Monika Kujawska

FOREST COSMO-POLITICS AND THE AGENCY OF PLANTS: A CASE STUDY FROM THE ASHÁNINKA PEOPLE IN PERUVIAN AMAZONIA

ABSTRACT

For Amazonian Indigenous people, the forest plays a vital role in sustaining their subsistence; it also serves as the social arena for interactions between different classes of beings. This paper analyses forest cosmo-politics and the agency of plants from the perspective of the Asháninka people in Peruvian Amazonia, making dual contributions to multispecies scholarship. Ethnographically, it demonstrates how manipulation and predation characterise human–animal–spirit interactions within the unified cosmological space of the forest, whereby plants function as vital allies to humans. Methodologically, this paper puts forth the 'walk in the forest' approach as a collaborative ethnographic method that elicits contextualised knowledge through conversations prompted by encounters with organisms and sensory cues that emerge in the forest. Drawing from an animistic framework on multispecies relations, the analysis reveals that plants vary in their ontological status, their proximity to humans, and their roles. Yet, different classes of plants participate in counteracting the malevolent actions of spirits and animals, thereby restoring health and mitigating social tensions arising from interspecies encounters. Multiple agentive capacities of plants stem from both cosmological positioning and biological attributes. This research contributes to understanding the complex and multifaceted nature of plant agencies in Indigenous Amazonia, whilst simultaneously demonstrating the efficacy of forest walks as a methodology for accessing embodied, relational knowledge.

Keywords: Arawak people, Asháninka people, interspecies relations, Peruvian Amazonia, plant agency, walk in the forest

INTRODUCTION

For Amazonian Indigenous people, the forest not only plays a vital role in sustaining their subsistence; it also serves as the social arena for interactions and relations between different classes of beings (Balée 2013; Descola 1996; Kohn 2013; Rival 2002; Wilbert 1992). This paper explores the forest cosmo-politics from the perspective of the Asháninka Indigenous people (Arawak family) living in Upper Peruvian Amazonia. In this context, cosmo-politics is a complex term referring to both the space and set of conditions for establishing interactions between the Asháninka people and nonhuman beings in the forest, as well as to the encounters

and interactions that take place therein. Another operational concept used in this study is the agency of plants—that is, their capacity to act viewed from a plant's ontological status, their cosmological positions, and their biological properties. Through these explorations, this article contributes to the multispecies debate in two ways: ethnographically by introducing a new case study from the most numerous Peruvian Amazonian Indigenous group, the Asháninka people, and methodologically by providing a detailed description of the 'walk in the forest' field method. 'Walk in the wood' has been largely explored as a field technique in ethnobotanical studies, which, in their classical form, largely focus on useful plants described by different Indigenous and local societies (Martin 2004). The present study expands its significance beyond ethnobotany, given that it adapts rather well to multispecies studies, particularly those which address interactions between different classes of beings in areas dominated by forests, such as native Amazonia. I outline the 'walk in the forest' method in detail in the methods section. The ethnographic material used in this paper comes from the implementation of forest walks with Asháninka collaborators. Multispecies ethnography (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010) and its derivatives still suffer from a major methodological problem regarding how to study the entanglements of human and nonhumans protagonists and how to bring together their different perspectives (Hornborg 2017). This article aims to expand the repertoire of methods considered in the multispecies approach.

COSMO-POLITICS

Cosmo-politics may be governed by different schemes of relations, depending on a particular context. In Bruno Latour's (2004) version, this is basically a 'give and take process'. For Mario Blaser (2016) and Marisol de la Cadena (2010), this is a conflict that involves different ontologies and different worldings (see Descola 2014). The forest cosmo-politics described in this paper are enacted by different classes of beings in order to manipulate one another; as such, interspecies relations, including predation, retaliation, or reciprocity, may be included in this scheme of interactions.

Isabelle Stengers (2005) and Bruno Latour (2004) thought of cosmo-politics as a specific set of processes and interactions that took place in a unified cosmos or a shared world with different worldviews and/or knowledge systems. Blaser (2016) and de la Cadena (2010) demonstrated, however, that a problem or conflict may stem from the disjuncture between the different ontological perspectives involved, rather than from different worldviews or an incongruence between knowledge systems. The latter scholars placed cosmo-politics within a pluriverse (see Escobar 2017) and multiple ontologies; it is for this pluriverse perspective that, Blaser (2016: 546) argues, we need cosmo-politics. The actants within the forest cosmo-politics, including the Asháninka people and nonhumans, manipulate themselves within a unified cosmos. However, their common cosmos is different from that of Stengers' (2005) and Latour's (2004), because it is a shared ontological and cosmological space with meaningful rules of knowing and interpreting the behaviour of others (see Kohn 2007). In other words, here, my starting point is that the ongoing politics in the forest are based upon shared concepts and a common epistemology—that is, understanding the agency of animals and plants, their intentions, actions, and powers. I also adhere to the term 'cosmo-politics', given that the term represents more than interspecies politics to include the animals, the plants, and the spirits, and which

is performed in the forest, itself representing a web of social and ecological relations where cosmologies and ecologies become fused (see Århem 1996; Reichel-Dolmatoff 1976).

THE AGENCY OF PLANTS

The concept of cosmo-politics speaks to both a human and nonhuman-centred agency. At its core, this agency refers to the capacity to act, which is attributed to different classes of beings. In Indigenous Amazonia, researchers turned their attention to nonhuman subjectivity and the range of dispositions attributed to animals, plants, or spirits through the detailed study of animism, multinaturalism, and personhood (Belaunde 2001; Conklin and Morgan 1996; Descola 2013; Santos-Granero 2012; Viveiros de Castro 2004; Zent 2009).

From the already published cases, we learn that plants participate in the person-making, in protecting humans by guarding their households, healing, and counteracting maladies from other humans and nonhumans. Plants may also attack and enact revenge, and their actions always have social and political consequences (Pérez-Gil 2024; Revilla-Minaya 2019; Rodríguez-Espíritu 2021; Virtanen and Apurinã 2024; Whitaker et al. 2024).

This paper adheres to the constructivist view of the agency of plants rather than the perspectival/multinatural view (see Santos-Granero 2012) given that it better fits the Asháninka ethnography of forest cosmo-politics. Whilst the perspectival approach assumes that humans share their interiorities (souls) with all classes of beings including plants, the constructivist view acknowledges that not all classes of beings have the same interiority, and different modalities exist in proximity to humans. In a perspectival approach, it is the body that differentiates beings and determines their behaviour and dispositions; by contrast, in a constructivist interpretation, the differences in beings occur also in their interiorities (Pérez-Gil 2024; Revilla-Minaya 2019; Santos-Granero 2012). Thus, subjectivity is a fluid condition rather than fixed, and its specificity derives from sharing substances between humans and nonhumans.

Humans enter into interactions and obtain substances from other beings, such as plants, fungi, or animals. Plants may play a fundamental role in the formation of human beings, which is basically accomplished by ingesting different plants or by being exposed to their qualities and agencies (Santos-Granero 2012: 185; Kujawska et al. 2020). Plants may have human-like souls, a different kind of soul, or be soulless; they may vary in the degree of personhood, or intentionality, consciousness, communicative ability, and agency (Shepard and Daly 2022). The ontological position of plants may stem from their place in the overall classification of beings by a given society. One axis for classifying plants is the discrimination between wild and domesticated. For example, for the Asháninka people, domesticated plants are in essence persons who in certain circumstances may manifest in human form (Rojas-Zolezzi 1997). Piri-piri cultivated plants have a special status amongst the Arawak groups in Peru (Kujawska et al. 2020, 2023; Revilla-Minaya 2019; Rodríguez-Espíritu 2021; Shepard 2004; Valadeau et al. 2010). The Asháninka extensively cultivate different types of piri-piri and endow them with mythical origin and the ontological status of plant-persons. As such, they are commonly used to restore the personal, family, or social balance, and to counteract violations of proscriptions. They are perceived by the Asháninka as subjects that (co)produce the social world (Kujawska et al. 2020, 2023). Wild-grown plants from the forest (Ash. inchatoshi)

seem not to have the same degree of subjectivity and agency as fully or incipiently domesticated plants for the Asháninka people. For example, the Nomatsigenka, another Arawak group from the region, also discriminates between cultivated obeinki (Ash. ibenki) and forest plants (anchosipage). The spirit owners of domesticated plants do not fear humans and establish reciprocal conditions with them. Medicinal plants, irrespective of being cultivated or wild-grown, are the kin of the Nomatsigenka, and their agency is oriented towards treating and healing the illnesses provoked by the owners of these plants (Rodríguez-Espíritu 2021: 207).

