A person in profile, wearing a white long-sleeved shirt, holds a dark bowl containing burning incense. The bowl is placed on a wooden tray. The background is blurred, showing other people in a dimly lit room. The overall mood is serene and focused.

The Path of Plants

A Journey to Healing

A DOCUMENTARY BY
LOUIS BIDOUC AND AURÉLIE MARQUES



SYNOPSIS

On the edge of the Peruvian forest, the Takiwasi center welcomes and treats drug addicts from all over the world. Combining psychotherapy and traditional Amazonian medicines, their method for treating addiction is unique.

For nine months, patients live behind closed doors, learning how to create new meaningful social bonds with one another, while facing all aspects of themselves. Purging plants are used to detoxify the body and mind, while vision plants, such as ayahuasca, allow for an immersion into the unconscious during which patients explore the complexities of memory and identity.

In a setting where everything is ritualized, the center acts as a theater of physical and psychological transformations.





STATEMENT OF INTENT

Following “The Path of Plants” we traveled Latin America to become familiar with the emblematic plants of indigenous peoples. At times food, at times medicine, or objects of myth, ritual, or divination, these plants reveal the richness of the bonds that unite man to his environment.

But these plants are also the connecting points between the modern world and traditional ways of life which are rapidly changing.

At the end of our travels, we came back with many pictures, and a strong desire to share the stories we discovered. "The Path of Plants: A Journey to Healing" is the first independently-produced documentary to come from this adventure.

Told from the point of view of patients undergoing a demanding healing process, the film occurs at the intersection of multiple stunning life stories meeting one another at the gates of the Peruvian rainforest.

With respect for traditional Amazonian medicines, this film places spirituality back at the core of the healing process.



INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHORS

“The Path of Plants : A Journey to Healing” a film about drug addiction?

The film tells the story of people who came to the center to treat their addictions, but the focus is on the transformation process at work, rather than the illness they came to treat.

Showing the sacrifices and struggles that mark the patients’ healing, the film addresses the universal issues of transformation and the search for self. How can we deal with a traumatic past and break free from the narrative we have been trapped by? How can we identify the personas that we have created for ourselves but do not serve us, and get rid of them? How can we recover a wounded body and mind, and rebuild our identity from the ground up? Everyone can relate to what these patients are working to achieve.

What was your place in the center?

It took time for us to build relationships and trust with the patients. Our Saturday afternoon soccer matches helped a lot! Most of the patients had gone through very difficult life events, and most of them

were eventually willing to share their stories. We knew that we could not grasp the depth of their experiences without experimenting ourselves, both with plants, and to a lesser extent, with therapeutic workshops. As such, we participated in ayahuasca sessions, in forest plant diets, and in ‘bio-dance’ workshops. This allowed us to directly experience the action of a medicine that was, until then, totally unknown to us.

At the same time, we lived outside of the center, and respected our position as directors of the film. We feel like this enabled us to achieve the right balance between intellectual honesty and distance from the subject.

What is the role of ayahuasca in treating addiction ?

Ayahuasca is a psychoactive vine which has been used for millennia by the indigenous cultures of the Amazon in a ritual setting to access the invisible world, communicate with the spirits of the forest, and to heal. Its consumption does not carry any form of dependence. So, is it a drug or a medicine? The short answer is that all depends on how it is used.

The experimentation of modified states of consciousness through plants or various



techniques (dance, music, breathing ...) is common to all traditional societies, and contributes to the vitality of their spiritual life. In the West, the misuse of certain natural psychotropic substances, outside the sacred ritual framework, condemns them to be considered as drugs. Yet ayahuasca is now being studied seriously in psychiatry and research centers as a means of treating addiction.

At Takiwasi, ayahuasca is used in a treatment protocol that includes psychotherapy and the use of many other plants. The patients consume it during weekly ritual sessions, guided by experienced healers. The therapeutic benefits are twofold: on the level of the psyche, ayahuasca stimulates the frontal lobe, which is responsible for managing our thoughts and reflections, as well as the cerebral amygdala which manages memories that are associated with strong emotional content. The ritual brings out unconscious, psychological, and emotional material to be shared with the psychotherapist.

At the same time, altered states of consciousness broaden the spectrum of ordinary perception and reveal an "invisible world". The center encourages patients to reconnect with their spiritual roots as a path to healing.

Can you explain the particular form the film takes?

