reflection on the psychedelic experience" (Partridge, *High Culture* 231) and would eventually inspire Terrence McKenna, known as the "Leary of the 90s."

If Huxley could be considered "the psychedelic guru on the 1950s" (Partridge, *High Culture* 230), Timothy Leary would be that of the 1960s. Leary's journey with psychedelics began while he was vacationing in Mexico in 1960. Three years prior, in 1957, R. Gordon Wasson published a *Life* article titled "Seeking the Magic Mushroom," which outlined his and his wife's profoundly numinous experience ingesting "magic" teonanacatl mushrooms. Leary acquired these mushrooms through an anthropologist at the University of Mexico, and after his first "trip" and profound religious experience, he returned to Harvard. That same year in 1960, Leary and Richard Alpert began

psychedelic research at the Harvard University's Center for Research in Personality, which Huxley ultimately joined as a volunteer participant. During his time at Harvard, in response to their attempted regulation of psychedelic research, Leary formed the International Foundation for Internal Freedom (IFIF); IFIF was a non-profit organization that supplied its community centers (approximately 3,000 members in total) with LSD to 'internally free' them. Leary envisioned the IFIF communities would grow, ultimately evangelizing America and spreading the psychedelic spiritual movement.

By 1963, both Leary, Alpert, and those working within the IFIF were dismissed from Harvard. However, during the period which followed, Leary became a counterculture icon and the psychedelic subculture flourished. Leary continued on as a "guru" and a "messiah" of the psychedelic era; he remains revered as "the most important psychedelic activist and thinker" of the period. Post-Harvard, he continued attempting to democratize the previously elitist practice of consuming psychedelics by campaigning for "the legalization of psychedelic drugs for religious purposes and to promote 'psychedelic religion'" (Chryssides 201). Eventually, in September of 1966, Leary founded the League for Spiritual Discovery (LSD). As outlined within the new religion's pamphlet, *Start Your Own Religion*, the core doctrines were:

> Drop out—detach yourself from the external social drama which is as dehydrated and ersatz as TV. Turn on—find a sacrament which returns you to the Temple of God, you own body. Go out of your mind. Get high. Tune in—be reborn. Drop back in [to the mundane] to express it. Start a new sequence of behavior that reflects your vision. (Partridge, *Vol. II* 100-101)

This religion was founded to protect the psychedelic communities use of sacramental substances from the Californian government, which a month following the establishment of the church, made LSD and DMT illegal.

Huxley, Leary, and the other major proponents of the psychedelic era were all—to some degree—invested in the belief that "humanity was on the verge of a new age of drug-provoked, Easternized, expanded, mystical consciousness" (100) and discovering "human potentialities" (Partridge, *High Culture* 236). In fact, Eastern philosophy and religion had great influence on the movement; elements of renunciation, holism, transcendental meditation, holistic health, and enlightenment were thoughts and practices that permeated the 60s, which are pervasive in the cacao community. Based on the connection between the East and psychedelic religion, Leary, Alpert, and Metzner co-wrote *The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead* in 1964. This text, which was written as a field guide for psychedelic participants, was inspired by *The Tibetan Book of the Dead (Bardo Thodol)*. Similarly, *Bardo Thodol* acted as a guide that assisted dying individuals in detaching from their physical reality; according to Alpert, this text "provided 'the most vivid descriptions of what we were experiencing with psychedelics but hadn't been able to describe" (Partridge, *High Culture* 96).

While the influence of Eastern religions remain, largely due to Terrence McKenna's influence, contemporary psychedelic use has a more, eclectic, neo-pagan orientation. After psychedelic substances were criminalized in 1971, a gap in psychedelia literature and public practice developed. However, rave culture of the 90s, the internet, and McKenna reignited public interest in psychedelics. Proceeding Leary and the major

psychedelic proponents of the 60s, McKenna led the third wave of the psychedelic revolution, promoting a neo-paganistic and shamanistic approach to consumption. Through obtaining a degree in Shamanism, Ecology, and Resource Conservation at University of California Berkeley and traveling throughout Asia and South America, McKenna developed an idiosyncratic, "mycologically oriented philosophy" (Partridge, *Vol. II* 113-114). His spirituality was based on the notion that psychedelic mushrooms were responsible for the spiritual and rational evolution of the human species; therefore, society could "get back to their roots" and reconnect with nature by partaking in psychedelic spirituality.

Further, McKenna believed that psychedelics were central to continued human evolution, that "true shamanism" incorporated entheogen use, and that reviving psychedelic shamanic practice and gnosis would alleviate contemporary Western issues. McKenna's beliefs centered magic, myth, the interconnectedness of mind and universe as an organic whole, and the mind as a "'mirror of nature' (and the reverse)" (Hanegraaff, *Entheogenic* 405). This worldview appealed to those who opposed the 'spiritually bankrupt' Western world that was experiencing both environmental crises and "post-war existentialism" (407). This desire to alleviate anxieties related such issues through neo-shamanic and self-healing with cacao as a guide is an idea expressed within ceremony and amongst members of the community. A common sentiment in ceremony is that consuming cacao helps to ground individuals, bring them peace, and even allow them to transcend turmoil. For example, in terms of political turmoil and polarization, such as what was occurring throughout the 2020 election cycle, one participant noted that through healing and consuming cacao, she had become less political and felt as peace in

her neutrality. As stated by Wilson in one ceremony, “The revolution is on the inside.” Individual evolution through grounding via neo-shamanic and individual healing practices that utilize cacao is viewed by some participants as a radical method of reforming society.

Shamanism

In Mircea Eliade’s *Shamanism – Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, ‘ecstasy’ refers to “soul flight, a religious experience, where the soul is believed to leave the body in order to experience another dimension” (Puttick 292). This dimension was defined by Carlos Castaneda as the “non-ordinary reality” or “the otherworld.” As both a liminal figure and traverser of these liminal realms, a ‘shaman’ is said to enter a trance state and journey to another dimension; in this otherworld, they communicate and negotiate with spirits, guides, or allies, whom the shaman has preestablished relationships with. Through this communication, shamans gather “information, power, or healing energy” (292) and with it, they return to their body and utilize it “to achieve [their] aims, which usually are concerned with medicine, war, hunting, marriage brokering or agriculture” (292). Within these cultures, shamans were more than “religious specialists”; they were social mediators often central to their communities.

In contrast, the popular Western practice of *neo-shamanism* is a construct developed by practitioners through use of anthropological academic research and modern-day, countercultural mythology. The development of neo-shamanism began in the mid-20th century with historian of religions Mircea Eliade’s *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy.* In this text, Eliade outlined universalized features and reduced the indigenous practice to four components: (1) shaman serve an important role within their

community due to their ability to enter a state of ecstasy; (2) within the state of ecstasy, the shaman can "journey to places they conceive of as other dimensions of reality" (Hendrickson 33); (3) within the realm, shamans can access healing or mystical information as well as engage with or even become animal spirits; and (4) shamans return from their journey to heal members of their community, "primarily by returning them to states of original purity and balance" (33). This text made shamanism approachable to Westerners who were then able to co-opt and reconstruct practices, access indigenous gnosis, and develop their own psychotherapies.

Eliade believed that engaging in indigenous practices would "help break the spiritual amnesia of Western society and return us to meaningful life" (34). Carlos Castaneda, who was controversial due to his fictionalized "academic" work, also pushed this narrative through his 1969's Master's-thesis-turned-book, *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge*. Don Juan, a Yaqui indigenous man, taught Castaneda that enlightened individuals could access universal energies and harness them. While it was originally marketed as an ethnographic work, it is now largely considered modern fiction; despite this, the book, and those of them that followed, had an impact on the West's interest in and practicing of neo-shamanism.

Michael Harner was another anthropologist and major proponent of neo-shamanism. While doing his fieldwork in Ecuador and Peru, he was introduced to and participated in shamanic rituals during which he used ayahuasca. After his "other-worldly" experiences, Harner wrote *The Way of the Shaman*, left academia, and started the Foundation for Shamanic Studies. Through this foundation, he taught "core shamanism," which universalized and promoted Western access to shamanism. Rather

than using the practices of any specific cultural groups, Harner's core shamanism teaches the fundamentals and basic methods of shamanic journeying. One such method was to enter a "shamanic state of consciousness" (SSC) "through meditation while listening to pulsating drumming" (Hendrickson 35) rather than through psychotropic substance use.

As shown, due to its nature of conception, neo-shamanism could be considered an essentialized and detraditionalized method of physical, psychological, and spiritual healing, which is modified to meet the needs of new religious movement communities. According to Hendrickson, neo-shamanism differs from traditional shamanism in that beliefs and practices associated with the former are

> 'more eclectic that those of the classic shaman' (Joan Townsend 1998 qt. by Hendrickson 36), often including the use of chakras and crystals, a pronounced commitment to the natural world and environmental protection and restoration. This propensity to borrow and refashion, common throughout New Age and contemporary metaphysical religious groups, is matched by a desire to seek beyond modern medicine for healing (Hendrickson 35).

This "propensity to borrow and refashion" leads to practitioners pulling from a "grab-bag of healing modalities" (31), the motivation for which is the desire to "eliminate negative energy, recall and eliminate repressed memories, align one's energies, overcome addiction, become self-actualized, communicate better, and obtain peace" (31). Within the cacao community, this manifests as crystal usage, the balancing of chakras, the clearing of 'densities' through guided-imagery-induced journeying, neo-shamanic practice, and so on.

Some traditional shamanic and neo-shamanic practices include the utilization of psychotropic plants; however, just as promoted by Harner, such consumption was not a requisite to reach an elevated consciousness. For example, due to a lack of access to mind-altering substances, indigenous groups of the Northern Hemisphere sought entheogenic states through styles of drumming "at around 180 beats per minute (Puttick 292), shamanic singing, or hyperventilation that would trigger a trance (Metzner 72). In this same class of trance triggers are practices such as "hypnotic induction, meditation technique, mantra ... breathing, sensory isolation, movement, sex," (72) etc., which are also examples of activities that my collaborators reported doing while consuming cacao.

Neo-Shamanism and the Entheogenic Cacao Spirit

The first thing that I asked each collaborator was for them to outline their understanding of the history of sacramental cacao use within the West. I received two categories of response: 76% of collaborators referenced Central and South American indigenous practice, but they did not know how the Western practice surfaced; and the remaining 24%, responded that the practice originated with an American man named Keith Wilson, proprietor of Wilson's Cacao and renowned as the "Chocolate Shaman." One of the collaborators, Joanna, credited Wilson, saying,

> I would say, before Wilson no one was doing it – I mean no one had ever heard the words "cacao" and "ceremony" together ... I'd never ever heard of anyone before the year 2000 mentioned this, and I've been around quite a while because I am 67 years old. So, I do absolutely credit Wilson with sort of making it a thing.

According to an interview with the *Far Out* podcast, Wilson not only popularized the term "cacao ceremony," but he also coined the terms "ceremonial cacao" and

"ceremonial-grade cacao." Searching these terms today will pull up websites for Wilson's Cacao as well as those of his estimated "30 international competitors ... All of whom call cacao what we've called it—all of them taking stuff right off our website [to] use it for their promotional materials (59:56-60:06)." However, this does not bother Wilson; instead, he considers this to be a contribution to the dissemination of cacao's message, "I see myself as working for a plant spirit medicine and in her desire purpose to spread over the world as the *food for the shift*—as a facilitator for the shift process and all the things related to it" (60:28-60:50). While not limited to these examples, this shift process could include global "age" or "paradigm" shifting, the shifting of one's consciousness of from chaos to love, or a shift of the "modern" ideologies to the romanticized "archaic," and as mentioned in the podcast, all that relates to "people's fun and excitement, like creativity [or] workplace productivity" (60:52).

According to Wilson, indigenous lore states that, "Whenever the balance between humans and nature becomes threatened, Cacao comes from the rain forest to open people's hearts and return the planet to harmony" ("Far Out #69" 23:32-23:46). Approximately 24 years ago while Wilson meditated near Lake Atitlan, Guatemala, "she" did just that. The spirit contacts Wilson energetically and urged him to conduct research on cacao, including its indigenous history and methods of production. This work would enable Wilson to introduce the West to its message and medicinal potential. Wilson built relationships with and learned from the Cacao Spirit and surrounding indigenous families and shamans, some of whom reportedly told him that he was the "first non-Indigenous person to use cacao this way in 500 years" (Wilson). Wilson began crafting and sharing

cacao beverages with fellow expats on his porch, and one day, an expat referred to their meetings as a "cacao ceremony," officially coining the term.

As an entheogen, cacao is interpreted as a loving and gentle plant spirit, medicine, and teacher who desires to share her message of love, unity, and holistic healing to begin a global transformation. While not psychedelic like most medicines of interest, cacao offers a cocktail of "over 500 different compounds" (Powis et al.). These are said to be *heart-opening*, psychoactive molecules attractive to practitioners. This chemical profile includes theobromine, a cardiovascular stimulant; low caffeine concentration, which prevents jitters and an energy "crash"; phenylethylamine (PEA), referred to by a past facilitator as "chocolate-amphetamine"; and neurotransmitters including anandamide, a cannabinoid that causes bliss (Gnutzman). These all contribute to what one might experience during a ceremony, including feelings of love, energy, openness, or feeling *grounded*. For example, my collaborator Bri described feeling grounded through cacao consumption as "easy"; she could "connect to earth with cacao; like at any point, if I ever feel ungrounded—or if I'm losing sight of what's happening in my life—I can get a cup of cacao and like instantly feel that connection." The compounds also assist in the release of emotions, and when paired with the correct *intention* or activity, divine or elevated consciousness.

Due to its psychoactive nature and role in the religious ceremony, cacao certainly may be seen as an entheogen and sacrament. In this instance, the term entheogen specifically relates to those substances that caused unordinary consciousness states that elicit spiritual sensations such as being "'filled', 'possessed' or 'inspired' by some kind of divine entity" (Hanegraaff, *Entheogenic* 392). Being classified a psychedelic substance

is not a prerequisite to being considered an entheogen; while they may be psychedelic, the term entheogen defines a "[theologized] chemically induced [experience] of transcendence" (Partridge, *High Culture* 4).