Here, some important questions arise regarding the relational and material aspects of agency: Is the agency of plants granted by their souls or the whole set of cosmological properties, or does their power derive from their biological or ecological attributes? How should we regard plant agency if it is mediated by the intentional use of a given group of humans, such as the Asháninka? These questions are explored through empirical data and discussed in light of the literature in the following sections. I start with a brief characterisation of the Asháninka people. I then provide an in-depth description of the method of walking in the forest, particularly those elements of the method which I found productive in the context of interspecies relations and forest cosmo-politics. Then, I briefly outline the concept of personhood and the body—that is, how the body is made through the multispecies interactions which stem from an ontological scheme of relations between Asháninka persons, spirits, animals, and plants. Having established this basis, I move to the forest encounters epitomised by particular cases narrated by my interlocutors, such as those of encounters with malevolent forest spirits and with animals imbued with powers to harm and by introducing excerpts from our walks in the forest where plants served as triggers for more complex stories of multispecies relations. In the last section, I return to the main questions regarding the nature of plant agency from the perspective of the Asháninka people, but I also attempt to place my conclusions into dialogue with other Amazonia studies which kept plant capacities, their roles, and their ontological positions within their scope.

ETHNOGRAPHIC SETTING AND METHODS

THE ASHÁNINKA

The Asháninka are a group belonging to the Arawak linguistic family, who inhabit the tributaries of the Upper Ucayali River and the interfluvial region of Gran Pajonal in Upper Peruvian Amazonia (Varese 2006; Veber 2003; Weiss 2005). The Asháninka are the largest group of people in Peruvian Amazonia, altogether totalling 118,277 inhabitants distributed in 520 (INEI 2017) or 675 native communities (BDPI 2020). Similar to other Arawak groups, the Asháninka have a long history of practising horticulture (Heckenberger 2005; Hill and Santos-Granero 2002). Their settlements have never crossed the 1500 m above sea level, the critical altitude for the growth of cassava, their staple cultigen (Rojas-Zolezzi 2014).

During the colonial period, Franciscan missionaries were present for only a short time, and were expelled during the Juan Santos Atahualpa uprising in 1742. After the collapse of the rebellion, some areas of the Asháninka territory remained free from exploration and exploitation by outsiders for over a century. Gerald Weiss (2005) mentioned that the Asháninka from the Tambo River, the protagonists of this paper, would attack any

white man who ventured into Tambo territory. However, the rubber boom at the end of the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth centuries was devastating to them, especially given the forced labour and interethnic raids for captives in exchange for metal tools. More recently, the Asháninka have been troubled by the activities of some communist paramilitary groups in the region, especially the Shining Path (el Sendero luminoso) in the late 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, and, in recent years, the Asháninka from these rivers have experienced violence and pressure from cocaine producers (Santos and Barclay 2005: xxxvi).

Economically, the Asháninka range from self-subsistence to a market economy. They often combine work within traditional agro-ecosystems consisting of cash crop production, predominantly cocoa, through which they are connected to trans-local markets (Araujo 2022; Peralta and Kainer 2008). This ability to maintain their ethnic identity, along with their high degree of resilience and flexibility in social organisation, can explain, at least in part, their successful resistance to the aggression of colonial and national powers, as well as subversive groups (Varese 2006: 30–31).

This study took place in the Tambo River valleys, an area ecologically dominated by a range of ecosystems from Montane Rainforests (Span. bosque montano pluvial) up to Amazonia Humid Forests (Span. bosques húmedos amazónicos) (Reynel 1984). The Tambo River valleys encompass 52 native communities with hamlets. The communities are relatively large, numbering between 200 and 3000 inhabitants. I worked in 12 Asháninka native communities along the Tambo River (Figure 1), which are affiliated with the Central Asháninka del Río Tambo (CART; Asháninka Organisation of the Tambo Region). The research itself was conducted between 2016–2018, and in 2022 and 2024, within two research projects dedicated to the ethnobotany of medicinal and edible plants and to Asháninka ethnomedicine and foodways. All the necessary permits for conducting the fieldwork and collecting herbarium specimens were obtained from Servicio Nacional Forestal y de Fauna Silvestre (SERFOR) in the Peruvian Ministry of Agriculture (SERFOR N° 252-2017-SERFOR/DGGSPFFS and RD N° D000163-2022-MIDAGRI-SERFOR-DGGSPFFS-DGSPF). Prior written informed consent was granted by CART, and from the authorities of each native community. Oral informed consent was obtained from each adult Asháninka person who volunteered to participate in the study. All photos accompanying this article were taken by the author with the consent of the Asháninka interlocutors. The study adhered to the ethical protocols established by the American Anthropological Association and the International Society of Ethnobiology.

When working with the Asháninka people, the primary ethnographic method I chose was to walk in the forest in the direction and at the pace set by study participants. In total, 55 Asháninka participants (27 women, 28 men) took part in these forest walks. Trips to the forest were supplemented by interviews, which took the form of open-ended conversations on a given topic. During these conversations, I often focused on the clarification of some terms which arose when we were in the forest. Moreover, I conducted ethnobotanical guided tours in the Asháninka home gardens and agricultural plots (Kujawska et al. 2020, 2023). I also conducted participant observation in the homes of the Asháninka people; this formed part of my temporary co-residence in Asháninka homes, through which I could participate in their daily practices and conversations.

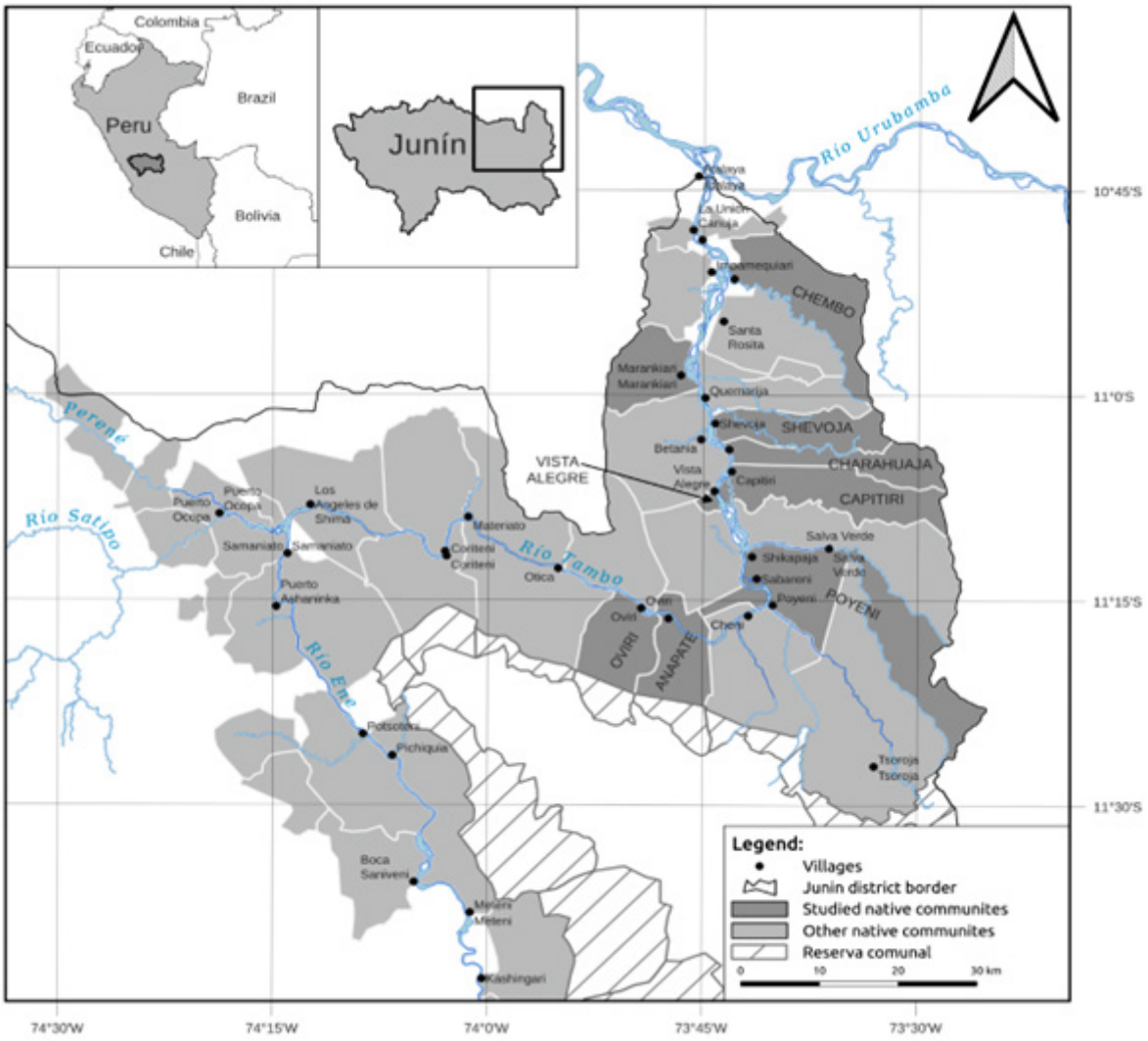

Figure 1. Map of the study area, Upper Peruvian Amazonia. Adapted from Kujawska and Albán-Castillo (2025).