The experience of change, of personal transformation, is not linear. During the healing process, we go through steps which can have both immediate or long-lasting effects. At Takiwasi, these steps are very ritualized - from the arrival at the center, to the ingesting of plants during the therapeutic workshops - there are rules and codes for everything.

This led us to imagine a structure for the film in several acts. Similar to a theatrical play, the scenes present units of time and space which appear in an order that is not necessarily that of reality. The rhythm of the film is built around the changes in the characters' states during their healing process, and the expression of their different personality traits.

Interviews with their psychotherapists are important milestones for the patients during their stay. We were not granted access to these sessions, and so used the interview format to mirror their effect, creating interludes in the structure of the film. In an office, facing the camera, the patient explains how he thinks of his past, the reasons for his addiction... and how he is working to understand and accept himself. A lot of depth emerges from the juxtaposition of their words and the images of their healing process.





THE TAKIWASI CENTER

The Takiwasi protocol is based on 3 main types of plants: purgative plants which are used for detoxification, psychoactive plants, such as ayahuasca, which give access to modified states of consciousness and very deep introspective work, and finally, “master plants” which are taken in a context of isolation in the forest - with dietary, sexual, and energetic prescriptions - so as to reinforce certain aspects of the personality.

This work with plants allows the emergence of psychological, emotional, and dream-related material. This raw material is then worked through and processed in psychotherapy, with the help of a team of psychologists and psychotherapists. Takiwasi's method is thus organized as a therapeutic triptych: living together, medicinal plants, and psychotherapy.

Takiwasi is working with the Center for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) based in Toronto, Canada. The goal of this collaboration is to scientifically evaluate the results of the use of ayahuasca in treating drug addiction.

But the philosophy of the center goes further than this and brings forth the importance of spirituality in the treatment of addiction. Beyond the sacred nature of Amazonian medicines, Takiwasi advocates for spirituality to be considered as a necessity for healing. Although the center is non-denominational, it houses a chapel, most of the people who work there are catholic, and conversions might happen during the treatment.

It should also be noted that the center only accepts male patients so as to ensure sexual abstinence during treatment.



Key figures :

- **The average length of treatment is 9 months, but it can go up to 12.**
- **Takiwasi has been welcoming patients for 25 years.**
- **More than 1000 patients have been treated for addiction at Takiwasi.**
- **According to the center's surveys, 2 years after leaving, 64% of patients say they feel better since completing their stay at Takiwasi.**

It is also important to note that roughly half of patients interrupt their treatment, a figure that illustrates the difficulty of the process.





LES PATIENTS



FERNANDO

60 years old

Arrived at Takiwasi 2 months ago

Il Thirty years ago, Fernando first tried cocaine paste. Since then, he had used it to compensate for his frustrations and feelings of inadequacy, ending up completely enslaved to it. At 60, he is trying to reconcile with his past by rediscovering the child he was, rejected by a careless and authoritarian father. This inner isolation is masked by his extroverted and talkative temperament. On a daily basis, Fernando has a broad, almost clownish smile. His guitar slung around his neck, he gathers everyone around his songs, expressing his full potential for sociability. However, the need to face himself is eventually revealed.



YORSI

17 years old

Arrived at Takiwasi 6 months ago

Age 17, Yorsi is the youngest patient in the center. He came to Takiwasi to treat his addiction to the cocaine “pasta” but also to escape from criminality. Yorsi is impetuous and his overflowing energy sometimes makes others feel uncomfortable. Along with treatment for his addiction, he goes through a real “school of life” - learning how to temper his excesses and to leave space for others. The dark past that he carries will also serve as the basis for his reconstruction.



DIO

33 years old

Arrived at Takiwasi 12 months ago

This reserved 33-year-old New Yorker joined the center to treat his opioid addiction to painkillers legally prescribed by his doctor. Dio became dependent to his medication which was prescribed for back pain, and went so far as to nearly overdose. All previous detox attempts, replacing pills by other pills, have failed. After 12 months of treatment, Dio has changed a lot. He has learned to express his feelings and seems to have found his vocation in theater. His departure from Takiwasi is imminent but Dio recognizes his transformation here as only the first step in a long and solitary journey to healing.