Ayahuasca, psilocybin, LSD, and peyote are among the best-known entheogens; psychoactive—but not psychedelic—substances such as coffee and cacao are also considered to be entheogenic and are, or have been, used in religious ceremonies. Just as peyote visions are sacred and central to some Native American rituals, prior to being "discovered" by the West, coffee was "used by Islamic Sufis, who valued its stimulant properties for long nights of prayer and meditation" (Metzner PG); just as Mother Ayahuasca is central to Brazilian mestizo ceremonies, prior to being "discovered" by the West, cacao was significant to Mesoamerican ritual practice and spiritual lives—a connection to the divine (Dreiss). Now cacao is viewed as a "food for the shift."

In terms of being "food for the shift," ceremonialists consider cacao to be a *tool* and *guide*, similar to the ways Leary and McKenna considered LSD or mushrooms. Rather than the disassociating nature of a psychedelic, cacao is gentle; as frequently stated within the community, cacao *opens the door to transformation*, but it does not make you walk through. Cacao *grounds* the participant, meaning that it *shifts* them from their head or ego and, as Wilson would say, gets them "out of their own way" to achieve a more embodied and heart-centered experience and way of life. Cacao is said to guide the participant on a pilgrimage to the heart or what one Ora facilitator referred to as "the places; the doorways we find inside ourselves." These inner places are where the participant can connect with self-love to dispel low *vibrational frequencies.* The referencing of energy, including facilitators' use of *heart chakra* to reference the heart

center, reflects the concept of quantum healing, or the holistic healing of the mind, body, and soul at an energetic level (Partridge, *Vol. II* 35). By healing at this level, individuals can experience self-renewal through the act of animistic worship and community engagement, for their own health and wellbeing, and/or to transition into channels of light and love, beginning the shift into a golden age.[78]

[7] While referenced in other ceremonies, the explicit focus on holistic, quantum healing is *central* to Wilson's ceremonies.

[8] As stated by Partridge, this focus on energy "comes close to being *hard* orthodoxy within the holistic milieu" (*Vol. II,* 34) so much so that those who do not believe are effectively outsiders.

CHAPTER IV: BIRTH OF THE CACAO SPIRIT

The following chapter discusses the process of producing a cacao product fit for purchase and consumption within ceremony. This will include consideration of purity and pollution in the production and purchasing process. This chapter also analyzes the community's method of determining what is a "ceremonial" product versus that which is not, including the significance of terroir and symbolism.

Bean to Ceremonial Bar

There are six steps to producing a cacao bar fit for ceremony and the spiritual, heart-opening experience: fermentation, drying, roasting, winnowing, and grinding; each step may be accomplished by hand or use of machine. Once cacao pods have finished their four-to-five-month growth and an additional month-long ripening, producers carefully remover the pods from the trees as not to damage them. Producers open the pods and scoop the mucilage-engulfed beans. In her work, *The Chocolate Connoisseur,* Chloé Doutre-Roussel describes these pulpy beans as appearing like a mass of "grapes covered in soggy cotton wool" (59) when first extracted. The producers place the mass into a fermentation box, which has a base that permits the drainage of pulp, and then oversee the three-to-ten-day fermentation process. The box is covered with a mat or lid and the chemical work of anaerobic yeasts, ethanol, bacteria, and oxygen produces a heat that liquefies the pulp and ensures a less astringent and more "chocolatey" bean.[9] To achieve "a 'well fermented' status based on the FCCI protocol" ("Our Cacao"), company

[9] According to Doutre-Roussel, using banana tree leaves rather than a lid can "enhance the fermentation process" (60) due to the introduction of the bacteria of the leaves.

Embue Cacao states that fermentation "requires a nuanced monitoring of natural sugar & moisture content, weather and heat and rotation protocols" ("Our Cacao").

Once producers have fermented the beans, they spread them out in the sun, such as on a concrete slab in a yard; in greenhouses on mats or racks; or, in the case of modern cacao companies like Embue and Ora—who may also use one of the above listed methods—a solar dryer or drying bed. The process of drying these beans takes approximately two weeks, and it is during this period that the beans slowly lose "more than half of their weight" (Coe et al. 24) to contain "less than six to eight percent [of their original] moisture" (Doutre-Roussel 62). The low percentage of moisture allows producers to transport the beans and/or store them for long durations of time without molding.

At this stage of the process, Wilson may visit the seven to eight farms he partners with to check the bean batches' quality. Each harvest produces a different quality of bean, so Wilson visits each in turn, "tunes into" the batches' "energetic frequencies," "assesses" their flavor profile through consumption, and selects the best tasting beans that are most potent for ceremony. "Tuning into" a bean's energetic frequency is a skill Wilson began developing after first encountering the Cacao Spirit. During a three-year phase of research, he "[traveled] from Southern Mexico to Panama, bought cacao in markets, visited farms, visited indigenous people, [and] visited chocolate making workshops" ("Far Out #69" 17:50-18:01), all the while familiarizing himself with the variable, sometimes "useless," energy emitted by the beans. Today, once Wilson has made his selection, he disperses his beans to 12 indigenous Maya families for bar production.

Once the beans have dried, the next step is the roasting process, which releases cacao's aromas. Traditional methods include roasting the beans "over a hot fire on the terra-cotta surface of the *camol*" (Dreiss et al. 106) while more modern techniques include using an oven. When roasted, the processors remove the bean's outer shell through *winnowing*. Traditionally, producers winnow by hand peeling, but more modern methods of removing the shell include "using a strong air current" ("Ceremonial Grade") to reveal the cacao nibs within. The following grinding process may occur through traditional stone grinding, like by using a "stone metate with a stone mano" (Dreiss et al. 106), or with a machine.

Once ground, the cacao nib releases the cacao butter within, and the smooth, liquid cacao produced is poured into molds. Ora Cacao, an outlier, lists *conching* and *tempering* their cacao as their final steps. As a product, cacao can take shape in several forms. If one searches "ceremonial cacao" via Google, webpages such as "Best Ceremonial Cacao to Buy Online" or innumerable advertisements for "100% Pure Cacao" appear. Most commonly, cacao is sold as a 16-ounce block, but different companies offer products such as "Solid Ceremonial Cacao Bullion Bar – 600 grams" or Ora Chocolates "pouches" of cacao disks.

Purity, Pollution, and Intention in Purchasing and Processing Cacao

Labeling the cacao as "ceremonial" maybe be considered what folklorist Lucy Long calls a "strategy to draw attention to the exotic quality of otherwise familiar food" ("Culinary Tourism" 39) while implying its sacrality and purity. It also draws to attention the distinction between cacao that is safe for ceremony versus what may as well be Halloween candy. Through interviews, attendance of ceremonies, and website analysis, it

appears the consensus is that ceremonial cacao is free of pollutants, whether those be additives, chemicals, or energetic frequencies.

During Wilson's first interaction with cacao, he recalls thinking, "This energy is not Hershey's, so what is going on?" ("Far Out #69" 14:36-14:40). Wilson's experience of the energy shift between an exemplary processed bar and unadulterated cacao suggests that it is holy in its "wholeness and completeness" (Douglas 51), free of fillers and additives. To maintain the holiness, or energetic integrity, precautions are taken during preparation. When pure cacao[10] is transformed from into a beverage, the ceremonialist first chops or blends up to 5 ounces of cacao, depending on the ceremony and the participants tolerance level; if too high of a "dose," cacao may give the inexperienced participant a headache. The ceremonialist melts the cacao in warm water of about 170 degrees Fahrenheit; rather than boiling water, using warm water will ensure that cacao's potent psychoactive compounds, and therefore her energetic integrity, are protected. Thereafter, the majority of ceremonialists will add a combination of sweeteners and spices. Although the act of drinking cacao at its purest is exotic, if not for the inclusion of additional "pure" ingredients, cacao's earthy and bitter taste would be inedible or unpalatable for many. Regarding pollution rules, people may include other "pure" ingredients; websites and facilitators instruct the community not to use pollutants, like refined sugar or dairy products.

My collaborators reported maintaining the beverage's purity by using ingredients such as vanilla, cinnamon, cardamom, or cayenne pepper (such as used in Mexican hot

[10] Websites use the word "pure" to describe which cacao bars have additives in comparison to those comprised solely of cacao.

chocolate); coconut, soy, or almond milk; maple syrup, coconut sugar, or "local honey made by happy bees" (Ora Chocolate); and tinctures such as holy basil, rose, and medicinal mushrooms. Recipes discussed by my collaborators as well as promoted on websites include brews containing holy basil, rose oil, linden flower, and Hawthorne berries (Raven).

Furthermore, companies advertise their process to producing cacao in ways that suggest its purity. Ora's behavioral norms and the precautions taken within their *cacao temple*, the small production facility in California, suggest that maintaining a pure space and energy is essential to the process of producing a bar (or bag of disks). Through prayer and "sitting in ceremony," the crew can hear and honor the cacao's wishes; they can "intuitively feel when [they] receive a cacao sample that we are supposed to share onwards" ("Ceremonial Grade"). Here, the concept of quantum healing is applied; by becoming energetically pure, the crew can select cacao of the purist quality. Further, MysticalCacaoSource's Etsy says that, after their cacao is packaged and labeled, it is sent to their "[Mystical Yoga Farm] where it is smudged, blessed, and prayed to by our sacred fire, infused with loving intentions!"

Producer/purchaser relationships are also significant in determining the purity of a product. Ora focuses on selecting smallholder farms that will produce beans of a high energetic standard. Jonas Ketterle, the founder of Ora who began his relationship with cacao nine years ago in Oaxaca, Mexico, travels to the company's partnering communities to build relationships and trades directly with them. As is reportedly standard in the ceremonial cacao industry, Ketterle also pays a "beyond" fair trade wage

for the labor and product.[11] Each of my collaborators expressed that, while determining which company to purchase from, the company's connection to their partnering communities was significant to their decision process. One stated that supporting companies that prioritize fair trade practices and family-owned farms is essential with something as "dangerous as cacao is because you can get the wrong kind and it could be [produced by] child labor... in a lot of [countries] there's ... all kinds of horrible labor practices" (Jesse). This web of connections illustrates the role of intentional relationships in producing a cacao fit for ceremony; if the communities producing the cacao are not properly treated or compensated, the cacao itself is *dangerous* in its ethical impurity and, although not explicitly stated, would consequently lack in energetic and spiritually transformative purity as well.

Culinary Tourism and Terroir

Ora's website also states that by making these connections, they can ensure participants are purchasing cacao that was "tended to lovingly" ("Ceremonial Grade"). This creates a perceived tie between the ethical participant and a "loving" producer.[12] Companies also make apparent that these producers are Maya families with access to reclaimed ancestral growing lands; Wilson's company has even stated during ceremony that the indigenous Maya believed Lake Atitlan, positioned near the communities he works with, is the world's birthplace.

Similarly, during one Ora ceremony, owner Jonas Ketterle shared information pertaining to the Arhuaco tribe of Colombia who the company had partnered with

[11] Unlike the other companies discussed in this paper, which solely source from Guatemala, Ora works with groups in Tanzania, Ecuador, Mexico, Colombia, and Belize.

[12] This could also be tied to discussions of ideas on safety and otherness.

through their “Colombian Cacao Project” to produce their cacao product, “Connect Colombian.” Prior to the inception of their partnership, the Arhuaco had gained access to their ancestral cacao growing lands and had reportedly even located “some wild cacao trees, which are descendants of their historic cacao groves.” Ketterle shared information about the tribe including that the spiritual leaders wore

> these really amazing hats ... and their whole society is guided by their spiritual leaders. They view their home place, the Sierra Nevada mountains, which are one of the most spectacular places in the world ... as the heart of the world.

He described this tribe’s beliefs as centered on holism to support the earth energetically and “maintain balance all across the planet” by traveling the globe to perform rituals. They “then do corresponding [energetic healing] rituals back at the heart of the earth.” These rituals were cited by Ketterle as

> very articulate and detailed meditations ... they will go deep into meditation; first, get totally blank and then they will visualize specific details different colors and different frequencies to construct like a mental altar. They spend an enormous amount of time doing this ... they're bringing to the earth healing and balancing that they offer. And they view themselves as our big brothers in a very friendly way, they see themselves as caring for all of us ... and the cacao that they offer us as medicine for our healing ... it's brought to us knowledge that cacao is such amazing medicine for our hearts, and they just stoked to be able to support us and that the cacao that they're growing is being used in this way.

While production transparency is important to decolonializing cacao, by educating the participant, companies imply that cacao grown in these lands and touched by loving and

caring indigenous hands is the most authentic and, therefore, most likely to induce a spiritual experience. When talking about her connection to the plant, one collaborator stated, “[Through consumption,] I can feel a connection to those elders who cared for the plant, revered it, protected it, and carried its traditions and rituals for centuries” (Soon), thereby identifying cacao “with a romanticized tribal past” (Long, “Culinary Tourism” 28).

On Legacy Cacao’s website, it is stated that their cacao

> ... helps you to drop into your zone of genius, provides added mental clarity and alertness, boosts energy without any crash, and reconnects you back to your heart and Soul Truth ... It is prepared by only women and mixed in ceremony by a Mayan Priestess in accordance with the original Mayan recipe - a secret only given to one respected elder at a time. Legacy Cacao has been entrusted with the honor and responsibility of being the only bridge between this ancient legacy and the rest of the world.

Soul Lift Cacao’s website states that their company “is one of the only U.S. companies providing true ceremonial cacao, roasted over a wood fire by Mayan indigenous people.”