WALK IN THE FOREST: A METHODOLOGICAL INNOVATION FOR MULTISPECIES ETHNOGRAPHY

In ethnobotanical manuals, a 'walk in the woods' is regarded as an effective technique for collecting plant material accompanied by relevant ecological and ethnographic information (Alexiades 1996; Martin 2004). It has been described as the most 'natural' condition for conducting ethnobotanical research amongst highly mobile forest people (Rival 2009). This participatory method offers a range of important botanical, ecological, and chemosensory advantages. Both the researcher and interlocutors participate in a focused walk in the forest, during which plants are encountered either by chance or as the result of a purposeful search. Asháninka people, for example, memorise (i.e., mentally map) the

spots in the forest where useful plants grow; but, on the way to these spots, other plant species are found which may trigger a memory of a previous experience with them, knowledge of their use, and stories connected to them. During forest walks, the researcher and the participants engage in attentive observation and focused conversations, prompted by encounters of plants and sensorial cues that emerge in the forest. Moreover, it is in the forest that people recall and share their stories about encounters with nonhuman beings, such as spirits or animals in human disguise, which are rarely told in the village. The trigger for telling the stories is not only the specific plants we meet, but our very presence in the forest, hearing bird cries or other sounds belonging to animals or invisible spirits (see Rodríguez-Espíritu 2021: 207), or by encountering stones with a specific shape or holes produced by some insect. These are all meaningful cues about animal and spirit activities.

The botanical advantage of walks in the forest is that, when a plant is encountered, the researcher has the opportunity to see the plant and its life form within its web of ecological relations, together with its colour, shape, scent, texture, and taste. Moreover, when that plant is in its reproductive phase—that is, is flowering and/or bearing fruit—it is suitable for collection and joining others as an herbarium specimen for further botanical identification.

Shepard and Daly (Shepard 2004; Shepard and Daly 2022) observed that people–plant relationships are intrinsically sensory and mediated by the experience of specific phytochemical compounds. During walks in the forest, the researcher can capture interlocutors' sensory ways of knowing plants, in addition to their cognitive knowledge usually expressed in words, along with the names of the plants—that is, plant representations. By recording the sensory cues used to identify plants and communicate their properties and agencies, the researcher may gain access to the pre-representational aspects of knowledge about plants. From my own observations, the Asháninka people often use various prompts, such as texture, scent, and taste, to distinguish plants, or they squeeze the leaves to see the colouration of the leaf juice (Figure 2). During walks with two or more participants, I also observed that when people mutually exchange their knowledge about plants in situ, they often tell one another how to distinguish a given plant in the forest by using its distinctive features, and they usually point to both morphological and chemosensory cues.

This dialectical approach, and the joint experience of the researcher and the study participants, differs from field methods exclusively based on cognitive representations, such as plant names. Although inquiries into the cognitive content—that is, plant names, uses, and their place in the local cosmology—formed part of our walks in the forest, they served as more of a coda to my work with the Asháninka people. These matters were usually discussed whilst sitting in an Asháninka home after a walk in the forest, when additional questions about a given plant were posed by invoking plant names. This division between forest and village phases of collecting information was partly due to the pace and style of Asháninka movement in the forest. The Asháninka habit is to move briskly in the forest, which contrasts with their slower pace in the village. On some occasions, the person leading our walk in the forest complained that I took too much time photographing each plant, collecting sample specimens, and taking notes, all of which slowed down our pace.

Figure 2. Different cues used to distinguish plants in the forest: A) smell; B) taste; C) leaf colouration. Photo credits: Author's own.

During the forest walk, participants can display or demonstrate how plants are actually applied. This is particularly valuable when the use is not limited to collecting some leaves and putting them into a pot to prepare a decoction which is later ingested or used in a bath. For example, juice from a stem may be placed directly into the eye to relieve inflammation caused by being unfaithful to a partner, or leaves may be thrown behind a person in a precise configuration to counteract sorcery (Figure 3). Additionally, during our walks, I paid attention to the ways people collected plants, including how they cut bark pieces and roots, how they bundled the plants using some non-randomly selected leaves and lianas. I had the opportunity to observe which species and for which illnesses, and which plants were collected in the forest to bring home and use on the days that followed: the Asháninka tend to use only freshly cut pieces of plants as remedies.

Figure 3. Exploring plants, their uses, and intake—in situ experience and contextualised knowledge. A) A demonstration of the application of the fern tajamishi, which is placed directly on a cut to stop bleeding. B) Placing juice from the stem of a creeper in the eye to treat an irritation, a remedy against infidelity. C) Ashio meronkeashire ('my heart is beating fast'), requires the correct positioning of leaves, which is important to counteract sorcery. The leaves must be chewed and thrown according to the positioning of the sun and at a specific hour. Photo credits: Author's own.

During our walks in the forest, I asked about the name of each plant presented to me. I had the impression that sometimes plant names were created ad hoc. For example, when asked for a plant name, the Asháninka interlocutor would ponder and create one that corresponded to the use s/he just had described. In this case, the name always comprised a secondary lexeme with a productive (and meaningful) constituent and adequate suffix corresponding to the life form or particular plant parts, such as karaparitsa, 'the liana of

a rattlesnake' (from karapariti ['a rattlesnake'] and shivitsa [a 'liana']). At first, I assumed that the nomenclature of plants was 'unstable' and polysemic, but this observation applies only to some not commonly known forest herbs, shrubs, and lianas. For instance, the names of most trees are well-established primary lexemes and for which strong consensus exists (see Reynel 1984).

THE SOCIAL PRODUCTION OF THE BODY, HUMAN AND NONHUMAN RELATIONS, AND CONNECTED BODIES

ASHÁNINKA PERSONHOOD

To understand interspecies encounters, the diplomacy it requires, and other elements of forest cosmo-politics, it is worth examining the Asháninka concept of personhood. As in other native Amazonian contexts, the notion of the person amongst the Asháninka is tightly intertwined with the social production of the body (Belaunde 2001; Conklin and Morgan 1996; Rosengren 2006; Santos-Granero 2012). The Asháninka cosmology is relational—that is, their myths describe different classes of beings which interact, compete, and often metamorphose. The notion of Asháninka personhood requires looking into nature and the scope of their relations with other classes of beings with whom they co-create the environment.

The cosmogonic myth establishes the proximities between humans, animals, plants, and different classes of spirits, both celestial as well as malevolent, and defines the hierarchies between different beings. The human body is consubstantial with plants and animals, which has a linguistic basis insofar as a series of terms exist which refer to parts of humans, plants, and animals (Rojas-Zolezzi 1997: 266). Obatsa is the physicality and exteriority of each being, literally 'the meat', which is extended to fruit pulps and edible tubers. Interiority is defined by tasonkantsi—that is, 'the blow' delivered by divine beings, tasorentsi, which animate living beings—and the ishire which is the proper interiority or the soul (Rojas-Zolezzi 2006: 260–261). Every being has the same basic interiority (ishire) or a personhood that originates from the same female principle fertilised by the moon (kashiri). It is ishire that makes the person think, understand, and communicate. Animals are also attributed with ishire, which enables them, to a certain extent, to think and communicate (Weiss 1975: 426–427).

However, not all beings have the same volition and capacity to further transform their ishire throughout their lives (Rojas-Zolezzi 2006). The process of transformation (Ash. pianaka) is inherent with becoming a human person through socialisation and approved models of conduct and relations with other humans within the community, with outsiders, and with nonhuman beings (Rojas-Zolezzi 2006: 255–257). The social part of the process presupposes certain rules of behaviour, including respecting taboos, the principle of consanguinity and affinity, and reciprocity. This process requires a collective effort, especially during pregnancy and childhood, and is later partly individual. The transformation process influences the quality of being a human and, after death, one's place amongst beings in the universe (Rojas-Zolezzi 2006: 259).