FRANCK

20 years old

Arrived at Takiwasi 3 months ago

At barely 20 years old, Franck returns to Takiwasi. He was expelled from his first stay after using drugs in the center. He has just had a baby girl, but his addiction to marijuana and cocaine paste has distanced him from his responsibilities. His return to the center is a challenge and a real test of his will. Although it is sometimes difficult to contain the unstable young man, Franck does apply himself to plant care and psychotherapy. Gradually, he tries to explore and understand the origin of his anger and anxiety.



THE TEAM



Aurélie Marques

Director

After graduating in journalism at the Political Sciences Institute of Grenoble in 2014, I have directed magazines and documentaries for public TV and cable. In 2017, I decided to stop everything to get involved in a project that reflects the values I believe in and fight for.

My passion for alternative medicine led me to spend six months travelling in Latin America, seeking to understand traditional healing practices. At Takiwasi, I discovered the therapeutic potential of the meeting between psychotherapy and the science of Amazonian plants. A deep desire to create this film was born in me, and my desire for change was strengthened. The next step in this process for me will be to begin a



Louis Bidou

Director

With an ethnologist as a father and a psychoanalyst as a mother, The Path of Plants : A Journey to Healing is somewhat the story of me following in their footsteps. After my business studies, I spent almost five years in the social and solidarity economy in Africa. My long stays abroad helped me develop a broader perspective. In 2012, my father sent me the recordings that he had made forty years before of shamans of the Tatuyo people: they contained ritual myths and songs that had partly disappeared since. I returned to the Colombian Amazon to find the descendants of these shamans and restore this fragment of their intangible heritage to them.

This adventure gave birth to a first documentary "La Voix des Tatuyos" which was screened in cinemas and festivals. I discovered the pleasure of film directing and the power of the documentary format. The seed was sown! With The Path of Plants, I continue to explore possible meeting points between native people and the modern world.



Adrien Bellay

Editor

As an editor, I was particularly captivated by the pictures of the Tatuyos. These people live in perfect symbiosis with their environment. "La Voix des Tatuyos" made me realize that it was possible to convey a message with a participative and independent spirit. Following this first collaboration with Louis Bidou, I directed the documentary "L'Éveil de la Permaculture" in 2017, the success of which exceeded all our expectations. This second film came at the perfect time, responding to a public demand for ecology, sharing, community, and creating common culture - a list of values which guide me in my professional projects. I decided to work on The Path of Plants with Louis & Aurélie so as to make these sacred plants and the people whose rituals they belong to better known and understood by today's world.