This romanticized tie between authenticity, land, time, and a community’s perceived ethos and gnosis suggest a “nostalgia ... for a certain way of life” (Trubek 268). As suggested by folklorist Roger Abrahams, “micro-level cultural matters” (20), such as those related to foodways, can reflect systemic macro-level issues; when asked what attracted her to cacao ceremonies, Alice expressed a desire for a reprieve from the Western world’s "intense stress, pressure, pervasive busyness and ... increasing disconnection from nature and [promoting disconnection] from oneself.” Instead, Alice

was striving for a way of being known by preindustrial peoples perceived to be more in tune with their communities, spirituality, and environment. This is true regarding perceptions of modern indigenous groups as the West perceives them to possess the same "uncorrupted [ancient] wisdom of a humanity unrepressed by the external dogma, rationalism and authority of later institutionalized religion and culture" (Partridge, *Vol. 1* 77). Participants imbibe cacao to symbolically embody this imagined tribal knowledge and ethos, which demonstrates the significance of cacao's connection to a holy and ancient terroir.

As folklorist Rachelle Saltzman explains, terroir means "Earth or soil" and "[refers] to the relationship between place and taste" and how "food grown in a particular area acquire a flavor profile derived from that area's climate, water, and terrain" (Saltzman 1368). Further, in her examination of terroir, Saltzman discusses the connection between terroir and those that inhabit the "Earth or soil." Saltzman's focus on people is concerned with the evolution of diet, health, and terroir, and I argue that the producers' connections to their land and their romanticized history is foundational to the creation of "ceremonial" cacao. The promotion of cacao as a plant medicine is legitimized by its connection to an imagined sacred and ancient community, oozing with authenticity. Just as suggested by the excerpts above, by connecting with cacao that has been 'blessed' by a "Mayan Priestess," participants see themselves as being offered a state of gnosis, or a state of knowing from the so-called "Zone of Genius," heart, and "Soul Truth." Essentially, cacao is a symbolic key.

Symbolism

Symbols are a "molecule, or smallest portion of to which a ritual sequence or dynamic total can be reduced by subdivision without losing its semantic structural identity" (Turner, "Forms of Symbolic" 8). These symbols may "'naturally' [typify or represent] something by possession of analogous qualities or by association in fact or thought" (8). According to Lucy Long, these "symbols are polysemic, able to carry more than one meaning" ("Meaning-Centered" 206). Cacao is a symbol vehicle representing, to name a few concepts: the heart, a medicine, a teacher, a gateway, intimacy, compassion, love, and healing. Additionally, as suggested in the previous discussion on terroir, through association in fact, cacao is viewed as connected to pre-Colombian indigenous roots; and through association in thought, it is viewed as connected to pre-Colombian indigenous society that was pure in its connection to and esoteric understanding of the cosmos and Earth.

Furthermore, cacao has had symbolic connections to the heart since pre-Columbian consumption. Long notes, "Foods become symbolic … through the presence of analogous qualities – includes physical qualities" ("Food as Symbol" 1). In Aztec culture, researchers suspect that both the pod and the heart were viewed as "as repositories for precious liquids" (Dreiss et al. 49), as reflected by the esoteric terms "yollotl" and "eztli," meaning "heart" and "blood," which Aztecs used as a metaphor for cacao (Coe et al. 101) and from which Embue Cacao derived its title. Rather than symbolizing impurity or danger, blood is representative of "life force energy," and as "heart blood," and cacao is effectually a consumable life force energy.

As if exchanging cacao for blood, victims consumed cacao during the "final rite" that occurred before their sacrifice. The cacao was used to provide the victim life force energy that would assist them on their journey into the underworld. For example, in a 40-day calendrical ritual endemic to Tenochtitlán, a slave chosen to have their heart extracted would drink "itzpapalotl." According to the accounts of friar Diego de Duran, this translated to "'water from the washing of obsidian blades'" (Coe et al. 102). "Obsidian blades" refer to the reportedly bloodied sacrificial knives that priests used while preparing the "bewitching" beverage used to positively affect the mood of the victim.[13]

Further, in the Mixtec codices, bleeding cacao pods acted as toponyms for villages known to have had sacrificial activity; in the Aztec Codex Fejervary-Mayer scene discussed previously, the cacao tree represents the Tree of the South, which is associated with red, or the color of blood (Coe et al. 100); and this association occurs in innumerable documented calendrical events, such as rituals promoting cosmic and agricultural cycle continuation. For example, in sixteenth-century accounts, the people of Xeoj would cut their arms and ears, similarly to those gods depicted in the Madrid Codex, and shed their blood and offer it as a token of appeasement to the earth gods, ensuring a bountiful bloom of cacao flowers (Dreiss). In each sacrificial context stated above, cacao was significant to renewal and continuation of life, such as those of blooming flowers and crops

[13] It was believed that the victim's sorrow "was held as an evil omen or sign prognosticating some future disaster" (Coe et al. 102). Durán's book currently sells for $1,008 on Amazon.

Additional evidence between cacao and the heart can be seen in cacao's connection to ideas of intimacy (including sexual) and love. While some believe the myth that cacao is an aphrodisiac, which was started by Spanish conquistadors who claimed, "Aztec emperor Moctezuma [drank] 50 golden goblets of chocolate a day ... to enhance his sexual prowess" (Doutre-Roussel 167), a couple of my collaborators drew connections between cacao's call for love and sexuality. One referred to cacao as "the grandma that still has sex, rather than the grandma who is like over and done and retired, you know. There is this liveliness there" (Mikki). These connections also have been mentioned in association with ceremonies. When asked by a ceremonialist why he shares cacao, Embue owner Moses stated, "When my cup of love is full, it spills over," and that he receives a strong urge that comes from the cacao itself; as a "promiscuous plant." This promiscuity refers to cacao as a spirit that wants her message of love shared and cacao as a plant that cross-pollinates between genetic subspecies.[14] Further, cacao's connection to sex is reflected in Meg's healing experience:

> My partner and I, for quite a while, had challenges around our sexual relationship, and cacao and ceremony in general has been so helpful for that in terms of like creating a beautiful space with intention to just be together as well as like – it feels like a friend was coming to help us work through things I think that's been one of the most profound things.

14 When I asked another ceremonialist how they felt about the *feminine* cacao being referred to as "promiscuous," she stated, "we have an idea about how women are supposed to behave [and] about what sexuality is ... The conversation about that is an opportunity to examine our beliefs, about how women are supposed to be. So what if she's promiscuous? Why is that a problem?" (Mikki).

This further suggests the connection between cacao and not only sex, but intimacy and love, as suggested by chocolate's connection to Valentine's Day.

Further, cacao's symbolic connection to the heart, renewal, and intimacy extend to the self and ideas of self-love and care. For example, Caroline stated, "I think cacao gives me that little space to say, "'Wait a second, you can show yourself kindness as well.'" These messages come through while one experiences the "heart-opening" effects of ritualized cacao consumption. In the next chapter, I will explore the process of heart opening within the context of the cacao ceremony.

CHAPTER V: THE CACAO CEREMONY

While people do consume cacao in secular contexts, my focus in this chapter continues to be upon how participants achieve its full, heart-opening and transformational benefits through imbibing it during ritual events, or cacao ceremonies. The events include preparing the cacao, opening ceremony, dispersal of cacao, sequences of instruction, meditation, healing, sound baths, dancing, journaling, journeying, sharing, etc.; they include genres of ritual language such as singing, journaling, reciting poetry, use of prayer, invocations, intention-setting, and "witnessing," (the practice of reporting healing miracles or seeming supernatural intervention, which anthropologist Thomas Csordas reported in his research on Charismatic healing (59)). Most ceremonies are calendrical events; if not astrologically tied, such as to the moon's cycle, the ceremonies can correlate with one's menstrual cycle or a specific weekday. While I attended ceremonies of cacao-selling companies during my research, independent facilitators may also hold ceremonies. Whether online due to the global pandemic or in person, facilitators schedule and organize their ceremonies based on their preferences and skill set. The average length of the ceremony is an hour and a half, and when in-person, they may take place in settings such as the facilitator's home, yoga studios, or spiritual retreats in an exotic destination such as the scaled-down Pyramids of Giza in the jungle of Ubud, Bali, Indonesia, that I attended. Regardless of context, ceremonies can be understood through the lens of Victor Turner's rites of passage model.

Turner's theory derives from French folklorist Arnold van Gennep's work, *Les Rites de Passage*, which offers the tripartite ritual model comprised of separation, liminality—or liminoid as we will see, and reaggregation [reintegration], also sometimes

titled the preliminal, liminal, and postliminal (*Celebrations* 202). Separation is the initial process detaching one from the external and profane and into scared space through symbolic action. These actions signify a "detachment of the individual or group from an earlier fixed point in the social structure" (202). Once separated, cacao participants take part in a range of heart-centered ritual events comprising the liminal process, or the period of the ceremony during which numinous experiences and healing transformations may occur. During liminality, effectively separated participants "[enter] a ritual time and space that are betwixt and between those ordered by … categories of past and future mundane social existence" (202).

Later, Turner revisited his work on liminality and introduced another term, liminoid. While reminiscent of liminality, he applies the term to the anti-structural environment of individually sustained, industrial leisure, rather than the societally integrated ritual or rites of passage that he initially documented in non-Western and tribal societies. In this liminoid space, individuals are divorced from their objective realities and new forms of self-representation and public renewal can manifest. Rather that liminality, which he claimed that is "obligatory" and produced through "cohesion plus cooperative, collective action directed towards the achievement of group goals" (Turner, *Liminal to Liminoid* 74), the "playful and leisurely" liminoid is fragmentary and experimental, existing through the efforts of "the individual innovator, the unique person who dares and opts to create" (75). I argue that the ritualized consumption of cacao, while primarily liminoid, has qualities of liminality as well. While individually sustained, cacao ceremonies are societally integrated. Participating in ceremonies may be at one's leisure and at times playful, but it is "work" and "obligatory" in the way that many

participants are working towards self-transformation with the secondary purpose of collectively transforming society.

Through ritual, participants "[enact a] religious purpose" (Stoeltje 264). By consuming cacao and thus "opening a door that they can choose to walk through," many participants believe they are acting as a vessel for the divine. This doorway leads to the sacred within, with the ceremony's primary focus being on entering one's "heart space" and feeling "grounded" within it. Within the liminal realm, participants experience cacao's effects and begin the process of interpreting their experience. In doing so, they confront inner tensions such as their misalignment with their life's purpose. They may also confront their desire to escape the everyday, certain ailments, and/or, as stated by my collaborator, Alice, "the stress, pressure, pervasive busyness and an increasing disconnection from nature and from oneself" that is fostered by the postindustrial, Western world. Finally, Turner's third state in the ritual process, reintegration, is that period representative of the "return of the novice to society and the desacralization of the entire situation" (Turner, *Celebrations* 202). Through this process, individuals leave and integrate the messages and potential lessons learned from the cacao through ceremony. This is the stage when transformation can occur on an individual and then on a community or societal basis. That is what makes for a successful ritual.

Separation

The act of separation is context-based and subjective. For the participant of an in-person ceremony, this process may include simply stepping from the outside world and into the private space of the event. Just before stepping over the threshold, the facilitator may use smoldering sage to "smudge" or spiritually cleanse and purify participants as

they enter the ritual space. The act of wafting the smoke around the individuals' bodies ensures that their energetic fields are clear of harmful entities or energies when entering the sacred space. Following the smudging, participants sit in the curated space.

For the participant of the online ceremony, the onus to create the ritual space rests on the individual. There is not a single way to prepare the space, but participants reported smudging their spaces and/or building an altar using objects such as crystals and tarot cards as well as readying items, such as musical instruments or art supplies and objects representative of the elements, to use in case of cacao-induced inspiration. For example, candles may represent renewal and rebirth while acting as a symbolic stand-in for the fire traditional to certain indigenous plant medicine ceremonies, like peyote. The potential incorporation of a feather "is to bring in like that lightness of air" (Lyndsey). A glass of water would not only serve to keep the cacao participant hydrated, which is said to stave off any potential cacao-induced headaches, but also as a literal symbol water and its ability to cleanse. Finally, plants, flower petals, or the aforementioned crystals may represent the earth and its abundance.

For the host of an in-person ceremony or the average participant of an online ceremony, the event may begin during the preparation of the cacao beverage. One main tenet of cacao-based spiritual practice is that all participants must prepare, consume, and engage with cacao with respect and intention. Regarding intentional consumption of cacao, TemptressApothecary says, "This Celestial beverage invites us to slow down and set aside time for ourselves for self-care and nourishment, opening to our inner guidance and wisdom. Please prepare and consume your ceremonial Cacao with this intent." According to Alice, "there is a … need to begin to use cacao in a more respectful way,

which decolonizes the practice of chocolate as mere confectionary candy." To engage respectfully, the websites of the cacao-selling companies recommend setting up a ritual space and holding a preparation ceremony.

The preparation ceremony begins with "opening the space," which should be private, quiet, and clear of distraction or clutter, and enhanced by lighting incense or candles and/or playing "sacred" music. While one prepares their cacao, it is advised to remain in the present moment and focus one's efforts on honoring the cacao; this includes prayer and thanking the cacao and/or earth for the blessings it provides as well as expressing and setting an intention for the impending consumption of the cacao.

The process of setting intention also occurs during ceremony, just before the cacao is consumed for the first time within the group. Whether an online or in-person ceremony format, no one drinks their cacao until everyone is holding a mug and has set their intention for the ceremony. This setting can be as simple as asking for peace or divine guidance and is viewed as the most significant factor in achieving a healing or transcendental experience. According to my collaborator, Mikki, "[Going] into ceremony or a journey, I always see it as ... knocking on a professor's door during office hours, and if you don't have a reason to be there [or an intention] it's kind of a wasted conversation."