Following death, human individuals are transformed into different beings, according to the developmental degree of interiority (ishire). During this process, some humans may become game animals in the forest, especially ordinary people who have not attained a high level of knowledge or who have not respected the rules

of kinship and reciprocity. Such individuals are rejected from upper spheres after death and fall into the forest, and are called peyari, 'the transformed' (Rojas-Zolezzi 2006: 270–272). In all of these cases, the transformed animals are subordinated to the species owners and become potential prey for hunters. My interlocutors also stated that 'when we die, we come back to the forest', but this does not necessarily mean the human transforms into animals; such transformation can be to trees and palms as well (see also Rival 2002; Zent 2009).

THE RELATIONAL ONTOLOGY OF PLANTS, ANIMALS, AND HUMANS

Humans can only develop consanguineal relations with plants, which is accomplished through their cultivation and domestication, and affinal relations with game animals. Forest animals, however, preserve consanguineal relations with their owners (iriri) (Rojas-Zolezzi 1997, 2014). Viewed from the kinship perspective, domesticated plants are closer to humans or positioned at a higher proximity than forest animals. For the forest plants, Asháninka myths teach us that many of the trees and palms were previously humans in the past. For example, in mythical times, women offended by the disrespectful behaviour of men decided to punish them by changing themselves into the tsirentsi palm (*Euterpe precatoria*). Therefore, forest plants have a varied ontological status, some of which are similar to cultivated plants.

The human quality (atsiri) can be lost if an individual moves too far away from the environment of inter-human relations (Rojas-Zolezzi 2006: 266). This is an important issue in the context of forest cosmo-politics, because the forest is precisely the place where nonhuman relations prevail over human relations. In the forest (Ash. inchatomashi), one can get lost. Whilst some hunters may prefer their solitude in the forest and can move easily at night or stay overnight in their hunter huts (Span. maspute), most of the men and women only venture into the forest in the company of others.

Hunting activity and relations with animals, especially with a class of spirits who are owners of animals (iriri), are important parts of the cosmo-politics of the Asháninka. The hunter approaches game in the forest through their relation with the owners of animals who demand compliance with certain rules, such as body purification and meat consumption. A devoted hunter may become the son-in-law of the owner of a given class of animals by seducing his daughter and being accepted by her father. In this situation, social relations revert to those in the Asháninka community, where it is the son-in-law who brings game meat to his father-in-law. This may create tensions. For example, the newborn child of a hunter may be at risk of being hunted by the owner of the animals who establishes a relationship with the child analogous to that between hunter and prey (Rojas-Zolezzi 2006: 268–269). A hunter should not go hunting during this period to protect his child, but he sometimes does:

> The father goes hunting but has no luck, because the animals hear the child crying. In order for the father to hunt, he has to cover the navel of the baby—then the animals won't be able to hear him [the child crying]. (Man, 55, Poyeni)

Through this manipulation, the father of a baby avoids informing the owner of animals about the birth of his child and carries on hunting. This case and a similar one can also be explained from the perspective of the native theory of connected bodies, which implies that the action of an

individual person has potential consequences for his or her family. For the Asháninka, even the simple act of walking in the forest may affect their infant given that a part of the child's soul always accompanies her/his parents. Rosengren (2006: 84–85), however, provided another explanation for this phenomenon, specifically in the context of the Matsigenka people, namely that the soul of a small child is particularly volatile, because it is only loosely attached to the physical body during its first years of life. I have not heard this explanation from the Asháninka people, but always heard about the child's soul or part of its soul accompanying parents.

Food taboos reveal the tensions between the father of a newborn child and the owner of the animals or animals themselves. Food taboos also apply to the mother of the baby. Therefore, food proscriptions are embedded in the Asháninka principle of connected bodies, not only in the hunter and the owner of animals' relations. Thus, when a child is born, parents should follow a special diet, specifically avoiding some kinds of game meat. Some parents of a newborn who still want to eat game meat and hunt can manipulate this situation by recalling and using forest plants. They collect the leaves of various plants from the forest and prepare a bath to prevent the spirits of the animal from affecting that of their small child. The newborn is repeatedly bathed in the decoction of these leaves. The plant names used for this purpose are secondary lexemes composed of a bird name + suffix shi from oshi ('leaf')—for example, mamaroshi, aronishi, and tisonishi amongst others (Figure 4).

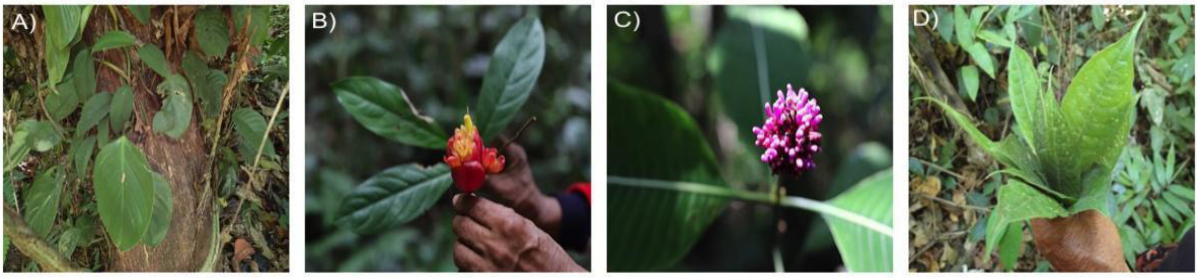

Figure 4. A) Mamaroshi, 'leaf of a mottled owl', botanically not identified. B) Aronishi, 'leaf of a black caracara bird', *Drymonia pendula* sp. C) Tisonishi, 'leaf of a gallinazo /family of vultures', *Palicourea* sp. D) Onkirishi, 'leaf of a great tinamou', botanically not identified. Photo credits: Author's own.

During our walks in the forest, the men explained that aroni (black caracara) 'is the same as the devil'. When the father of a small child goes to the forest, he can 'cross' with this bird; because the father is carrying part of his child's spirit (or soul) with him, the spirit may clash (Span. chocar) with that of the aroni. In such an event, the child follows the voice of the aroni, imitating it, crying repeatedly, and not sleeping properly. The treatment consists of washing the baby in a decoction of leaves. There are several aronishi plants used for this purpose, such as cultivated ibinishi (*Justicia* sp.) or *Drymonia pendula* whose flowers resemble the red patch of the aroni bird.

My understanding was that each instance of a child being unwell and crying required a precise identification of the bird or other forest animal that had affected her/him (Span. lo ha cutipado). It was only during my fieldwork in 2022, when I was walking in the forest with one Asháninka woman who showed me at least seven different plants for this purpose (most of them from the *Palicourea* and *Psychotria*

genera), each for a different kind of animal. She explained that the mother of a newborn had to collect the leaves of several plant species representing different animals. Then, she had to bathe the baby in a decoction of all of these leaves together because, she said, it was often difficult to determine which animal had affected the child. In a similar fashion, Rodríguez-Espiritu (2021: 216) described an intervention using forest plants to treat mal aire: a health condition recognised by all Arawak groups caused by malevolent spirits. The condition has diverse symptoms, such as body weakness and pain, vomiting, and diarrhoea. Amongst the Nomatsigenka, treatment is based on baths or steam baths incorporating a mixture of leaves and stems from several forest plants, but when they use their cultivated piri-piri (the strongest of which is igotobeinki kamagari), they just use one (ethno)species at a time.

From the above-described plant interventions emerges the first type of plant agency and a set of properties: counteracting the action of the owner of animals and the animals themselves. The therapeutic property of plants serves as a token of their power. The adequate use of plants and their powers require knowledge. In this context, Rojas-Zolezzi (2006) rightly points out that mastering certain domains, such as the knowledge of plants and their properties, has a cosmological dimension.

> [T]hose who die from illness are considered victims of some being whose power they could not avoid or with which they have stumbled, which is considered the result of **limited knowledge** of the forces of the cosmos, and they are, therefore, credited with ending up in the belly of the moon after falling into a trap (Rojas-Zolezzi 2006: 271, author's own translation, emphasis added).

The second type of plant agency that emerges from these examples is their important role in people-making—that is, the social fabrication of the body, which remains in line with practices found amongst other Arawak groups such as the Ashéninka, Nomatsigenka, and Yanesha (Rodriguez-Espíritu 2021; Lenaerts 2006; Santos-Granero 2012). Plants participate in human transformations through their particular subjectivity, which they share with humans through the flow of substances from plants to humans. Santos-Granero (2012: 187) suggests that it is not the fixed properties and subjectivities of plants that influence people-making, but a combination of bodily and subjectival substances obtained through interactions with a variety of subjects: whether human or nonhuman, affine or consanguine. In this sense, the plant properties emerge from relationships.