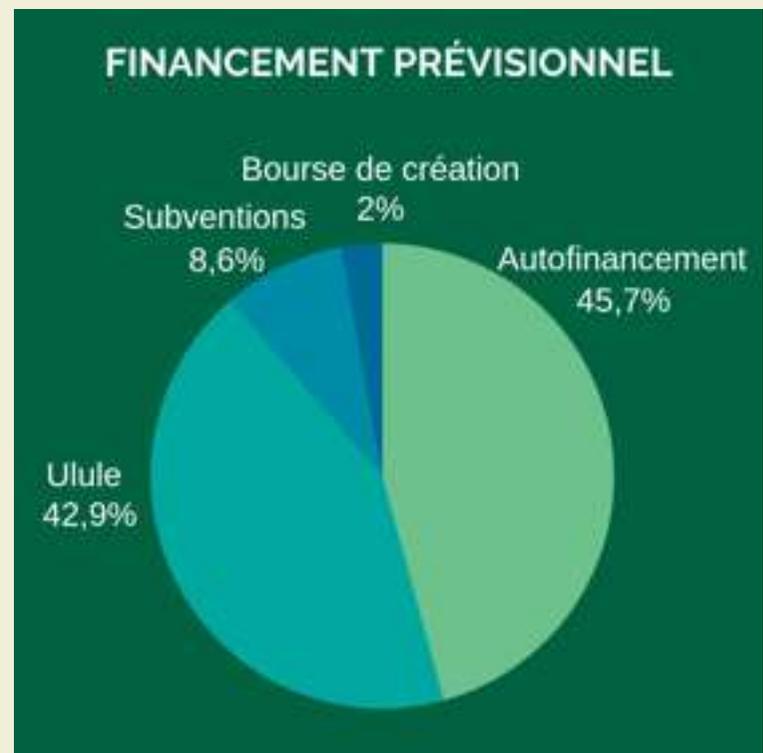


THE CROWDFUNDING

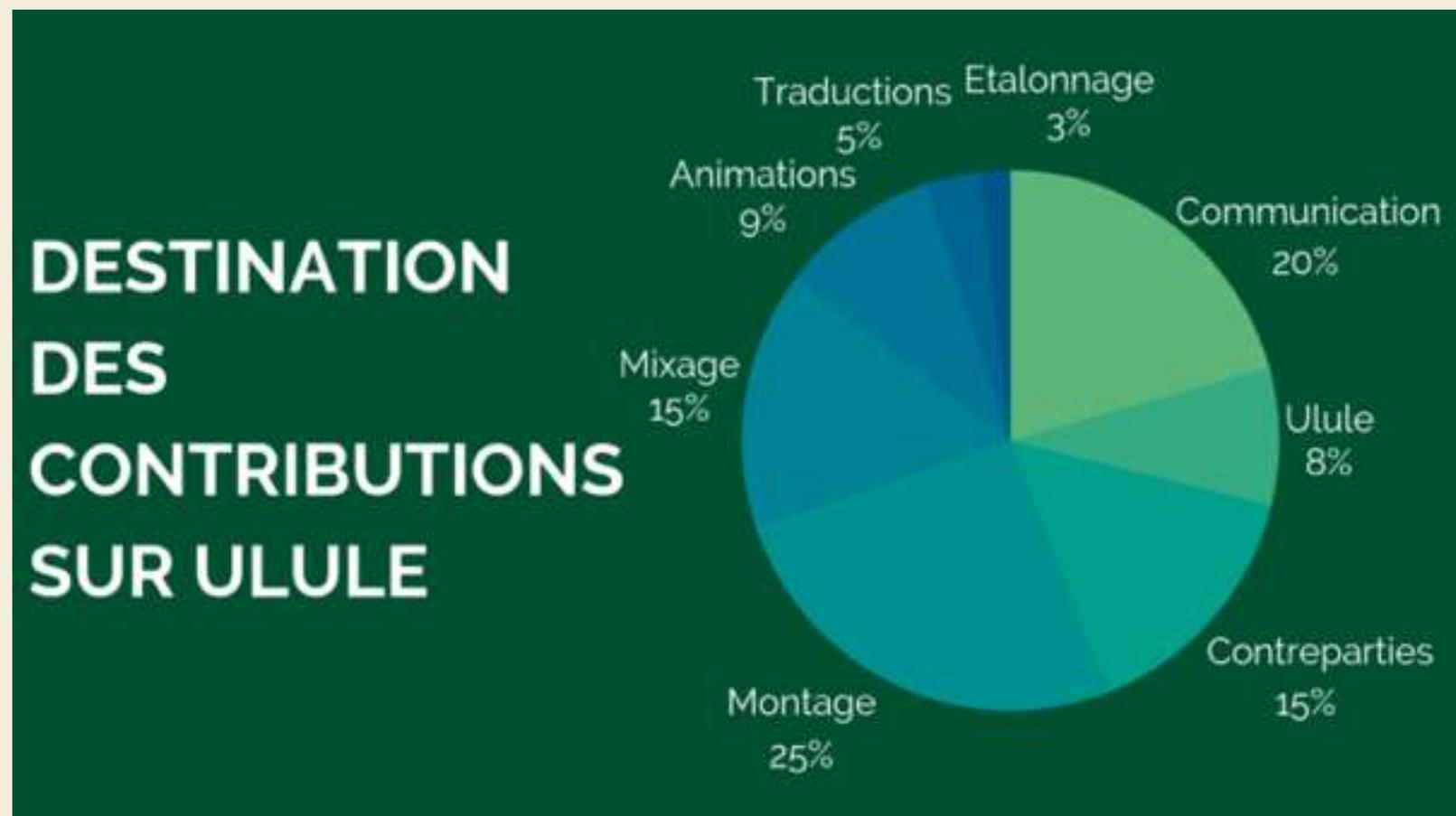
In order to create this film independently, we are launching a crowdfunding campaign to complete the financing of the project, which until now has been entirely self-produced.

The campaign is organized on the Ulule platform from March 4th to May 5th, 2019. We will be offering many rewards including access to the film via streaming, the organization of a private screening, herbs, and more.

A successful crowdfunding campaign would allow an end-of-2019 release of the film.



Join the crowdfunding : <https://lavoiedesplantes-lefilm.com/crowdfunding/>





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