Overall, the experience of separation is subjective.[15] It may begin during their personal pre-ceremony, cacao-brewing ritual, when the participant logs into Zoom or steps into the ceremonial space, during the opening ceremony. In either the case of in-person or online use and practice, the opening ceremony acts as the final stage of

[15] If at home, disconnection from their surroundings may be impossible due to distractions such as pets or children.

separation as an onboarding process. During the opening ceremony, instructors introduce themselves, occasionally including their credentials (e.g., noting that a facilitator that also worked at a spiritual center as healer of "womb spaces"); describe the event's activities; and discuss cacao, its effects, and a variation of its history. Some participants view facilitators who do not share cacao's history as disrespecting the cacao spirit, and during three separate interviews, ceremonialists shared that they stopped attending certain groups' ceremonies for this reason. If the cacao imbibing is in-person, the facilitator typically disperses the cacao cup-by-cup; the facilitator encourages each person who touches the cup to infuse it with a prayer of well-wishes before passing it. Once everyone is holding their mugs, the host completes their introduction process.

Finally, the facilitator initiates the last phase of ritual separation by 'acknowledging and opening the space' and setting expectations. Acknowledging and opening the space typically occurs through a variation of an invocation of divine guides, the Four Directions, and/or the Four Elements through personal or group prayer or meditation.

For example, during one of Keith's Cacao's ceremonies, Keith instructed us to ask our "unseen friends,'" whether that be our "spirit team" or "extraterrestrial beings" (ETs), to support and connect with us through ceremony. We asked our unseen friends for our cups to be filled with vibrations or frequencies so that we could experience "release, expansion, and opening." This would help us to match the frequency of love, which would enable a link to future "downloads" and "upgrades," or versions of ourselves with higher consciousness.

One ceremony started with this invocation, which the facilitator adopted from Guatemalan elder Nada Marina.

> [We will start by] raising our cups to the sky ... to the heart of the sky, we thank you for your light, your wisdom, your radiance, which you shine down upon us every day through the sun. Now bringing our cups down towards the earth—to the heart of the Earth, we thank you for your nourishment and for a place to call home, for groundedness. Bringing our cups up to our heart—and here I kind of like to start spinning it in a circle to honor the different directions and the different elements. To the heart of air, thank you for your vastness, your movement, and the vital breath that we breathe in every day of our lives. To the heart of water, thank you for your fluidity, for teaching us to go with the flow, and for your purifying power. To the heart of fire, thank you for the passion you ignite within us all, for pushing us forward through motivation and determination towards our highest visions. (Eve)

This facilitator continued by thanking the cacao:

> And now, holding it close to our hearts, feeling the warmth. To the heart of cacao, thank you for bringing us together in community to open our hearts to ourselves to each other and for another day—another opportunity to honor mother earth and our relationship with her. May the sacred medicine circle be blessed, held, and protected by unconditional love and light and by the love and guidance of all our guides allies and higher selves. (Eve)

During another ceremony, the same facilitator shared her version of opening the ceremony through prayer:

> Great Spirit, Mother Earth, Father Sky, Divine Consciousness in all things. Thank you so much for this opportunity to gather in our hearts on this day. To share in gratitude, to share in prayer, to share in community. Giving thanks and gratitude for our healthy bodies and friendships and shelter and clean water and clean air. Giving gratitude to the Sun and the stars and the places that each of us call home. Giving gratitude for the songs of the birds, and the songs that sing through us. All our unique gifts and offerings. Giving thanks for spiritual wealth, to be walking in spiritual wealth at this time on this planet, and for this very playful amazing heart activating medicine: cacao. Mama Cacao. Thank you to all the peoples who are attending and tending cacao, holding this cacao close as medicine. We are so, so grateful to you, Cacao Sequa, for helping us activate our heart frequency and know what it means to live in this way. (Eve)

While simultaneously offering gratitude to life-sustaining elements and the cacao, prayers such as these suggest a departure from the physical world and a pilgrimage inward.

Priming for "Doing the Work"

An important aspect of what I refer to as an on-boarding process of the ceremony, or the process of receiving information necessary to begin the liminal ritual events, places emphasis on "doing the work." Individuals need to "sit in their hearts, speak from their hearts, act from their hearts, acknowledging themselves for being here, showing that" they are "doing it" (Online Fieldnotes). Essentially, to do the work is to embody cacao's message of love; by accessing, healing, and learning to live from the heart, the participant is "doing the work" of self-transformation.

While participants are "sharing in community," the ceremony focuses on the individual's journey. The sharing ceremony assists this individual journey "energetically" because it "helps to collectively raise the vibration of the group, as people begin to 'resonate' with one another" (Alice). Through the individual journey, the participant may gradually heal, which raises their vibrational frequency. By raising their frequency, they are benefiting the *collective*, or those members of the community actively participating in self-evolution. This ties back into beliefs related to the Age of Aquarius and the individual's responsibility in bringing forth the New Age.

Liminality

Each activity that participants undergo post-prayer or introduction and prior to the closing ceremony compromises the liminal period. Each ceremony varies based on facilitator preference and skill set, including the activities, which help to bring the participant inward. I would argue that, to bring participants inward, these activities are meant to produce a state of *flow*, or that "experience of merging action and awareness" (Turner, "Liminal to Liminoid" 87) where one's awareness is narrowed on their activity, time and space is suspended, and they are unaware of their awareness. This is reflected in language referenced in the discussion on the inner pilgrimage; facilitators and participants mention "going with the flow of it all or that they are letting cacao take them on a journey."

These activities commonly include singing, guided and solo meditation, journaling, journeying, dancing, yoga, breathwork, sound healing, and/or neo-shamanic healing in their itineraries. According to survey results, other practices include: bodywork, prayer, chanting, devotional work, earthing and grounding, moon ceremonies,

elemental blessings, offering to fire, sage aura cleansing, deep feeling, alter rituals, tarot, melting into love, attunement, Shakti Mat, Women's Circle, Akashic Record work, Reiki, nature connection, art, painting, vision boarding, mantras/affirmations, conscious movement, Shamanic "heartsongs," guitar, flute, gong, drumming, and consuming other plant medicines.

One collaborator used live sound healing in her ceremonies and then followed that with crystal bowls and gong with breathwork and meditation. Alternatively, she facilitated ceremony through drumming, rhythm, and light breathwork to relax, which was followed by group meditation for cleansing and clearing stress or blockages. Finally, the ceremony would end with a fire ritual during which participants would write personal traumas onto a piece of paper and burn them in the fire to symbolically release them. Other ceremonies, including those provided by Embue and Ora, place strong emphasis on guided meditation, or *guided imagery*, experiences, where everyone is invited to lay down, close their eyes, and begin the process of receiving "revelatory or therapeutic," imagery, in typical New Age healing style (see Csordas 75). With an intention and open mind, the activities could offer a space for transformation through catharsis and/or accessing the divine; for example, while singing, one participant reported unexpectedly experienced waves of cathartic crying and laughing that felt otherworldly in origin.

According to Turner's three components of the liminal stage, the display and experience of the sacra (those symbolic objects, actions, or statements that communicate to participants the sacred nature of the space and experience) is crucial (Turner et al., *Celebrations* 202). Facilitators prioritize sacra in the preparation and presentation of ceremony; prior to permitting participants into a ceremonial space, a facilitator uses some

kind of purifier. When I attended the in-person ceremony, an important symbolic action was burning sage, and the action of surrounding my body in the smoke symbolically purified me. I entered the *pure* ceremonial space, dimly lit by an altar of candles, which represented both renewal and the symbolic equivalent for the fire ritual traditional to certain indigenous plant medicine ceremonies. These candles sat on a bed of rose petals, a flower symbolizing love and affection and, in the community, powerful manifestation. We sat in a circle and consumed our first drinks of cacao together as a symbol for unity. Within a this sacredly framed space, each action holds meaning; feelings in the body become messages from higher powers. For example, crying indicates the presence of the divine and helps individuals to clear negative energies from their vibrational fields.

The sacra may also be the mug of cacao itself; a personal altar; the "sacred music" used throughout ceremony; tarot cards; crystals; or instruments such a gongs, sound bowls, or an indigenous skin drum, which are used by facilitators during ceremony. The sacra can also include songs, which facilitators or participants may have written while under the influence of cacao and therefore able to channel her message; the finger-painting of the "third-eye" with cacao to represent the opening of the mind with her help; or the allowing of cacao to "take over the body" in ecstatic dance/expressive movement. If effectively done, this movement may "bring the whole person into communion with the fundamental meanings, values, and goals" of the community (Turner et al. 204). One participant shared that "while dancing, the [water, fire, air and earth] elements were coming to [them]" as a message from cacao to remain grounded and at one with Mother Earth and community.

Another key feature in Turner's ritual model that occurs in the liminal stage is ludic recombination, the "playful recombination" of cultural elements that leads a participant to question and challenge reality. In a "tribal ritual," such as those studied by Turner, ludic recombination would typically involve carnivalesque aspects, such as the grotesque representation of the body through mask or costume, or hybrid animal-human figuration. I argue that ludic recombination is present within the individual's "inner world" and not only from external stimuli. This inner world can transform emotions into beings such as the inner child (more on this in Chapter VI). While there are no carnivalesque elements to the cacao ceremony, participants arguably playfully reimagine traumas and turmoil in ways that render them more confrontable. Transforming pain into an image of a wounded or playful inner child allows one to challenge notions of themselves and their general reality.

Finally, the third component of Turner's liminal state is communitas, or the "total confrontation of human identities" that unites people in a ritual space "over and above any formal social bond" (Turner, *Celebrations* 205). While I was attending Ora's online ceremonies, I found it difficult to feel a sense of unity, which is something that many of my collaborators have expressed. Lacking personal contact with the Zoomed-in viewers, I cannot determine which participants, if any, feel as though they are bonded to this community.

However, I believe an indication of a potential bond, even if only within a small percentage of the community, is suggested through participants' vulnerability. Facilitators encourage participants to share the intimate details about their lives with the group during "shares." When discussing the impact of experiencing other participants'

vulnerable moments, Courtney explained, “I've had online moments with people where it is full-body chills. I'm crying tears down my face; like I feel so much love for them. Then, there is also that moment where I'm like, ‘I just want to hug you.’” These vulnerable moments include participants discussing personal issues relating to deteriorating romantic, platonic, and family ties; issues at work; and issues related to self-esteem. Vulnerability and the stories shared then have the potential of affecting other participants within the ceremony.

While sharing her experience during a journaling session within the ceremony, one participant spoke about the connection that she felt within the ritual setting: “…magic flows through me, and also flows into those I share this space and story with.” The belief in the ability to affect through this perceived “magical” connection was reflected by Courtney who stated that she values being able to turn her camera off during ceremony, so she does not “affect other people's experience” with a bad mood. These sentiments suggest a sense of emotional symbiosis wherein participants can experience meaningful, sometimes “magical” bonds and/or negatively affect others within the space simply by being or speaking within it. This suggests that communitas is partially maintained, or disturbed, via the sharing and experiencing of positive or negative emotions, otherwise named “vibes” and “energies,” which this thesis will discuss more extensively in the sixth chapter.

To reiterate, communitas involves a deep and profound connection between people, not normally experienced in day-to-day life. Connecting in a profound way with one another’s energies is something that several of my collaborators expressed; resonating with others in the ceremony offers access to messages and healing. During one

of Wilson's Cacao's ceremonies, he asked participants to go into meditation to connect with one another, to "ride the energy wave" together. Later in that ceremony, while performing a personal healing for one of the participants, he instructed her to "feel the energy all around" her and to embrace those feelings that were moving all around her. He encouraged her by commenting that he could feel the shifts she was making in her energetic field. After several minutes, he asked her to send her energy out to all of us. She lifted her hands to the screen, closed her eyes, and began to transmit her energy. As she did, Wilson asked how many of us could feel it. Approximately one third of the individuals who could feel her energy raised their hands or waved.

I argue that this community, while not as connected during Zoom ceremonies, meet the requirements of communitas as members, when in ceremony together, are stripped of their outside statuses. I state this in the sense that their identity (including ideology) outside of the ceremony is seemingly leveled to the concerns and behaviors that each person brings into and performs within the ceremonial setting. While each participant has a set of unique concerns or motivations behind attending, individuals are leveled to their need to heal and feel connection and safety. Jesse noted that while Zoom made such feelings more challenging,

> a lot of stuff happened on Keith's porch–like a lot–I'm like connecting with people in like such a crazy way–like what's going on? Like really intense physical like feelings I can't explain ... But yeah, Keith's porch was definitely like this crazy interconnection experience of like, 'oh my God—like how do you know me so well? It is like I just know that woman for like a couple of days, but all of a sudden, [we were connected] ... it just felt really intense.

While communitas may occur online, it is not always experienced during virtual ceremonies and is more likely to occur during in-person ceremonial events. As suggested by Jesse's account, attending in-person ceremonies permits the experience of a collective energy or ecstasy that is referred to as "collective effervescence" (see Durkheim 1912, 1995).

Ultimately, it is within the liminal, betwixt-and-between phase where individuals engage with those three potentially transformative elements to achieve a numinous experience. Although I did not experience this during the many online ceremonies I attended, I had a numinous experience not long after I sat within the circle of the single in-person ceremony I was able to attend prior to COVID-19 lockdowns in Bali in October of 2019. After consuming my cacao, I felt different; my head was clear of thought, my whole body was furnace-hot and pulsing to a drum's beat; I felt love for those in my circle, and I alternated between blissfully laughing and crying. This was all completely beyond my volition and totally unexpected. Although the chemical compounds of cacao may explain away what I experienced, the feeling was nevertheless mystical. Those participants I have spoken with have expressed similar experiences.

Set and Setting

The ritual setting itself is meaningful and is crucial to accessing the liminal, divine pathway and its potential, such as healing or the altering of one's worldview. Ralph Metzner's (2013) work stresses the importance of Timothy Leary's set-and-setting hypothesis, which posits that both internal (set) and external (setting) environments are critical to the experience that one has while in a drug-altered state. The manifestation of experiences including transcendence are predicated on interpretation and expectation—or

intention, as it is referred, such as those related to "healing or divination" (Metzner 66). Facilitators walk individuals through the process of intention setting, or the priming of the participant's internal environment. The following excerpt comes from my personal journal; I wrote it long before my decision to study cacao rituals and its spiritual aspects. It describes the "intention" I set with the guidance of Om Ben and Luciana.