FOREST COSMO-POLITICS AND THE NATURE OF INTERSPECIES RELATIONS

For the Asháninka, visits to the forest are not performed for leisure or a stroll, as sometimes described in the Amazonian ethnographic literature (Rival 2002, 2009). They usually have a purpose, such as hunting animals, or gathering plants, mushrooms, or edible larvae. The Asháninka also enter the forest for selective logging and cutting palm leaves for roof thatching. Whilst what is brought back home is an effect of previous topographic mapping, remembering, and purposeful search, such items may also include the fruits of opportunistic acquisitions (e.g., mushrooms).

Trips to the forest are considered dangerous and are only undertaken when necessary. Several times, Asháninka collaborators were reluctant to accompany me to the forest. Various reasons

were given, such as an abundance of ticks, the possibility of meeting a jaguar, or a shortage of cartridges. Excuses were usually offered in a joke-like style. The possibility of encountering spirits was never openly expressed as a reason for not going to the forest, and it was only during our walks that people mentioned their previous encounters with malevolent spirits. These spirits can show up, usually in human disguise, when a person is alone or strays from their companions. Yet, the danger of going to the forest is overcome by hunters who do it frequently and who know this environment better than other community members.

The Asháninka divide nonhuman beings into good and bad according to their cosmological position and the place of their residence: good spirits are believed to live on top of the mountains and in the clouds, whilst malevolent spirits occupy the forest and the underworld, with their powers and actions oriented towards harming humans. Good (Ash. kametsa) spirits do not necessarily do good, but they at least do no harm; the aroni bird (black caracara), however, is regarded as an evil being with an evil spirit/soul (ishire). Kamari ('the one who kills'; Span. lo que mata) is a generic name for all malevolent beings in the Asháninka cosmos (Rojas-Zolezzi 2006), whilst the term is also used to refer to the spirits of dead people who live in the underworld. Therefore, during forest walks, people have a much greater chance of meeting 'bad' or malevolent forest spirits than of meeting good spirits; they are also more likely to encounter those who live in the underworld, because these underworld spirits can emerge through some holes in the ground. On several occasions during our walks, we examined some holes produced by ants and other animals, which my interlocutors considered the connecting points between the earth and the underworld inhabited by bad spirits.

THE (IN)VISIBILITY OF ANIMALS AND HUMANS

Another important aspect of the forest cosmopolitics is the visibility of beings. This is also a recurrent theme in the Amazonian ethnographic literature (Rogalski 2017; Santos-Granero 2006; Viveiros de Castro 2012; Wilbert 1992). Within forest encounters, humans, animals, and spirits manipulate each other through their visibility and through the visions which the spirits of animals and the owners of animals induce in humans. For example, a successful hunt requires animals to have the will to present themselves to hunters. Thus, the Asháninka hunters use specific plants, both cultivated and wild-grown, for this purpose:

> Maniroshi [*Ruellia menthoides* sp.]—it is a pusanga for the deer [Ash. maniro]. Before going to the forest, you pass the leaves over your face. When you enter the forest and see the birds and the peccary, you should not touch them. Only when a deer presents itself to you [then shoot]—because this plant is the mother of the deer. (Man, 65, Capitiri)

Maniroshi is used as pusanga, which, given the cosmological position as the mother of the deer and perhaps other inherent qualities recognised by the Asháninka, makes the deer allow the hunter to approach and kill it. Pusanga is a term used in Amazonian Spanish to denote plants, such as the abovementioned piri-piri and other elements used to seduce and control or exercise power over others (Dziubinska 2024).

In a similar fashion albeit on a limited scale, hunters, or those who cross the forest, may prevent animals from seeing them. For example, they use sachajergón (*Dracontium* sp.) to become invisible to poisonous snakes.

The leaf of the sachajergón is used in a gesture (a cross) to render humans invisible against the common lancehead. The Asháninka see a resemblance between the upright head of the common lancehead and the shoot or young leaf of this herb. Therefore, the agency of this plant may also stem from its external or easily visible features.

THE PREDATORY DIMENSIONS OF FOREST ENCOUNTERS

The forest is a non-domesticated place and the cosmo-politics practised there include the predation of malevolent beings (kamari) and nonhuman sorcerers (matsi), entities who seek vengeance or hunt for human souls to turn them into beings similar to themselves. A human's presence in the forest requires the engagement of all senses and an active use of knowledge about the structure and relations governing this place (Ash. yotaantsi).

'I have never seen an Asháninka person who was insane since their birth', said one Asháninka leader. Thus, people are believed to go insane under certain circumstances, such as making eye contact, engaging in conversation with, or engaging in sexual intercourse with predatory spirits. I heard several stories and testimonies of such encounters occurring whilst collecting plants considered helpful to counteracting the action of spirits.

> Irampabanto is the owner of the forest birds. Irampabanto is what illuminates at night when you switch on a torch; this is irampabanto who already illuminates. And it can transform into a lady who chases after you when you hunt plenty of forest birds. (Man, 36, Capitiri)

> Irampabanto is a daemon. They manifest themselves as a woman whose dress is open at her genitalia. This is how she becomes visible to a man who is alone in the forest. This vision can drive him crazy; on top of that, this woman follows the man. It is as if she had a thread and she is pulling the male. So, when the man is trying to escape, he has to go around each tree to get rid of the thread. This woman has a toucan [Ash. opempe] on her shoulder. (Man, 58, Poyeni)

Relations between humans and nonhumans exclude sexual relations. Sharing the sexual act with a person is a token of sharing the same point of view, thereby forming a part of a human collective (Rojas-Zolezzi 2006: 274). If irampabanto is indeed the mother of forest birds, sexual relations with them could be understood within the scope of the moral economy (see McLachlan 2011), and specifically representing vengeance of the irampabanto for overhunting the birds. Through this action, which may conclude with the death of the hunter, his soul would possibly return to the pool of forest birds, thereby restoring balance in the cosmos.

There are several plant species used as a remedy for the action of the irampabanto, uniformly called irampabantoshi ('the leaf of irampabanto'); it is always a leaf squeezed to express juice which is placed in the eyes (Figure 5). For example, *Calathea lutea* was described as 'the mother of irampabanto' (Span. la madre de irampabanto). In this case, similar to the pusanga miroroshi, the plant would be the mother of the owner of the animals (here, birds).

Figure 5. Different irampabantoshi found in the forest with Asháninka men, corresponding to the following botanical species: A) *Polygala spectabilis*; B) *Anthurium kunthii*; and C) *Calathea lutea.* Photo credits: Author's own.

The prototypical human is the shaman, sheripiari, the opposite of which lies matsi, the sorcerer. The kamari (malevolent spirits) are involved in the transformation of one's ishire by teaching a person antisocial behaviour. The matsi preserve the human form, but their interiority suffers from the transformation into kamari spirits. In the Asháninka cosmology, the condition of the matsi is extended towards other classes of beings, especially insects, who like human sorcerers harm others by manipulating food remains or some corporeal remains of the people they wish to harm. Small children, who are especially vulnerable to their actions, are kept away from the ground in hammocks and are looked after in order not to have contact with ants, stingless bees (eri), and crickets (shinti), all of which are considered matsi (own field notes; Rojas-Zolezzi 2006: 265). Numerous species of ants which live on the forest floor or in the trees are endowed by the Asháninka with specific names and malevolent agencies.

> It harms us [Span. nos agarra] because it [the ant] feels us like something new [a novelty], when we breathe, it feels our air. The ant feels the smell of the person when we pass where they are walking. The person breathes and the ant breathes, and the [human] person enters the field of breathing of the ant. (Man, 65, Oviri)

It seems that the capacity of ants to harm people (their agency) is instinctive—that is, it is in their nature. Sometimes, the position of the anthill is important, both cosmologically and practically. For example, maniji (painful bullet ant) create their nests on the forest floor or close to a tree trunk. This gives the impression that the nest is rooted in the underground, which is ruled by kamari spirits;—hence, the association between the *kamari*, daemons, and ants. However, there are other ants, like setsi, who induce harm, but whose anthills are on trees:

> When the hunter passes by their ant house, he cannot hear any more. Setsi [*Azteca chartifex* spp.] covers his ears and he hears only a buzzing. In a steam bath, pieces of the setsi honeycomb come out. (Man, 57, Selva Verde)

Here, the potential connection between the ants, who may discourage hunters from chasing after game animals, and the owner of animals still needs further exploration. The harm produced

by ants is usually diagnosed by visiting an expert steam bath maker, who by adding adequate plants and by interpreting the 'things' found amongst the leaves, may confirm whether the illness was caused by the sorcery of ants. This is indicated by the presence of dead ants or parts of their nests amongst the leaves found after a steam bath. Part of the therapy includes burning the ant nest in the forest. In addition, there are wild-grown plants from the forest used to counteract the harm caused by the ants.

THE NATURE OF FOREST COSMO-POLITICS: MANIPULATION, PREDATION, AND PLANT PROTECTION

A picture of cosmo-politics emerges from these descriptions in which the predominant features include the manipulation of animals and humans, the predation of spirits, and the protection of plants. Nevertheless, some aspects of this predation of nonhumans towards the Asháninka appear to take the form of seeking revenge performed in a reciprocal way. Other Amazonian ethnographies contain numerous examples of engagement with nonhumans, where certain animals and spirits capture the souls of children or make them sick when the parents harmed them in some way (Rosengren 2006; Izquierdo et al. 2008; Revilla-Minaya 2019).

The relations with plants that emerge in these contexts of forest cosmo-politics, in which humans are exposed to animal and spirit predation, are oriented towards accessing plant substances and their subjectivities. Seeking plant substances means that both cultivated piri-piri and forest plant species are used similarly to the Western notion of medicinal plants; in such cases, they have ascribed properties, and their agency is oriented towards counteracting various maladies, such as restlessness, body pain, vomiting, or diarrhoea. Similar to Shepard and Daly (2022: 87), I see 'the substance-based logic' in the Asháninka approach to plants used in the treatment of these disorders. This reflects a materialistic explanation, although viewed from a relational perspective, absorbing plant substances involves their subjectivities being integrated with that of the human. This process could represent a more generalised socialisation with the vegetal life of the forest. It could also serve as a route to obtaining allies and nonhuman kinsmen as part of performing forest cosmo-politics, which is full of tension or even violence. Thus, plants participate in establishing social relations through the body and in trans-species consanguineal engagement (see Kohn 2007; Opas 2005; McLachlan 2011; Rodríguez-Espíritu 2021; Rosengren 2006).

BACK TO THE AGENCY OF PLANTS: RECONCILING BIOLOGICAL AND COSMOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS

Here, we return to the question of whether these are the biological and ecological attributes that explain the agency of plants or the cosmological properties and positionality that grant this capacity to plants. From the ethnographic material that emerges from forest walks, I argue that both are true to some extent. A greater insight is offered by the following two excerpts from our conversations with Asháninka interlocutors.

> Everyone has the same soul—humans, animals, and plants. There exists a compatibility between human souls and plant souls. (Man, 40, Puerto Ocopa)
> – So, ibenki [*Cyperus* spp., cultivated piri-piri] and the plants from the forest are the same?

> – Ibenki are different from forest plants. Because the ibenki is a plant without a stem [Ibenki do have a stem (orig. a tallo), but in its curing context it is 'invisible'], only a tuber [rhizome] that can be used for curing, and medicinal plants from the forest have stems, roots, and leaves; they perform several functions. They are the same as the soul they cure and according to diseases [Span. Son la misma alma para curar y según las enfermedades]. (Man, 37, Capitiri)

For my interlocutors, plants have the same basic interiority: ishire as humans and animals. This ontological status of plants, which renders them as equal to humans and animals, prevents us from imbuing plants and their properties with Western notions of herbal medicines. The second excerpt, however, invokes the plant agency as closely related to their biological powers. Similarly, Rodríguez-Espíritu (2021: 216) noted that '[w]e create relations with medicinal plants when we use them, whether [we use] their leaves, seeds, or stems.' If the plant agency is an agency per se, it may be understood in biological terms, and, indeed, the plants have stable properties, especially those used in a medicinal context. That said, the food plants have more ambivalent or relational positions—that is, they can have harmful effects (cutipar) in one situation, such as on a pregnant women, but be perfectly edible in another context. This argument would advocate for plant agency as something not fixed, but rather as having a relational aspect, which should be considered with regard to someone or something (see also Maizza 2017; Pérez-Gil 2024; Santos-Granero 2012; Whitaker et al. 2024).

Plants, such as trees, lianas, shrubs, and herbs, seem to be abundant, stable, and harmless components of the forest. Even if some plants are noxious and poisonous, one can learn to avoid them. Mastering this knowledge is embedded in the evolution of the interiority (ishire) and becoming a human. However, this position of forest plants as nonaggressive and non-predatory beings is not uniformly shared by Indigenous groups of Amazonia, such that some Indigenous cosmologies evince predatory relations with certain plants (Pérez-Gil 2024; Shepard and Daly 2022).

Thus, certain plants, endowed with special powers, are considered 'plant-shaman'—they are vegetal equivalents of their human counterparts (Revilla-Minaya 2019: 252; Shepard and Daly 2022: 87). For the Asháninka, such plants consist of domesticated ibenki (*Cyperus* spp.) and the incipiently domesticated ibinishi (*Justicia* spp.). Different ethnospecies of ibenki may be viewed as plant-shaman specialised in curing particular ailments, capable of counteracting the breaking of taboos (Kujawska et al. 2020, 2023). It seems that wild-grown forest plants do not have the same proximity to humans, given that humans do not spend as much time in the forest as their in home gardens, where they can co-produce their bodies with piri-piri and may be involved in the mutual production of kinship and reciprocity. However, forest plants are still considered allies of the Asháninka in performing forest cosmo-politics. Their agency stems from the overall ongoing interactions and relations in the forest, in which plants are not perceived as manipulative or harmful, and the Asháninka foster consanguineal relations with them. Yet, some specific properties of plants are distinguished and absorbed by humans and, together with this, substances and subjectivities flow between these two classes of beings (see Santos-Granero 2012; Zent 2009).

CONCLUSIONS: REIMAGINING PLANT AGENCY THROUGH MULTISPECIES ETHNOGRAPHY

This study has explored the complex interrelationships between humans, plants, animals, and spirits within Asháninka forest cosmo-politics, offering both empirical and methodological contributions to our understanding of multispecies engagements in the Amazonian context.

The walk in the forest method is one of a few examples in which a technique elaborated in ethnobotany has been applied to the anthropological repertoire of methods. In ethnographic research, the walk in the forest is not only a technique to register traditional environmental knowledge, but it may be considered the main form of collecting data in an appropriate ethnographic context. This method is a dialectic conversation where knowledge is co-produced through interactions forged between the researcher and interlocutors. In my case, walks in the forest and collecting particular plants triggered stories and testimonies surrounding the encounters with the spirits of animals, dead people, or nonhuman sorcerers. A methodological limitation still might be that, from the anthropological perspective, it is difficult to analyse plant agency per se, as we usually study how the nonhuman-centred agency is mediated by human volition and intentions. This challenge invites us to continue developing methodological approaches that can more effectively engage with the complexity of multispecies relations in Amazonian and other Indigenous contexts. The advantage of collecting herbarium specimens during forest walks and their botanical identification is that it enables comparisons between different Amazonian groups in relation to certain plant species. Furthermore, the recording of traditional ecological knowledge ascribed to certain botanical species and their publication is a form of safeguarding the intellectual property rights of the Indigenous groups studied. Finally, this practice enables members of Indigenous communities to have the documentation of their knowledge, saved not only in scientific papers, but also in botanical institutions for further consultations by their descendants.

From these forest walks with the Asháninka partners emerges a notion of the forest as a non-domesticated and dangerous place; however, whilst it can be tamed by skilful hunters, it also has its costs or risks for the hunter himself and his family. Often, the encounters of the Asháninka with malevolent spirits or the spirits of animals in the forest mark predatory interspecies relations rather than reciprocal relations. Direct contact with these spirits may produce a restlessness, or even a psychosis-like state, and if not properly cured using plants, steam baths, or shamanic interventions, they may lead to death. Some animals, especially insects, are ascribed with powers characteristic of human sorcerers. Other animals may seek vengeance on people for numerous reasons anchored in mythical times.

Numerous plants, both domesticated and wild-grown in the forest, are used to counteract illnesses and psychotic-like states. Whilst domesticated and wild plants may have a different ontological status and proximity to humans, all serve as allies in interspecies encounters and relations. Other Amazonian studies focused on plant agency also point to a varied ontological status of plants, and to the differences in plant qualities and powers (Pérez-Gil 2024; Virtanen and Apurinã 2024; Whitaker et al. 2024). That said, the Asháninka case contributes to our understanding of the plant agencies as epitomised by their cosmological

and biological attributes. In other words, the mythical past of some plants (cosmology) and their status (ontology) enter into dialogue with plant biology and bioactivity in the everyday life of the Asháninka people.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks go to the Asháninka study participants for their immense generosity in sharing their knowledge and their confidence in this collaboration. I am grateful to Joaquina Albán-Castillo for plant identification and collaboration in the projects, as well as to Joanna Sosnowska for introducing me to the Asháninka people and for allowing me to participate in her project (NCN, nr 2015/19/D/HS3/000632). Thanks go to Geancarlo Alarcon Iman for identifying the insects. This research was financed by the National Science Centre in Poland, project number 2018/31/B/HS3/03019.