> Manifestation Ceremony—Pyramids of Chi—11/25/18. By consuming this, I wish to come into my deep, central power—to tap into the love at the center of my heart. I wish that by tapping in, I can attract all those into my life mean to make it an adventure. I wish to tap into that feeling of doing with joy—that feeling of being and doing right what I am supposed to be. I wish to release resistance and all that which does not serve me ... Letting go into the fire. Abundance ... Feeling the discomfort of shifting energies; really just seeing it—allowing [the pain] to go on ... [*sic*] (Personal Journal Entry)

Omitting a couple random jottings, these were the goals I set, which influenced the mindset I had entering the ceremony in Bali. This specific ceremony centered around manifesting your desires, and we were encouraged to ask cacao for assistance accessing the "center of our hearts" (heart space), succumbing to pain, releasing resistance, and becoming a vessel of light, abundance, and joy.

"Getting high" on cacao and achieving its benefits also relies on the construction of an adequate ritual space, or setting. Psychonauts Leary, Alpert, and Metzner stated that this physical setting includes "the weather, the room's atmosphere; social—feelings of persons present towards one another; and cultural—prevailing views as to what is real" (*High Culture* 19). According to Metzner and Tuppers' research (2002, 2009), there is a

basic blueprint for the settings of ceremonial entheogen rituals, those referred to as traditional shamanic healing ceremonies or "small group hybrid therapeutic-shamanic circle rituals" (Metzner year:64) as practiced by Western neo-shamans or neo-shamanesses. This blueprint is used in cacao ceremonies and includes access to a ritual space in which spirits associated with the four directions have been called and ritualists may either sit or lie in a circle. The ceremony takes place around a central altar, fire, or both and an assisted or unassisted experienced elder or guide is present. The ceremony is in a low-light settings, which is conducive to visions and hallucinations. Facilitators incorporate songs and instruments that allow for "drumming, rattling, singing or evocative recorded music" (Metzner 75), which encourages the channeling of divine guidance and directs the flow of visions (Tupper, *Entheogenic Healing* 277). Finally, the facilitators promote the "cultivation of a respectful, spiritual attitude" (Metzner 64). Facilitators and practitioners may see an inadequately formatted setting as desacralizing a plant medicine; to divorce cacao from its ritual and/or spiritual context may be seen by participants as misusing a divine tool, or that which "invokes its capacity to effect a purposeful change on the mind/body" (Tupper, *Entheogens* 502). This analysis of the participant's interaction with the construction set and setting grant the researcher access to understanding the effectiveness and performance of cacao ceremonies.

Performance

According to folklorist Richard Bauman, "The more we know of performance, the deeper our understanding of the most meaningful and affecting aspects of human experience" (113). In their work, *Performing Ethnography*, Victor and Edith Turner discuss a phenomenological approach to ethnographic work that enables the researcher to

understand the impacts of ritual through performance. As writing and analyzing monographs meant to examine social dramas and ritual performances is purely analytical and , the Turners intended to "put experiential flesh on ... cognitive bones" (Turner et al. *Performing Ethnography* date:47); by working with a range of religions, anthropology, and drama studies graduate students at the University of Virginia, Chicago, and NYU, the Turners experimented with a reflexive, embodied approach to understanding ethnographic studies and data (from nonliterate Brazilian and African groups) related to social dramas or ritual performances. What the Turners and their students found was that, through the process of developing and studying scripts based on the data, performing the plays, collecting data via digital recording (from their character's perspective), completing a reflexive write-up post-performance, they were able to experience the visceral effects and significance of ritual performances. The theoretical framework used included van Gennep's rite of passage model—in which ritual is a timeless transformative, or liminal, space; Gregory Bateson's concept of the frame (34)—linked to a specific cultural context supporting metacommunication; and Goffman's subsequent concept of frame slipping and breaking (34)—referring in this case to moments in which performers broke from the role they played within the specific frame. Although the cacao ceremony may hold little cultural relevance to the average Westerner, the Turners' research confirms that rituals can still be a transformative space when performed, and in this case study, very much so for cacao participants if they maintain their perceived roll within the ritual, thus facilitating ritual liminality.

The act of performing a ritual itself has the power to elicit an altered state of mind. For example, in both the Turners' work and cacao ceremonies, even in instances in

which an “outsider” or “first timer,” respectively, felt a diminished sense of cultural symbolism in the ceremonial setting, the dramatic performance of the ritual elicited an emotional response and sense of transformation, suggesting the sheer power of ritual. Through the tandem use of entheogenic consumption and this concept, Turner’s work suggests that performance of ritual creates a sense of understanding nearly tangible universal dramas, fear, tension, and bliss associated with ritual experiences. These shared emotional and spiritual experiences result in a mutually created myth that unites a community. In this way, Turner’s article suggests that the questions that lie at the foundation of theatre and theatrical performance lie at the foundation of ritual and ritual performance—questions about the relationship of actors to text, of actors to audience, or fiction to fictive reality, and so on. (44)

Like other cultural performances, the cacao ceremony presents participants with an “associational cluster of pragmatic and metapragmatic features – event structure, formal devices, genre, participant roles and relationships – any one of which may serve conventionally to invoke the performance frame in a particular community, but whose co-occurrence makes it abundantly clear [the participant is] witnessing a performance” (Bauman 100). In the ritual genre of the cacao ceremony setting, there appear to be two intersecting performances; first the performance of the ritual itself; and second, the subsumed performance of group belongs and competence. One illustration of their interdependence is portrayed via attendee adaption of facilitator speech. This suggested to me that the building of linguistic capital, subsumed by the group’s overall cultural capital, may not be a difficult process, but is part of a learned performance of belonging and a display of how a performance is “a joint achievement of performer and audience”

(Bauman 101). For example, my interlocutor Courtney spoke of her recognition that language plays an important role in belonging: “My brain knows that if I use these ten words … like stating something is ‘my truth’ and that ‘I just had a download [of medicine/insight from a higher power]’, then I will come off as a more enlightened, aware human being.”

She refers to these words and phrases. as “mainstream pop spiritual community words/phrases.” Courtney noted that, other than in ceremony and on social media, she does not use this ritual lexicon nor her “spiritual voice” (i.e. intonation). This intentional shift in communication represents the use of the code-switching of registers; she switches from her everyday vernacular to an appropriate ritual style of communication (Bauman 110). Code-switching, or ““the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or sub-systems” (Gumperz 1982:59 qtd. in De Fina 380). Code-switching allows the participant to display their group membership and communicative competence, or as defined by Dell Hymes (1972), the “knowledge that a speaker needs to have in order to function as a member of a social group” (qtd. by Duranti 15). Those “mainstream pop spiritual community words/phrases” comprise the repertoire of community members; the terms may include, but are not limited to the frequent, various methods of expressing one’s gratitude; stating that you need to “check in with what your heart feels” while assessing a situation; using terms such as “grounding” when discussing one’s somatic experience of shifting their focus to their emotional landscape; referencing the body as a “body temple”; using terms such as goddess, inner-divinity, the higher self when discussing the “higher-vibrational” (enlightened) self; calling insights that one receives through ceremony “medicine,”

sometimes describing them as "juicy"; and using titles such as plant teacher, medicine, Mama Cacao, Cacao Spirit, 5th-Dimensional Being, or tool while referencing cacao.

The Turners' work illustrates the power of performance in providing the attendee/actor with a sense of transcending the limitations of their performance, touching upon some greater force. In this context, the greater force may be the higher self or the spirit of cacao, suggesting that participants are doing more than performing their belonging when adopting buzzwords; they are attempting via linguistic action to speak into reality a mystical connection to the divine. This newcomer's share provides an example of this connection between speech act and intention: "I would love to speak with spirits more … to connect with them and honor them. To do so, I am taking more pauses in my life and creating more sacred space." This suggests that, for those who are intentional and linguistical equipped within the space, cacao ceremonies act as a gateway.

The cacao ceremony can also include alternative healing and its associated performance. The journeys one takes to their inner "emotional and spiritual bodies" to connect with "higher powers," release negative energies, and process difficult emotions is a major motivating draw to cacao consumption, paralleling the significance of "tripping" for other psychedelic participants. Furthermore, during Ora's designated timeslot for shares, many state that it is during their inner journeys that many participants are able to experience some form of healing they otherwise cannot achieve.

Performing the Symbolic Pilgrimage

I refer to these journeys as symbolic pilgrimages to the heart. According to Lee Gilmore's (2015) research on the Burning Man festival, a pilgrimage is defined by the following five characteristics: "… (1) ritualized journey to a (2) specific, culturally

imbued … location intended to (3) connect individuals to a collective experience of (4) something [healing or transcendent which is] beyond their ordinary experience … [which the] communities involved choose to conceive [of], and that (5) can emerge in either religious or secular contexts" (156).

While there are retreats to cacao ceremonies in typically exotic locations, including Chocolate Shaman Wilson's porch in Guatemala, I am focusing here on the average experience, which has some of the features of pilgrimage but is a spiritual inner journey instead of physical travel. Cacao (and whatever deities, ancestors, etc. that they supplement with) guide the participant through this "pilgrimage to the heart"; according to Wilson, cacao "opens the door" to this transformative pilgrimage and the participant chooses to walk through. The "culturally imbued" space participants walk towards is the heart space*;* this ceremony is intended to take place from within the heart where reflection, forgiveness, compassion, and gratitude can lead to transformations.

Throughout ceremony, facilitators use performative verbs as instructions for the participant to undergo the spiritual inner pilgrimage. In this case, performative "refers to a domain of human action where special attention is given to the ways in which communicative acts are executed" (Duranti 15). Using performative verbs makes "explicit the type of action a particular utterance is trying to achieve" (15); for example, participants refer to the experience of cacao as taking a "journey" towards the heart and one way to enter it is by "dropping into the heart space." One facilitator explained that throughout ceremony, she is "going with the flow of it all"; Wilson instructs participants to "ride the waves." When participants "walk through the door" towards their hearts, or "drop in," they are participating in a mindfulness practice by transferring their attention

from their minds to focus on somatic experiences. When the person transfers their focus in this way, their orientation to their experience also shifts opening them to transcendental or healing experiences.

Learning to Be High

According to sociologist Howard Becker, individuals "learn to be high" (qtd. by Partridge, *High Culture* 19), especially in the case of ingesting a psychoactive substance such as cacao for which the experience of being "high" is "the product of an interaction between the psychoactive substance and the user's expectations, psychological state, and sociocultural milieu" (19). Referring back to Wilson's metaphor of cacao as a key to the door of transformation, participants view entheogens as mere chemical tools that induce transcendence and healing when used with the correct state of mind.

"Dropping into the body" under cacao's influence could be viewed as correlating to the notion of "tripping" or "getting high," which in the case of cacao consumption, I argue is a cultural experience learned through performance and correlates directly with an entheogenic quest. "Getting high" on cacao—which is not a term used in ceremony, but I will use analogically—is the experience of transcendence while under "her" psychoactive influence.

It is important to note that cacao does not naturally produce a dissociative experience more likely to be construed as mystical. Thus, it is critical to not only consider the narratives surrounding cacao and ritual (i.e. especially within the sacred setting, cacao will open the participant's heart) but also participants' previous experiences with substances, which both influence how people experience the substance and then interpret the experience. According to my survey data, 80 out of 118 individuals, or 67.7% of

participants, had consumed other plant medicines. Of these 80 individuals (67.5%) had consumed psychedelic substances. These substances include, from most to least reported: "magic" mushrooms (psilocybin) at 62.9%; ayahuasca (DMT) at 42.5%; San Pedro cactus (mescaline) at 12.9%; and peyote cactus (mescaline) at 5.5%. Although not psychedelic, participants used the following sacramental substances, which derive from South American shamanic practice: Kambo, a tree frog poison (5-methoxy-N,N-dimethyltryptamine (5-MeO-DMT)12 and bufotenine) at 3.7%; rapé, or tobacco, which is used as a precursor to psychedelic use, at 20.4%; and sananga, which is also used as a precursor to psychedelic use, at 1.8%.

The performances of journeying inwards towards the heart and "tripping" into a state of heightened consciousness share the same root. According to Michael Harner, an academic-turned-neo-shaman, it is no coincidence that terms such as "journeying" or "tripping" are used when one consumes a psychoactive substance and experiences another state of consciousness; "one of the most typical aspects of the shamanistic experience is the change into another state of consciousness often called a trance, with the shaman feeling that he is taking a journey" (qtd. by Partridge, *High Culture* 21). While participants will not "trip," cacao's psychoactive compounds can affect one's state of consciousness and through ceremony, especially guided imagery sessions (which will be discussed at length in Chapter 6), participants are coached on how to best utilize cacao to undergo their own journey. Without the context provided in ceremony, the individual would simply be consuming a foodstuff.

Overall, 66% of survey participants agreed with the statement, "I consume cacao because it is a gentle, more accessible alternative, and/or a perfect complement to

psychedelic plant medicines and teachers (i.e. ayahuasca, mushrooms, etc.)." From the perspective of my collaborators, journeying with cacao is learned as paralleling but distinct from tripping as that the former is "not harsh like some of the other [psychoactives] are; cacao is very soft—very 'let me hold your hand, while we go through this'" (Caroline). During our interviews, many highlighted the nature of other psychoactives "trips" in comparison. Jesse explained,

> It is like some plant medicines just destroy you in order to get there. I like how cacao just kind of generally leads you there and allows you to like do your own thing ... it doesn't like force you into an altered state either; if you decide not to be in an altered state—if it's too scary for you like it won't take you there.

Jesse contrasted this experience with one they had with ayahuasca; with that substance, "all the trauma in your life comes into your head, and everything is just insane ... then you're like living 100 lifetimes, and then you get back into your body, and are like, "Who the fuck am I?"

All of my collaborators repeatedly emphasized that cacao allowed its users to "do their own thing"; they regarded cacao as a gentle option in contrast to the potentially destructive nature of psychedelics, in which many others expressed disinterest. Sophia explained that, when consuming cacao, "you are not like blown out of reality; you're very grounded; you're not removed from the present."

The performance of consumption in the context of the cacao ceremony is not reflective of enduring a pilgrimage or "getting high" in a traditional sense; rather, it represents the "inner work" the community undergoes, traveling first to the heart and, if a subscriber to Aquarian perennist thought, the journey toward the New Age. By

consuming cacao as a key to an inner realm and journey towards self-understanding, participants open themselves to the possibility of transcendence and healing.

CHAPTER VI: TRANSCENDENCE AND HEALING THROUGH EMBODIMENT

This chapter elaborates on and analyzes the participants' varying motivations for participating in cacao ceremonies. In particular, the focus of this section is on transcendence and healing through embodiment. From a folkloristic perspective, one can gain insight into people's perceptions of their bodies as the vessel of the sacred self, as well as into the perceived efficiency of cacao as a folk medicine. Therefore, to analyze the power of ceremonial healing through a folkloristic lens, I offer several case studies that demonstrate the significance of embodiment in individual spiritual, energetic healing.

To understand what most motivated the desire to achieve embodiment, I asked survey participants to rate their agreement with statements about their motivations for participation: (1) the most common reason with 94.1% of participants who selected that they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I consume cacao to connect with my inner realm, including my heart, inner child, or higher power"; (2) 89% percent of survey participants either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I consume cacao because she is a transformative plant medicine and teacher"; (3) 83.9% agreed with "I consume cacao to connect with nature"; (4) 78.8 % with "I consume cacao for the health benefits"; (5) 68.6% with I consume cacao to connect with my ancestors, guides, deities, etc."; (6) 66.9% agreed or strongly agreed with "I consume cacao because it is a gentle, more accessible alternative, and/or a perfect complement to psychedelic medicines and teachers (i.e. ayahuasca, mushrooms, etc.)" with 43.5% of those that answered "strongly disagree," "disagree," and "neutral" had reported having consumed one or more

psychedelic substances, such as ayahuasca; (7) finally, 58.5% with "I consume cacao to connect with others through ceremony."

I also asked participants to write in any unlisted reasons why they consumed cacao. I received 36 responses and of these, (1) 27.7% noted that the taste of cacao was a motivating factor. Several participants noted enjoying the "earthy" taste of cacao or how cacao's flavor was more pleasing than that of coffee; each of the following categories received 22% of responses: (2) Cacao granted access to divine wisdom and the engenderment of the divine, as demonstrated in responses such as, "The Spirit of Cacao leads us to the kingdom within"; (3) Cacao is a healthy mood booster, namely as a better alternative than coffee; (4) Cacao is an alternative medicine that can act as a "grounding mood stabilizer" and for symptoms such as anxiety, depression, pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS) and, for one participant that has "discontinued all Western treatments," autoimmune diseases; and (5) finally, 5.5% referenced an elicited emotional response, such as, "The joy in my heart when I take the first sip."

As each of these responses tie to a range of interconnected experiences of the body, these results indicate that many participants are seeking somatic indicators through consumption that signal connection to cacao and other divine forms. In this regard, the body is perceived as the "existential ground of self" (Csordas, *The Sacred* 150), and the embodiment of cacao permits the engendering of the divine within by conjuring the source from or through the body. This typically is first manifested as the physiological effects of cacao's chemical composition, such as the flushing of the body with heat or the quacking heartrate provoked by the vasodilating properties of the theobromine. My collaborator Courtney described her experience with somatic indicators as

> [having] this moment where you're like, 'Oh, I've been like in my heart this whole time,' and that's what I usually notice—the physical effects, which are just like an increased heart rate—but not to a rate that's scary or altering. It's just like, I notice it—it's a like heartrate thing. More awareness of my physical body; I feel more relaxed. Like it does release tension, and I just feel more in my body. If there is a space that's tight, I feel like that kind of dissipates, and that adds to that feeling of presence. I'm not distracted […]

While these somatic indicators can be achieved through consumption alone, the use of "embodied practices" with the structured cacao community is key in achieving a full embodied spiritual and healing experience; participants "ground into their bodies" or "drop into their hearts" through consumption paired with activities intended to "ground" them, such as meditation, breathwork, journaling, guided imagery sessions, etc. Neo-shamanic healing practices and guidance also play a significant role in the process.

Once grounded, participants may more clearly connect with their inner selves, as well as nature, deities, and ancestors. Entities governing inner realms, such as the "inner child" and the higher self, each represent subselves of divine gnosis held in the heart, which may be energetically inaccessible. Grounding through cacao consumption is believed to permit the individual to address and transmute negative energies, such as hate into compassion. This represents the embodiment of cacao's message of love. Further, when purified, participants believe that one's higher dimensional beings, such as cacao or the higher sacred self, can more easily transmit messages of healing-related wisdom to the body, which in this context could be seen to act as an energetic radio tower. These messages are said to assist the individual in shifting their personal narratives, which

subsequently help their process of tending to trauma and challenging or dismantling "toxic," limiting belief systems.

Participants use cacao as a tool for personal transformation through energetic purification of the body, imagination, and personal narrative shifting, which will be further discussed in the following sections below: holistic perceptions of the body and the role of entheogens in ritual healing; energetic healing; the acquisition of gnosis; and neo-shamanic healing. Subsections in the discussion of ritual healing, energetic healing, and neo-shamanic healing include corresponding case studies related to guided imagery and the notion of the inner child. This chapter is not an exhaustive representation of the healing methods used within ceremony and through the participant's consumption of cacao; rather, the chapter offers insight into participants' views and experiences concerning the healing potential of cacao as an entheogen while briefly touching on how these practices overlap with modern psychotherapy.

Ritual Healing

To delve further into embodiment and ritual healing, we must revisit the concept of the subjective turn as well as "the holistic milieu," the concepts that Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead use to describe "wellbeing occulture." This interest in wellbeing through holistic health, or mind-body-soul health, motivates cacao consumption. This community often considers the body as sacred, leading to the notion of the "sacred self." Quoting Wade Clark Roof, Partridge notes that, "the body is central to healing experiences ... Whatever the type of healing, all such experiences are grounded in an embodied self that is in a continuous process of development and idealization" (*Vol. II* 4). Individualism and embodiment are both visible within cacao ceremonies; participants are

encouraged to “ground into” their bodies, take a journey, and access their sacred selves through this embodiment. That practitioners also refer to cacao’s as “embodied medicine” and “heart medicine” further reinforces this concept. To understand ritual healing, one must analyze the process through the participant’s body-centered orientation to their world and healing process. When healing, the individual considers the holistic connection between all things physical (body; natural world), social and cultural (current events; connection to community), and unseen (psychology; religious phenomena) as having an interconnected relationship. To heal oneself is to address a variety of these circumstances, as the “human body [is] modeled on the wider universe” (Foster and Anderson, *Medical Anthropology,* 126) and therefore a “disturbance of the natural balance between the elements of the human organism” (126) is viewed as the root of an illness and suffering.

Through ritual healing, participants engage “with basic life problems defined in a particular religious and cultural milieu [through] psychotherapy and other forms of healing and medical care. ... healing as a system of ritual performance comprised of specific ritual events [and stylistic genres]” (Csordas 35). Through this engagement, participants within ceremony work to isolate and identify the root of their illness or suffering and “use it as an instrument for learning and inner growth instead of taking the passive role of the victim” (Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion* 54). Wilson echoed this sentiment during ceremony when he told participants that “their problems were their solutions” and lessons they had “agreed to learn prior to coming to Earth” as per their “soul contracts.” By “taking responsibility” for their healing, participants could begin to “upgrade” their consciousness. As he explained, the focus on the participant and their responsibility

> is central to the holistic health movement, and accordingly there is a heavy emphasis on the individual character of therapy. This individualization of health care, in which not an abstract 'disease' but the unique individual in [their] undivided wholeness is at the centre [*sic.*] of attention is arguably the most central characteristic of the movement. (54)

In contrast to the *curing* of a *disease*, illness is not viewed as something "isolated" that must be eradicated. Rather than a purely biophysical phenomenon, Wilson and others maintain that physical and mental illness healing also requires tending to the soul.

While one main goal of healing is to assist the Earth and global population in shifting into a more enlightened, love-centered dimension, the first step in this process is for the individual to heal their own trauma, also referred to as the shadow self or pain body. Janet Jacobs' (1990) work with survivors of sexual assault displays how the ritual process facilitates healing of the pain body. Her work considers how ritually empowered individual can be through the process of participant, which allows them to "symbolically gain mastery over their experience of victimization" (40) and trauma. Within the visualization component of the ritual process, typically through a guided meditation, individuals embody self-constructed concepts of powerful archetypes such as the "goddess" figure or the Cacao Spirit.

Further, due to the holistic nature of healing, the individual acts upon the "social body" by addressing their own impurity. According to sociologist F.R. Wesley's (1980) article, neither the purification nor the healing ritual solve the issue it is supposed to address, such as the healing of energy centers through addressing organ systems, but that it more so reveals symbolic messages if carefully analyzed through the lens of the holistic

milieu. According to the perspective of an Aquarian perennist, those who purify the physical body also reify their belonging to and fortifying of their communities. From the Aquarian perspective, the community is not only that which will bring about the New Age, but it also extends to the "awakening" of the community-at-large. The awakening occurs through purification when one cleanses their energy channels of blockages; when energy is transmuted, such as pain into love, the individual becomes a channel for love and light.

The community describes cacao as "embodiment medicine" and "gift of the heart"; by consuming cacao, a person can work towards becoming a channel by coming into "her" heart-centered and activating energy. Through connecting with her, cacao grounds participants by bringing them into the present moment. Participants describe this process as "moving from the head space to the heart space," which allows them to "feel into" their body's wisdom through physical, spiritual, and emotional sensory experience. As one continues to consume cacao, they "relax into" the feeling of the embodied experience and "become the medicine" as they learn all of the lessons that cacao has to teach them. Wilson stated during one ceremony, at the point of becoming the medicine, cacao has "gone cellular" and is "in your DNA."

Wilson's notion aligns with Leary's biogenetic stance on psychedelic consumption and spirituality. In Leary's view, psychedelics do not induce mystical states; instead, they "take you beyond the senses into a world of cellular awareness" (Leary 114). At a cellular level, Leary referenced DNA codes as "molecular strands of memory and awareness" and that memories of "early and even intra-uterine life," which are stored in the brain, can be "flashed into consciousness" through psychedelic consumption

(Leary 115). Thus, from this perspective, by embodying cacao's message, one's cells are activated, and one is reminded of who they truly are, which, according to Wilson, is a being of unconditional love and a vessel for universal light.

Energetic Healing and Gnosis

Within many folk medical systems, the human body is understood "to be animated and sustained by a special type of force, energy, or essence whose presence and proper activity are essential to life and health" (O'Connor et al. 20). Within the cacao ceremony, many view managing their energy as central to healing and transcendence; becoming a vessel for light and channel for unconditional loving energy and vibrations is one focus in cacao ceremonies. As argued by Hendrickson, "energy is at the heart of metaphysical religious practices. From auras to mesmeric power, Reiki and chakras, energy is understood to fill and surround everything. A principal aspect of meta-physical religion is knowing about and having influence on this energy" (31). Practitioners are encouraged to harness and engage with "occult forces and energies [and] use this power for healing and restoring broken bodies and suffering relationships ... [to restore] spiritual peace within oneself (32). As suggested, interest in energy derives from the influences of Eastern religious thought. However, as is common with occulture bricoleurs, in the context of energetic healing, practitioners marry Eastern thought with the Western esotericist notion of the ethereal body and quantum theory.

The concepts of quantum theory that are harnessed by the community to explain and legitimize energetic healing derive from works such as Albert Einstein's and, later, theorists such as Gary Zukav (responsible for the best-selling self-help book *The Seat of the Soul*). The takeaway from works on quantum theory that are significant within the

community is the idea that "matter is nothing but a form of energy ... [which] can be transformed into other forms of energy" (Fritjof Capra qt. by Partridge, *Vol. II* 35). This is significant in the context of healing as it is believed that "mind, spirit, states of consciousness effect energy fields and give rise to bodily harmony or disharmony" (37) and "damage to or disturbance, obstruction, or capture of the vital force leads to illness" (O'Connor et al. 20). In folk medicinal practices, it is often asserted that when one manipulates their personal energy fields, they perform an act of "restoration of the [energy to its] proper embodiment, freedom, and function [as it] promotes healing" (20).

Participants view cacao as a key to this process and companies even market cacao as such. For instance, in one of their newsletters, Ora Chocolate informed participants that consuming cacao can "be used to activate and connect to different energy centers in our bodies" and that it "works directly with the energy center of [the participant's] heart." Unlike Keith's Cacao or Embue Cacao, Ora Chocolate offers products that incorporate different herbs and spices into their cacao. Ora markets those blends as correlating with different energy centers, or chakras, in addition to working with the heart.

Furthermore, the sales pitch incorporates a description of the seven energy centers: the root, sacral, solar plexus, heart, throat, third eye, and crown chakra. It also describes their locations: the base of the spine, below the navel, the diaphragm, chest's center, throat, between the eyebrows, and the top of the head, respectively. Finally, their functions are listed, including feeling supported, creativity, confidence, love and compassion, communication, intuition, and access to divinity, respectively (Ora Chocolate). Each of their products may activate one or more of these energy centers; for example, "Oaxacan Spice" activates the solar plexus:

> Oaxacan Spice: Awakens the fire within and connects to the solar plexus center (3), the home of personal power. The element correlating to this energy center is fire and the organic spices ground into the cacao are all spices that stoke the fire within our bodies physically and energetically. All four spices in this blend, ginger, cayenne, cardamom, and cinnamon are circulatory and digestive aids boosting the functioning of the digestive organs. On an energetic level, this cacao awakens the fire within, elevating willpower, and calling into action for the greater good. (Ora Chocolate)

Their product "Tantric Rose" corresponds with the heart and sacral centers:

> Tantric Rose: Connection and activation to the heart center (4) and sacral center (2), the center connected to the sexual organs. Tantric Rose's ingredients lend themselves to bringing about a connection to sensuality, loving nature, and the ability to savor the experience of life and creativity. The Damiana and pink rose petals in the Tantric Rose connect to sensuality through their aphrodisiacal effects.