NOTES

1 This term, which comes from the Guarani language, denotes sages (*Cyperus* spp.) (personal communication, Pastor Arenas). However, it is used throughout Indigenous Amazonia and mostly albeit not exclusively corresponds to cultivated *Cyperus* plants, which are appreciated for their wide range of medicinal and other properties (Plowman et al. 1990; Shepard 2004; Tournon et al. 1998).

2 Other Arawakan groups in the Selva Central region (Upper Peruvian Amazonia) are the Ashéninka, Kakinte, Matsigenka, Nomatsigenka, Yanesha, and Yine (Piro) (Santos-Granero 2002).

3 The collected plant specimens were identified by Joaquina Albán-Castillo and deposited in the USM Herbario de la Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos in Lima (Peru). A few ant species were mentioned in the text; they were collected with Asháninka collaborators and identified by Geancarlo Alarcon Iman.

4 The Asháninka term is yotaantsi, to know and understand. This also refers to the recognition of a given species or a type of plant in the forest amongst many others, together with the plant property, its application, and the web of relations with other classes of beings, such as birds, insects, and mammals amongst others (Rojas-Zolezzi 2006: 264).

5 The most representative cognitive method used in ethnobotany is free listing (Quinlan 2005), during which plant names are elicited from local study participants, and the researcher produces a list of locally known or used plants based on this elicitation. In this method, the interlocutors and the researcher communicate exclusively through plant names—that is, plant representations.

6 According to Rojas-Zolezzi (2014), one term for nonhumans in the Asháninka language is kari atiripe, which literary means, according to my interlocutors, 'this is not a [human] person' (Span. no es persona [humana]).

7 I have never participated in a planned-in-advance hunting party with the Asháninka people, although on many occasions we talked about hunting in relation to plants, such as plants used for successful hunting or to make a dog a good hunter, or when we discussed taboos. Moreover, the men would carry a shotgun to the forest during our walks in case there was an opportunity to kill game. Occasionally, after sensing an animal and viewing her/his traces, one of the men would quickly follow them in hopes of finding and shooting an animal.

8 Here lies perhaps the largest discrepancies between Rojas-Zolezzi's and my own ethnographic material—that is, whilst Rojas-Zolezzi sees the interactions between humans and animals (predation, reciprocity) through the owners of animals (iriri), my interlocutors more often referred to the animals themselves.

9 Steam baths are performed by expert women and men who completed a period of sexual abstinence and adhered to a special diet. They are particularly skilful in diagnosing the cause of an illness, and often the steam bath itself is a part of the healing process, through which harming objects are removed. For more details on how steam baths are prepared and performed, see Kujawska and Albán-Castillo (2025).

REFERENCES

Alexiades, Miguel N. 1996. Collecting Ethnobotanical Data: An Introduction to Basic Concepts and Techniques. In Miguel N. Alexiades and Jannie Wood Sheldon (eds). *Selected Guidelines for Ethnobotanical Research. A Field Manual*. New York: NYBG.

Araujo, Ana L. 2022. El impacto del paradigma conservacionista en la expansión de la agricultura en territorios indígenas. Aproximaciones desde una comunidad nativa asháninka de VRAEM. *Debate Agrario* 50: 145–178.

Århem, Kaj 1996. The Cosmic Food Web: Human-Nature Relatedness in Northwest Amazon. In Philippe Descola and Gísli Pálsson (eds). *Nature and Society: Anthropological Perspective*. London and New York: Routledge.

Balée, William 2013. *Cultural Forests of the Amazon. A Historical Ecology of People and their Landscapes*. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.30347164

BDPI 2020. Base de Datos Oficial de Pueblos Indígenas u Orginarios. Ministerio de Cultura, Peru. https://bdpi.cultura.gob.pe/pueblos/ashaninka <Accessed 18 March 2026>

Belaunde, Luisa E. 2001. *Viviendo bien. Género y fertilidad entre los airo-paị de la Amazonía peruana*. Lima: Centro Amazónico de Antropología y Aplicación Práctica.

Blaser, Mario 2016. Is Another Cosmopolitics Possible? *Cultural Anthropology* 31 (4): 545–570. https://doi.org/10.14506/ca31.4.05

Conklin, Beth A. and Lynn M. Morgan 1996. Babies, Bodies, and the Production of Personhood in North America and Native Amazonian Society. *Ethos* 24 (2): 657–694. https://doi.org/10.1525/eth.1996.24.4.02a00040

De la Cadena, Marisol 2010. Indigenous Cosmopolitics in the Andes: Conceptual Reflections beyond "Politics". *Cultural Anthropology* 25 (2): 334–370. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1360.2010.01061.x

Descola, Philippe 1996. *La selva culta. Simbolismo y praxis en la ecología de los Achuar*. Quito: Ediciones ABYA-YALA.

Descola, Philippe 2013. *Beyond Nature and Culture*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press. https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226145006.001.0001

Descola, Philippe 2014. Modes of Being and Forms of Predication. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 4 (1): 271–280. https://doi.org/10.14318/hau4.1.012

Dziubinska, Magda H. 2024. Can We Wash Away Love with Bleach? Affect, Gender, and Agency in Western Amazonia. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 14 (3): 686–701. https://doi.org/10.1086/732839

Escobar, Arturo 2017. Sustaining the Pluriverse: The Political Ontology of Territorial Struggles in Latin America. In Marc Brightman and Jerome Lewis (eds). *The Anthropology of Sustainability*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Heckenberger, Michael 2005. *The Ecology of Power: Culture, Place, and Personhood in the Southern Amazon, AD 1000–2000*. New York: Routledge.

Hill, Jonathan D. and Fernando Santos-Granero (eds) 2002. *Comparative Arawakan Histories: Rethinking Language Group and Culture Area in Amazonia*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Hornborg, Alf 2017. Dithering while the Planet Burns: Anthropologists' Approaches to the Anthropocene, *Reviews in Anthropology* 46 (2–3): 61–77. https://doi.org/10.1080/00938157.2017.1343023

INEI (Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática) 2017. III Censo de Comunidades Nativas 2017 – Resultados Definitivos.

https://www.inei.gob.pe/media/MenuRecursivo/publicaciones_digitales/Est/Lib1598/TOMO_01.pdf <Accessed 18 March 2026>

Izquierdo, Carolina, Allen Johnson, and Glenn H. Shepard 2008. Revenge, Envy and Sorcery in an Amazonian Society. In Stephen Beckerman and Paul Valentine (eds). *Revenge in the Cultures of Lowland South America*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press.

Kirksey, Eban and Stefan Helmreich 2010. The Emergence of Multispecies Ethnography. *Cultural Anthropology* 25 (4): 545–76. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1360.2010.01069.x

Kohn, Eduardo 2007. How Dogs Dream: Amazonian Natures and the Politics of Transspecies Engagement. *American Ethnologist* 34 (1): 3–24. https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.2007.34.1.3

Kohn, Eduardo 2013. *How Forests Think. Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human*. Berkeley and London: University of California Press.

Kujawska, Monika and Joaquina Albán-Castillo 2025. Wild-Grown Medicinal Plants Used by the Asháninka People from the Tambo River, Peruvian Amazonia. *Journal of Ethnopharmacology* 337 (3): 118919. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jep.2024.118919

Kujawska, Monika, Fernando Zamudio, Joaquina Albán-Castillo and Joanna Sosnowska 2020. The Relationship between a Western Amazonian Society and Domesticated Sedges (Cyperus spp.). *Economic Botany* 74: 292–318. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12231-020-09500-5

Kujawska, Monika, Fernando Zamudio, Joaquina Albán-Castillo and Joanna Sosnowska 2023. The Relation Between Ashaninka Amazonian Society and Cultivated Acanthaceae Plants. *Economic Botany* 77: 372–409. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12231-023-09585-8

Latour, Bruno 2004. Whose Cosmos, Which Cosmopolitics? Comments on the Peace Terms of Ulrich Beck. *Common Knowledge* 10 (3): 450–62. https://doi.org/10.1215/0961754X-10-3-450

Lenaerts, Marc 2006. Substances, Relationships and the Omnipresence of the Body: An Overview of Ashéninka Ethnomedicine (Western Amazonia). *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine* 2: 49. https://doi.org/10.1186/1746-4269-2-49

Maizza, Fabiana 2017. Persuasive Kinship: Human-Plant Relations in Southwestern Amazonia. *Tipití* 15 (2): 206–220. https://doi.org/10.70845/2572-3626.1249

Martin, Gary J. 2004. *Ethnobotany: A* Methods Manual. London: Earthscan.