In both of these examples, the connection between symbolism, healing, and ceremony offers the participants a paradigm in which transformation occurs, and the necessity of ceremony is reinforced. The transformation or construction of new rituals, like cacao ceremonies, relies on the constructions of belief systems that are metaphorically based. These systems allow the individual to fix analogical attributions of transcendental and numinous experiences to an occasion or, as I argue, to embrace cacao as a product and sacra that is paramount and obligatory within ritual and energy transmutation. In turn, through the performative acting within ritual consumption of

cacao, these central metaphors are brought to life and sustained. Spices are not only fires that cleanse the organs but also activate energy centers; rose petals are keys to sensuality and love; and mushrooms, such as those used in the product "Medicinal Mushroom," boost the immune system and "support rooting and centering by connecting [the participant] to the ancient heart of the earth. ... By consciously tuning into [between 715 and 810 million years of] wisdom of our mushroom friends you can bring about support and nourishment to your physical body while opening your heart" (Ora Chocolate).

Through energetically aligning with and embodying cacao, one may garner epiphanies from the spirit. I will refer to such epiphanies and deep understandings by what Csordas considers "'spiritual gifts' that are not from the emic point of view ... acts but spontaneous experiences of inspiration" (47). This could also be referred as gnosis and is a common reason for entheogen consumption; through use of entheogens one can experience "someone *talking* [*sic.*] to you ... This was actually a voice in the head, making sense, speaking English, and addressing the concerns that were most important to me personally" (McKenna 10; Partridge, *High Culture* 332). According to McKenna, "the information was not something that [he] could have come up with" (10) that was "proof of the otherness of the voice" (332). One survey participant stated that "[Cacao] has helped me to find new levels of intelligence I didn't know I had; she has given me the strength to make changes in my relationships and to release old beliefs about myself." Another noted that this information helps participants "clarity of their inner selves."

To achieve this clarity, participants have reported cacao consumption and ceremony assisting them in "clearing the energetic gunk" from their channels so that they could experience otherworldly messages and visions. During one of Keith's Cacao

ceremonies, one woman reported that she was feeling hatred towards someone who had wronged her. While she was describing the circumstances, she sneezed. Wilson immediately addressed this sneeze by equating the sneeze with the divine; the sneeze represented her expelling energy. He told her that her hatred could "go onto the next level of evolution" –that she could "let go" of the anger to transmute it into light and make room within for unconditional love. He told her that the universe would support her in this process as she supported it; by turning her unfortunate situation into a gift she could shift energies for the highest good, becoming a vessel for light.

In another healing session, Wilson began assessing a man. Before the man said anything to him, Wilson referred to him as "Mr. Magic" and told him he had "a lot of energy just hanging around him." He began the healing session by helping Mr. Magic receive access to the energies that "belonged to him" while simultaneously dispelling negative, "low vibrational" energies. Wilson instructed Mr. Magic to get ready for a "great, deep light-worker upgrade" by opening the front gates of his heart. During this process, Wilson said that it is not uncommon that people undergoing such a profound "shift" could feel the weight of their change somatically. The man confirmed that, prior to the ceremony, he has been experiencing body pains and depression, which manifested as "going deep into the bottom of their energy" and staying in bed for 24 hours. Mr. Magic told Wilson that he felt as if his body was tethered to the Earth by a hair. Wilson explained that these pains were spiritual-ascension-induced growing pains; growing pains occur in all places with where energy channels are clearing things out, such as "calcium deposits in the pineal gland" and the headaches one may experience when the calcified deposits are being flushed. Regarding New Age beliefs about chakras, once these

deposits are flushed, the pineal gland, which is associated with the third-eye chakra, can funnel divine messages and open the individual to their psychic gifts.

Neo-shamanic Healing

While many participants report accessing the wisdom and energetic healing they strive towards without one-on-one work, "downloads" and transformation may be directly granted or facilitated by the facilitator, or neo-shaman. During the Keith's Cacao ceremonies, Wilson claims to intuitively connect with participants on "a different energetic level" to help them access this gnosis and he describes the neo-shamanic process as intuitive. During ceremony as well as in his interview with the *Far Out Podcast,* Wilson described his journey to becoming the "Chocolate Shaman," a label that his community of participants fondly use when referring to him. Through his work with the Cacao Spirit and other multi-dimensional beings, Wilson developed his own methods of healing that are separate from indigenous tradition; he does not claim that his practices are affiliated with any "archaic" tradition, but that he was "trained" to access such shamanic gnosis during his own inner journey. He states that his method is not informed by a "system" or "theory"; instead, he addresses individuals based on their unique needs and the personal narratives they must address, which is informed by empathy, intuition, and what he witnesses on "another level." As he puts it, this level is a place of "5th dimensional knowing" where "everything is known", including "any vibrational resonance or frequency." Such information and clarity are always available to an individual, and cacao acts as a key that makes opening up to it easier; cacao helps the individual to access a liminal, flow state that allows them to "get you out their own way" and to "cut through bullshit to intuitive knowing" (*Far Out*).

Petter Johnstad (2018) and Kenneth Tuppers (2002, 2009) have analyzed the overlap of entheogen use, "intuitive knowing" and its mind/body benefits, and modern psychotherapy. Through a comparison of clinical and cultural practice, the authors suggest that the West's attempt to practice psychedelic medicine has its benefits but is ultimately sterile and void of significant sacred aspects. Rather than psychotherapists' using relativity new "tools" to address a psychiatric illness, those who traditionally participated in shamanic ceremonies were engaged in a spiritual experience with healers who embodied centuries of imparted cultural wisdom and training. According to O'Connor, neo-shamans, like traditional shamans, are "often identified initially through some form of supernatural indication or selection, and acquire their specialized knowledge through a combination of apprenticeship with recognized healers and mystically or intuitively acquired knowledge" (O'Connor et al. 17). Neo-shamans and healers within the cacao ceremonies, including Wilson, often claim that their wisdom and training was intuitive; guided by the Cacao Spirit, who helped them refine modalities of healing they were already familiar with, such as breathwork; or taught to them by traditional—or other neo—shamans.

Shamans, and subsequently neo-shamans, "often consider illness to be a manifestation of supernatural imbalance and draw upon spiritual forces" (Tupper, *Entheogenic Healing* 276) to holistically cure the soul and in turn, the mind. The ability to effectively treat illness through addressing ailments of body and mind via "the soul" and spirituality have been used successfully in addiction treatment, or as Tupper argues, these address "a spiritual void that [destructive] behaviors are [attempting] to fill" (278). Further, his work suggests that "healing... psychological conditions" (257) through

spiritual experience correlates with long-term self-development as well as the development of an otherwise unachievable access to self-understanding and connection. Approaching healing through the "archaic," financially accessible, and communal ways democratized by Mircea Eliade's book, *Shamanism – Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, is arguably the main function of cacao ceremonies.

Achieving self-understanding and connection suggests that a degree of existential intelligence may be another benefit of cacao consumption. This refers to the knowledge one gains after having experienced an entheogen-induced transcendental state. Entheogens also are considered by shamans and neo-shamans alike as "plant teachers" and may act as tools that will "provide a richer cosmological understanding of the world for both individuals and cultures" (Tupper, "Entheogens and Existential" 499). The dynamic of both the entheogen and the ritual performance then may allow the individual to see beyond themselves and to an otherwise unrecognized interconnectedness between the self, others, and the universe. This level of intelligence promotes a state of gnosis through which one is in constant awareness of a divine through line of life (Metzner). This level of awareness and "knowingness" is what psychedelic pioneers like McKenna, Metzner, and Leary were advocating; through accessing the "knowingness" at a societal level, individuals transcend the "postmodern condition." As I will discuss in a coming section, this sense of "knowingness" sometimes veers into unconventional and wildly alternative beliefs (what some have referred to as the "cultic milieu"); this is the case with some of Keith's Cacao ceremonies, in which Wilson states that the only way to overcome the negative experiences related to living in a world of political corruption, pedophilia, and the ominous Bill Gates (in Wilson's view, all related to related to a

massive global conspiracy regarding microchipping and child trafficking) is to focus inward and heal within.

In the discussion that follows, I describe several instances of healer and neo-shaman facilitated healing that my collaborators shared during our interviews as well as those that I witnessed during ceremonies. These sections also will provide some examples of additional actions taken to undergo and integrate healing. During Embue's and Ora's ceremonies, the facilitator guides the participants through journal prompts or meditations, and the individual holds the responsibility of privately interpreting the emotions or images that they experience. In Keith's Cacao ceremonies, the specific "genre of ritual healing" he uses is what Csordas refers to as the "problem-focused healing of selected individuals" (Csordas 59). From what I witnessed during various ceremonies, these personal healing sessions may last up to 60 minutes per individual, depending on the condition of the individual and Wilson's assessment of them. As Csordas observes with regard to such healing practices, due to the belief that the overall ecosystem of the individual is intertwined with the "collective," the utilization of either of these approaches ultimately enables the "general healing of others" (59).

Guided Imagery

The primary genre of ritual healing used by Keith's Cacao, Embue Cacao, and Ora Cacao is guided meditation, or guided imagery, involving experiences wherein participants are invited to make themselves comfortable, close their eyes, and begin the process of receiving "revelatory or therapeutic" imagery (Csordas 75) . When revelatory, the imagery experienced through the intentional use of the mind (imagination) is regarded as being symbolic of an active divine process or power at work; when therapeutic, the

spiritualist envisions an “experiential resolution to a problem” (75). As Magliocco notes in her discussion of neo-pagan rituals and spirituality, in both instances, the imagination “becomes a vehicle for achieving personal wholeness” (97); it is through the “language of ritual [that imagination can] express itself and communicates between the unconscious and rational consciousness” (97). In the context of cacao rituals, a classic example of such revelatory imagery is Dan’s experience in a recent Embue ceremony meditation session; he was guided through a pilgrimage to the heart; he walked through a sacred forest where he located a tree, crawled through its roots, and began descending a spiral staircase. This path “led to the inner room of his heart where he met his wise self who then spoke to him of wisdom ...” pertaining to personal trauma (Dan).

While talking about her first cacao ceremony, my collaborator Kim shared an experience in which she received both revelatory and therapeutic imagery when her dead father appeared to her during ceremony:

> … He actually came to me in [a] vision ... I had no idea what to expect from [the ceremony from] an outsider perspective, as a first timer. I'm going there and sipping on some of the cacao, lying in a circle [on comfy] blankets, and so he came to me; he was like literally—it was so visual—sitting at my legs, holding my legs, and he was saying that he had passed away so I could shine my light brighter, and it was just crazy. And there were some angels on my side—I have a lump in my breast, benign and everything, but they were sending the healing energies and stuff so ... Everything divinely orchestrated for that moment ... (Kim)

This vision was the first time she had seen her father in 10 years; he had died from HIV when she was eleven years of age, four years after her parents got divorced and he

disappeared from her life. She described the process of connecting with his spirit as "very difficult" but that hearing his message "[highlighted] a purpose ... behind his passing" and that this experience opened her up to a "further journey of healing" (Kim).

Through this guided imagery session, Kim received revelatory images, such as the *divine at work*, "orchestrating" everything for that moment; and the therapeutic imagery of seeing her estranged and deceased father. This also demonstrates the power of the reflexive, meaning-making mode in emotional processing. Further, this form of healing highlights the primary goal of ceremonies; with the assistance of cacao and the facilitators, participants work towards strengthening and prioritizing their imagination and sensory experiences, or emotional, embodied knowledge. Each ritual activity can be paired with cacao to "ground" the ceremonialist, and it is when this grounding was achieved that many noted experiencing a sense of "liminality." As the human body is viewed as an extension of the universe, "grounding" is seen allowing oneself access to a bodily knowledge that is equated with divine and universal wisdom. Participants view cacao as supporting the grounding and imaginative process that conjured mental images, like those experienced by Dan and Kim, which are viewed as indications that one is receiving gifts from the higher self.

Inner Child

Healing the inner child, or "younger self," through guided imagery is also a commonly promoted practice within cacao ceremonies and is an additional way of accessing gnosis; this inner child holds "higher" knowledge that is beneficial to the participant. As stated, of survey collaborators, 18% "agreed" while 74% "strongly agreed" that they consumed cacao to connect with their heart, "inner child," or the divine.

This is because cacao is perceived as a tool that is used to open the channel to access the inner child. When embodying the cacao's messages of love and grounding to the present moment, Wilson states that participants will experience a "deep sense of remembering" inner and universal truths of love and interconnectedness. This deep sense of remembering occurs when cacao clears and opens participants' energy channels or chakras, and they are able to access the "emotional self they suppressed as a child."

During a one-on-one healing session with Wilson, he "assessed" me by reading my energy at a "different energetic plane" and told me that no one was going to love me until I started loving myself, including those parts of me that I reject. He told me to travel within to find that little girl inside of me who I had abandoned and request that she take me to the places within where I hid my authentic self in order to be accepted by others. He asked me to imagine a safe place in my heart and to bring her back there. I brought her back to my childhood home where he then told me to reassure her that she was safe with me and always welcome in her new refuge (the childhood home subsumed by my heart) even if she decided to leave. Next, he told me to tell her that I was sorry and that I knew she was scared, but I would not be abandoning her again; I was open to her messages of playfulness and childlike wonder. I found this process interesting as, during that period, I was undergoing psychotherapy sessions and the significance of the concept of the inner child was also prevalent in my therapist's and my conversations.

During another one-on-one session, Wilson began facilitating a healing experience for a husband and wife. The wife was working with angels and tarot cards to heal while the husband on the other hand had an interest in violent media. This was causing a riff in their intimate and spiritual dynamic, to say the least. Wilson explained to

the wife that she and her husband were coming from different worlds; her husband needed to "find a place inside that allows him to have a sacred magical journey" because he learned to suppress his "knowing and magic" from a young age. Wilson instructed the husband to find his inner child and have the child take him by his hand. With the inner child as his guide, Wilson advised the husband to ask the child to take him where he hid "his empowerment to keep access to [him] when people [did] not agree" with him. Furthermore, Wilson told him that he "picked up programming at a young age," meaning that his inner child was wounded by his condition, which taught him that his affinity for "magic" was "bad." But this abandoned inner child held the key to the husband's ability to channel his magic.

As suggested by my interpretation of my experience with Keith – drawing the connection between our mini-session and my experiences with therapy – the reclamation of "the inner child" is a method of intervention used both in folk healing and contemporary psychotherapy (see Hestbech 2018). As Hestbech explains, through retrieving the inner child, patients are identifying and reintegrating "subselves or subpersonalities ... into the conscious part of the personality through the therapeutic process" (21). This idea of the subself is understood within communities of believers to "[experience] the world through sensation, emotion, and intuition ... [it] communicates through dreams, visions, art, and physical sensations and symptoms" (Magliocco 178). Due to this perspective, as promoted by Reclaiming Witchcraft tradition (see Magliocco 2010), participants of cacao ceremonies view the reclamation of this "younger self" as the key to their inner magic as well as suppressed emotions; addressing the inner child is a method of healing from the traumatic experiences that robbed the practitioner of their

sense of personal power and worthiness. Cacao ceremony facilitators, such as those who post in cacao community Facebook groups (i.e. “Rituals + Cacao Ceremonies”) advertise that ceremonies help the participant to “unravel” as they journey inward towards their truest nature. Similar to the neo-pagan practitioners that Magliocco studied, this true nature, or “knowing” for cacao enthusiasts refers to the communication that occurs between the “sacred self” and the “younger self” (Magliocco 178).

COVID-19, Healing, and Conspiracy

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns began the month before I started researching and attending cacao ceremonies. While the pandemic was not a topic of discussion in Ora or Embue ceremonies when I participated (beyond individuals discussing the stress it caused them), Keith addressed the virus during one healing session in a remarkable and shocking manner. In this session, a woman asked for a “sanity check”; she had just contracted COVID-19, was in a new romantic relationship, and had family members also sick with COVID-19. “What am I supposed to do?” she asked. Wilson responded directly: based on his findings while “rummaging around on the web,” he suggested that she try moringa or Ivermectin, a “long-used antiparasitic” that is used to deworm horses. He followed this advice by claiming that her sickness was a message from Mother Earth telling her that she was ready for an “upgrade” to a different level of consciousness that would allow her to connect to nature in a deeper way. This connection would enable Mother Earth to support her energetically and vibrationally while she healed.

Wilson also notified her that COVID-19 was ushering her towards the activation of an awakening. He instructed her to close her eyes and let in her “higher dimensional”

self through her crown, third eye, and heart chakras. By allowing this version of herself in, she could harness the higher dimensional reality and "anchor into this reality," send love to COVID-19, and to take the journey COVID-19 wanted her to take in the "highest way." By approaching her "COVID-19 journey" she could gather consciousness-altering benefits.

While this woman remained with her eyes closed, and was focusing on following his instructions, he asked if she felt an internal shift that he said he could sense in her energy field. Once she confirmed she could, he told her, "That was the virus assisting you on your journey." This was in reference to her transition to an enlightened state through personal vibrational *ascension* with the additional assistance of the "higher knowing of the heart chakra." Wilson repeatedly expresses the notion that the accessing of a "higher knowing" comes through confrontation of the inner experience, with cacao as the key inward. After the approximate 20-minute session, the participant thanked Wilson and appeared relieved. As I did not attend another of Wilson's ceremonies after this session, I cannot confirm whether the woman attempted to treat herself with the Ivermectin.

Unlike in the ceremonies hosted by Embue and Ora, Wilson's incorporation of pseudo-scientific and conspiratorial ideas into ceremony were frequent and display the connection between religious millennialism, conspiracy theories, esotericism, and what has been referred to as the cultic milieu or stigmatized knowledge. In his work, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*, Michael Barkun uses the term "improvisational millennialism" to define "an act of bricolage" that draws on "Eastern and Western religion, New Age ideas and esotericism, and radical politics, without any sense that the resulting mélange contains incompatible elements" (11).

Regarding such ill-assorted aspects, during ceremonies, Wilson stated that the job of participants was not to focus on the evil in the world nor the perceived destructive lifestyle or political choices of those you did not agree with; rather, individuals were to focus on their own process of healing for the greater good.

Wilson's diagnosis of the participant's COVID circumstance highlights the "conspiracist worldview [which] implies a universe governed by designs rather than by randomness" (Barkun 3). The principles of this worldview include the ideas that: (1) "nothing happens by accident," such as how the participant contracted the virus for the evolution of her consciousness; (2) "Nothing is as it seems"; what appeared to be a contracted virus was actually an energetic push from Mama Earth; (3) "Everything is connected"; the virus, Earth, and the participant's highest self were conspiring divinely (3, 4).

This viewpoint gives meaning to participants' struggles while simultaneously reinforcing the need for cacao ceremonies, sacred plant use, and what Barkun would refer to as Wilson's stigmatized knowledge, or "knowledge claims that have not been validated by mainstream institutions" (12). As it originates with his "unseen friends (E.T.s and higher dimensional beings)," Wilson is a gatekeeper of this knowledge, which appeals to participants who voiced feelings of distrust of authority and anger related to having been failed by perceived dysfunctional medical and governmental structures. Of course, not all participants in the cacao ceremonies I observed seemed marginalized by mainstream societal institutions, but this notion appeared to be a recurring one in some cases, and Wilson certainly reinforced such feelings and promoted stigmatized and conspiratorial

ideas. During our interview, my collaborator Kim stated that viewing the virus from this angle "is the more spiritually enlightened version of what is going on." Further, she stated

> I do my research … Not everybody's open to my perspective. Cacao most definitely supports [my beliefs] because it rips apart—in a very gentle way—the way you view the world. Like your intuition just becomes strengthened and strengthened and strengthens and that will cause you to question things. Do I trust in the power of my own body? Do I trust in the power of nature? Or do I trust in the power of some wonky scientists, putting the vaccines together? Maybe not, you know?

Reintegrating

A common thread between each instance of healing was the suggested efficacy of reframing internal and physical experience as spiritual guidance towards the transmutation of energy and corresponding gnosis, such as that of suffering or following uncertainty into enlightenment. [?? suggests the power of the sacralization of quantum theory.] The approach to healing witnessed in these case studies, whether through a neo-shaman's help or the personal assistance that cacao is perceived to supply, can be understood through use of the Narrative Process Coding System (see Aleixo et al. 2021). Regardless of therapeutic approach (i.e., cognitive behavioral therapy), this "observer-based empirical measure" (Aleixo et al. 32) enables researchers to understand the individual's process of changing their internal narratives through a tripartite model:

> (1) External Narrative mode includes the disclosure of personal stories/autobiographical memories (micronarrative). (2) Internal Narrative mode

> includes descriptions of bodily felt feelings and emotions, the expression and articulation of affections. (3) Reflexive Narrative mode or meaning-making processes draws into the coupling of both storytelling and emotion processes, and it results in new life themes and self-understandings. (32)

Concerning the COVID-19 example, for instance, the participant externalizes her concerns, or current narrative, around her illness. Wilson asks her to enter and analyze her internal realm, such as her experience within the heart or head spaces. And, finally, in the reflexive narrative mode, Wilson helped the participant reframe their perception of their ailment as divine intervention and an opportunity for empowerment and an energetic "upgrade." In the context of this model, COVID-19 and medicinal mushrooms are representative of an energetic relationship that, if addressed accordingly, may act as the key to access to otherwise hidden wisdom and knowledge. According to Keith, his primary focus as a healer is assisting individuals in changing their personal narratives to upgrade and achieve new self-understandings and connections to the divine.

As cacao is perceived to be an ally in healing, one could argue that this process may also occur in through the communication with cacao as an entity that is promoted within ceremony. Ceremonialists attend ceremony with concerns and begin by externalizing them (internally) by asking cacao for guidance. This is followed by the participant examining their internal world for shifts in emotions and feelings within the body (i.e. catharsis). Due to the characteristics that participants believe cacao has, when they consume cacao in the process of healing, they assert that they are better able to ground and accept what is occurring in their internal world. This leads them to make meaning of the somatic indicators or images that cacao is perceived to elicit. This also

signals the significance of imagination as discussed by Magliocco, outlined in the above section on the inner child.

As Kim implied when she referenced cacao as opening her to further healing of this internal world, participants view cacao a "powerful ally" that assists participants in confronting and reframing internal and external dramas to either begin or continue their healing journey. This journey towards wellness does not end with ceremony; the final stage of Turner's ritual is reintegration wherein the participant exits ceremony and integrates the lessons they gained through the therapeutic and transformative experiences of ritual into their everyday lives. In the cacao ceremony, the participant crosses a symbolic boundary into a both individually and communally oriented space, engaged with metaphor and symbolism for internal narrative and subsequent self-transformation, and, ideally, left having found the potential "missing link to [their] healing" (Jacobs 41); this "link" can be located through experiencing a connection with energies such as those of the inner child, the other individuals pilgrimaging to their hearts, or the Cacao Spirit herself. This is followed by a sense of empowerment and the participant's incorporation of any knowledge they had gained through ceremony back into their everyday lives.

It is significant to note that maintenance of the participants' senses of healing and empowerment often waned if they did not continue entering the ritual space or engaging with their solidarity groups that enforced their conscious transformations. As is implied by the frequently used term "journey," the path towards healing is an ongoing process that must be maintained and nurtured. According to my survey data, while the number of ritual events each of my collaborators participated in ranged from "less than 5" to—in the case of a single individual—over 250, the average numbers of ceremonies attended was

16.5. This continued participation promotes and reinforces further and current transformations through the individual's engagement with liminality and communitas.

Such rituals and connections legitimize "notions of [personal] power through the symbol" (Jacobs 39) of cacao. Through the cacao ceremony's "[facilitation of] spiritual and social [affiliations] among [individuals once] alienated ... from the dominant culture" (39), rituals promote conscious healing and transformation.

CHAPTER VII: CONCLUSION

Throughout this thesis, I framed the consumption of cacao through a behavioral, folkloristic perspective in which I focused on ceremony participants' personal approaches and needs as they relate to cacao consumption, healing, and overall spiritual practice; from this stance, I also argued that the cacao ceremony is a bricolage-infused event strictly unified as a framework through which the participants' desire for experiences of healing and transcendence are expressed idiosyncratically. I explored this phenomenon by initially drawing connections between the consumption of cacao as a sacred plant medicine and Mesoamerican folklore and mid-through-late 20th century psychedelic counterculture; offering a definition of the community, outlining the vernacular religions participants subscribe to, and analyzing the significance of symbolism and terroir in the development of cacao as a sacrament. Next, I outlined the cacao ritual using the tripartite rites of passage model (see Turner 1967, 1969, 1969, 1974; Turner et al. 1982, 1982), and then I concluded my analysis with a discussion of the ways spirituality is embodied and healing is performed and experienced by participants.

I found that, within the community of ceremonialists, cacao is considered a spirit, teacher, ally, sacrament, and a tool (or key) that facilitates the opening of the participant's heart. This opening is perceived to permit healing and the subsequent channeling of divine energy, the accessing of gnosis or "Soul Truth," and a state of living from the so-called heart. While sacramental use of cacao and the corresponding ceremony are a recent phenomenon, as noted, the practice has roots in from Mesoamerican folklore, while

reflecting the subjective turn from religion to spirituality, and the corresponding sacralization of psychotropic substances within metaphysical religions.

Participants imbibe cacao within the cacao ceremony to initiate transformation and healing experiences. While these ceremonies vary based on medium (online or in-person), function (personal or communal), or the preferences of the facilitator, they can be understood through the *rites de passage* model of separation, liminality, and reintegration. Participants separate from the external world and into ceremony where they are provided information regarding cacao, its history, and the ceremony. Once "separated" and prepared for the impending experience, participants may experience a sense of "liminality," or a space "betwixt and between" time. Unlike many other entheogens, such as LSD, cacao allows the consumer to remain somewhat "grounded" in reality during this liminal period, which enables the participant to decide if they are ready to enter their "inner realm" and "do the work"; this work is regarded as a challenge to one's perception of self and promotes self-healing through the transmutation of personal energies, narratives, and relationships.

Ritual healing in the context of the ceremony occurs holistically; participants view healing as occurring at the levels of mind, body, and soul. The methods of healing I witnessed were energetic and many were facilitated by neo-shamans or healers through guided imagery sessions. Once the ceremony is complete, the individual undergoes the final phase of "reintegration" by exiting the ceremonial space and integrating any knowledge they gained into their everyday life. As many people stated, they are on a "journey" with cacao; this references the ongoing process of "unbecoming," or healing so that one can experience their true essence as embodied love, which does not end with, but

is initiated and maintained through continued ceremony attendance and a sustained relationship with the spirit.

I hope this thesis provides a foundation for further research regarding the folkloristic perspective on contemporary Western "sacred plant" usage, and its use as folk medicine and healing, as well as the ways in which alternative spiritual practices and alternative medical conspiracy theories overlap. Future research on this topic could include a dissection of ritual performance and dynamics through the inclusion of participant observation of in-person ceremonies. Finally, future discussions could expand upon the intersection of vernacular religion practice and modern psychotherapy, the ironic overlap between cacao consumption and capitalism within supposed anti-capitalist religious movements (such as New Age and its opposition to dysfunctional modern structures), and the impacts that cacao, its sacramental consumption, and colonialization have on indigenous populations today.

Cacao has opened the door to this study, and now additional researchers must choose to walk through it.

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