McLachlan, Amy L. 2011. Bittersweet. The Moral Economy of Taste and Intimacy in an Amazonian Society. *The Senses and Society* 6 (2): 156–176. http://dx.doi.org/10.2752/174589311X12961584845765

Opas, Minna 2005. Mutually Exclusive Relationships: Corporeality and Differentiation of Persons in Yine (Piro) Social Cosmos. *Tipití* 3 (2): 111–130. https://doi.org/10.70845/2572-3626.1018

Peralta, Percy A. and Karen A. Kainer 2008. Market Integration and Livelihood Systems: A Comparative Case of Three Asháninka Villages in the Peruvian Amazon. *Journal of Sustainable Forestry* 27 (1–2): 145–171. https://doi.org/10.1080/10549810802225267

Pérez-Gil, Laura 2024. Timber Industry, Cosmopolitics, and Ontology of Trees in Peruvian Amazonia. *Journal of Ethnobiology* 44 (4): 392–401. https://doi.org/10.1177/02780771241277630

Plowman, Timothy C., Adrian Leuchtmann, Carlo Blaney and Keith Clay 1990. Significance of the Fungus Balansia cyperi Infecting Medicinal Species of Cyperus (Cyperaceae) from Amazonia. *Economic Botany* 44 (4): 452–462. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02859780

Quinlan, Marsha 2005. Considerations for Collecting Freelists in the Field: Examples from Ethnobotany. *Field Methods* 17 (3): 219–234. https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05277460

Revilla-Minaya, Caissa 2019. *Environmental Factishes: Variation, and Emergent Ontologies among the Matsigenka of the Peruvian Amazon*. PhD thesis. Nashville: Vanderbilt University.

Reynel, Carlos 1984. Un vocabulario para describir y nombrar a los árboles en la lengua Campa-Asháninka. *Revista Forestal del Perú* 12 (1–2): 81–97.

Reichel-Dolmatoff, Gerardo 1976. Cosmology as Ecological Analysis: A View from the Rain Forest. *Man* 11 (3): 307–318. https://doi.org/10.2307/2800273

Rival, Laura 2002. *Trekking Through History. The Huaorani of Amazonian Ecuador*. New York: Columbia University Press. https://doi.org/10.7312/riva11844

Rival, Laura 2009. Towards an Understanding of the Huaorani Ways of Knowing and Naming Plants. In Miguel Alexiades (ed). *Mobility and Migration in Indigenous Amazonia*. Oxford: Berghahn Books. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt9qd5hf.7

Rodríguez-Espíritu, G. 2021. Narrativas amazónicas: plantas que curan el mal aire desde los nomatsigengas. *Amazonía Peruana* 34: 203–217. https://doi.org/10.52980/revistaamazonaperuana.vi34.277

Rojas-Zolezzi, Enrique C. 1997. Origen y clasificación de plantas en el pensamiento mítico Asháninka. *Antropológica* 15 (15): 255–288. https://doi.org/10.18800/anthropologica.199701.009

Rojas-Zolezzi, Enrique C. 2006. Representaciones del devenir de la persona entre los ashaninka del oriente peruano. *Journal de la Société des Américanistes* 92 (1–2): 255–278. https://doi.org/10.4000/jsa.3206

Rojas-Zolezzi, Enrique C. 2014. *El morral del colibri. Mitologia, chamanismo y ecología simbólica entre los Asháninka del oriente peruano*. Lima: Librería Editorial Horizonte.

Rogalski, Filip 2017. Niespecyficzne duchy, przewrotne opowieści – budowanie wyobrażeń na temat osób nie-ludzkich w narracjach ludu Arabela (Amazonia peruwiańska). *Etnografia. Praktyki, Teorie, Doświadczenia* 3: 87–118. https://doi.org/10.4467/254395379EPT.17.004.9240

Rosengren, Dam 2006. Matsigenka Corporeality, a Nonbiological Reality: On Notions of Consciousness and the Constitution of Identity. *Tipití: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America* 4 (1): 81–102. https://doi.org/10.70845/2572-3626.1026

Santos-Granero, Fernando 2002. The Arawakan Matrix: Ethos, Language and History in Native South America. In Jonathan D. Hill and Fernando Santos-Granero (eds). *Comparative Arawakan History: Rethinking Language, Family and Culture Area in Amazonia*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Santos-Granero, Fernando 2006. Sensual Vitalities. Noncorporeal Modes of Sensing and Knowing in Native Amazonia. *Tipití: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America* 4 (1): 57–80. https://doi.org/10.70845/2572-3626.1025

Santos-Granero, Fernando 2012. Beinghood and People-Making in Native Amazonia. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 2 (1): 181–211. https://doi.org/10.14318/hau2.1.010

Santos, Fernando and Frederica Barclay 2005. Introduction. In Fernando Santos and Frederica Barclay (eds). *Guía etnográfica de la Alta Amazonía* vol. 5. Panama: Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, Lima: Instituto Francés de Estudios Andinos. https://doi.org/10.4000/books.ifea.5026

Shepard, Glenn H., Jr. 2004. A Sensory Ecology of Medicinal Plant Therapy in Two Amazonian Societies. *American Anthropologist* 106 (2): 252–266. https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.2004.106.2.252

Shepard, Glenn H., Jr. and Lewis Daly 2022. Sensory Ecology, Plant-persons, and Multinatural Landscapes in Amazonia. *Botany* 100 (2): 83–96. https://doi.org/10.1139/cjb-2021-0107

Stengers, Isabelle 2005. The Cosmopolitical Proposal. In Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (eds). *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Tournon, Jacques, Samuel Caúper Pinedo and Rafael Urquía Odicio 1998. Los 'piri piri', plantas paradójicas de la Amazonia. *Antropologica* 16 (16): 215–240. https://doi.org/10.18800/anthropologica.199801.009

Valadeau, Céline, Joaquina Albán-Castillo, Michel Sauvain, Augusto F. Lores and Geneviève Bourdy 2010. The Rainbow Hurts My Skin: Medicinal Concepts and Plants Uses among the Yanesha (Amuesha), an Amazonian Peruvian Ethnic Group. *Journal of Ethnopharmacology* 127 (1): 175–192. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jep.2009.09.024

Varese, Stefano 2006. *Sal de los cerros*. Lima: Fondo Editorial del Congreso del Perú.

Veber, Hanne 2003. Asháninka Messianism. The Production of a "Black Hole" in Western Amazonian Ethnography. *Current Anthropology* 44 (2): 183–211. https://doi.org/10.1086/346028

Virtanen, Pirjo K. and Francisco Apurinã 2024. Relating Plants and Apurinã's Multibeing Life-making. *Journal of Ethnobiology* 44 (4): 370–380. https://doi.org/10.1177/02780771241289042

Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo 2004. Exchanging Perspectives: The Transformation of Objects into Subjects in Amerindian Ontologies. *Common Knowledge* 10 (3): 463–84. https://doi.org/10.1215/0961754X-10-3-463

Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo 2012. *Metafísicas caníbales. Líneas de antropología postestructural*. Stella Mastrangelo (trans). Buenos Aires: Katz Editores.

Weiss, Gerald 1975. Campa Cosmology: The World of a Forest Tribe in South America. *Anthropological*

Papers of The American Museum of Natural History New York 52 (5): 217–588. http://hdl.handle.net/2246/278

Weiss, Gerald 2005. Campa ribereños. In Fernando Santos and Frederica Barclay (eds). *Guía etnográfica de la alta amazonía*. Balboa, Panamá: Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute. https://doi.org/10.4000/books.ifea.5027

Whitaker, James A., Vikram Tamboli, Lewis Daly and Matthias Lewy 2024. Plant Agency in the Guianas: Attraction, Assault and Animacy. *Journal of Ethnobiology* 44 (4): 347–359. https://doi.org/10.1177/02780771241277618

Wilbert, Werner 1992. Bush-spirit Encounters in Warao Life and Lore. *Antropologica* 77: 63–92.

Zent, Egleé L. 2009. "We Come from Trees": The Poetics of Plants Among the Jotï of the Venezuelan Guayana. *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 3 (1): 9–35. https://doi.org/10.1558/jsrnc.v3i1.9

MONIKA KUJAWSKA
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR
INSTITUTE OF ETHNOLOGY AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF LODZ
monika.kujawska@uni.lodz.pl