

## Narrating in Multinatural Word and Color: Vegetal Vitality in Lastenia Canayo's *Los dueños del mundo Shipibo*

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37536/ECOZONA.2025.16.2.5733>



### Abstract

Shipibo artist and writer Lastenia Canayo's 2004 visual/textual work *Los dueños del mundo Shipibo* presents images and descriptions of more-than-human beings of the Shipibo cosmivision. The titular Shipibo *dueños* are often associated with a specific type of plant, relating ancestral belief to natural resources in Shipibo territories in Western Amazonia. Throughout her work, Canayo, whose Indigenous name Pecon Quena means "la que llama a los colores" ("she who calls the colors"), emphasizes how Shipibo commitments to their natural environment are a function of their ancestral beliefs, in turn offering a counternarrative of vegetal vitality to extractivist deforestation and destruction on Shipibo Amazonian lands. Canayo's images—paired with texts written in the Spanish language—invite viewer/readers, Indigenous or not, to come to know and learn from Shipibo knowledge in word and in color. Ancestrality and territoriality, concepts broached by Graça Graúna (2013) and Robert David Sack (1986), respectively, textually and visually unite in Canayo's work to underscore how cosmogonic knowledge embodied in the *dueños* sustains Shipibo communities, as much in daily life today in the twenty-first century as well as in imagining Amazonian futures. In presenting a multi-edged vegetal vitality as a force of sustenance in Shipibo communities, Canayo deploys ancestrality and territoriality to textually and visually demarcate Shipibo socioenvironmental relations in Amazonia. Canayo highlights the diverse plant life along the Ucayali river and its tributaries, cosmological beings that multinaturally bridge human and more-than-human Shipibo worlds, to engage with Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's (2002/2020) understanding of multinaturalism, and to promote an imaginary of Amazonia that centralizes human and more-than-human socioenvironmental interactions rooted in ancestral knowledge.

**Keywords:** Ancestrality, Indigenous art, Indigenous literature, Shipibo, territoriality.

### Resumen

La obra visual/textual *Los dueños del mundo Shipibo* de 2004 de la artista y escritora shipiba Lastenia Canayo presenta imágenes y descripciones de seres más que humanos de la cosmovisión shipiba. Los dueños shipibos que dan título a la obra suelen estar asociados con una especie particular de planta, relacionando la creencia ancestral con los recursos naturales en los territorios shipibos de la Amazonía occidental. A lo largo de su obra, Canayo, cuyo nombre indígena Pecon Quena significa "la que llama a los colores," enfatiza cómo los compromisos shipibos con su entorno natural son una función de sus creencias ancestrales, ofreciendo a su vez una contranarrativa de vitalidad vegetal a la deforestación y destrucción extractivistas en las tierras amazónicas shipibas. Las imágenes de Canayo, emparejadas con textos escritos en español, invitan a los espectadores/lectores, indígenas o no, a conocer y aprender del conocimiento shipibo en palabras y en color. La ancestralidad y la territorialidad, conceptos abordados por Graça Graúna (2013) y Robert David Sack (1986), respectivamente, se unen textual y visualmente en la obra de Canayo para subrayar cómo el conocimiento cosmogónico encarnado en los dueños sostiene a las comunidades shipibas, tanto en la vida cotidiana actual en el siglo XXI como en la imaginación de futuros amazónicos. Al presentar una vitalidad vegetal multifacética como una fuerza de sustento en las comunidades shipibas, Canayo despliega la ancestralidad y la territorialidad para demarcar textual y visualmente las relaciones

socioambientales shipibas en la Amazonía. Canayo destaca la diversa vida vegetal a lo largo del río Ucayali y sus afluentes, seres cosmológicos que unen de manera multinatural los mundos humanos y más que humanos shipibos, para interactuar con la comprensión del multinaturalismo de Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2002/2020), y para retratar un imaginario de la Amazonía que centraliza las interacciones socioambientales humanas y más que humanas arraigado en la sabiduría ancestral.

*Palabras clave:* Ancestralidad, arte indígena, literatura indígena, shipibo, territorialidad.

What could we learn from plants in the Ucayali region of Amazonia? What knowledge lies in Amazonian vegetation? Shipibo artist and writer Lastenia Canayo's 2004 visual/textual work *Los dueños del mundo Shipibo* (*The Guardian Spirits of the Shipibo World*) invites the viewer/reader into her community's Shipibo cosmivision, highlighting relationships between human and plant beings that undergird Shipibo cosmogonic knowledge in Amazonia. Canayo's Indigenous name is Pecon Quena, 'la que llama a los colores' ('she who calls the colors'); in her designs of the titular *dueños* and accompanying textual descriptions, she relates Shipibo beliefs to natural resources of Shipibo territories along the Ucayali River and its tributaries, south of Iquitos, in the Ucayali department of Peru (Espino Relucé 259). Notably, she highlights the roles of diverse plant life in her Shipibo community's ancestral knowledge and its impact on the community today. Canayo emphasizes a commitment to the natural environment as a function of Shipibo ancestral beliefs, offering a counternarrative of vegetal vitality to extractivist deforestation and destruction on their Amazonian lands. This vegetal vitality transforms into a plant pedagogy that narratively imagines Amazonia as a geocultural space of knowledge production and education between human and more-than-human beings.

The *dueños* of the Shipibo world that Canayo narrates in her visual/textual work are more-than-human beings most often associated with a specific type of plant, but sometimes an animal or other more-than-human being of the natural world. Also known as Ibo-Yoshin, the *dueños* are "powerful beings that protect elements of Nature (plants, animals, winds...) and regulate their utilization by man, who in reciprocity is obligated to take care of them" (Macera 5).<sup>1</sup> Each textual description of a *dueño* includes the specific utility of the plant (or other associated being), its location in the region, its preparation and application for human use, and the relationship between the Shipibo community at-large with the *dueño*, normally in the form of asking permission from the *dueño* or other form of delineated relationship with elements of the human Shipibo world (Espino Relucé 261). This textual flow gradually hooks the reader into a multinatural narration of Shipibo human and more-than-human worlds, moving between them just as the viewer/reader moves between the image of the *dueño* design and the accompanying written text.

<sup>1</sup> "seres poderosos que protegen los elementos de la Naturaleza (plantas, animales, vientos...) y regulan su utilización por el hombre que en reciprocidad está obligado a cuidarlos" (all translations are the author's).

Indeed, Canayo's visual depictions of the *dueños* complement and augment her textual, literary narratives by offering an enhanced sensorial experience. Canayo's designs, alongside her narratives, engage the viewer/reader's sense of sight as part of the multinatural narration of Shipibo worlds and beings on view throughout *Los dueños*. Each *dueño* description and design occupies two pages of the text. The left page features the *dueño*'s name and the written description in Spanish, often in a paragraph, while the right page includes Canayo's visual drawing of the *dueño*.<sup>2</sup> In turn, these dual visual/textual narratives highlight their intertwining inextricability. For instance, Gonzalo Espino Relucé argues, "one cannot read the account without looking at the drawing, like one cannot visualize the drawing without reading the narration" (259–60).<sup>3</sup> While we critics cannot control a viewer/reader's approach to or engagement with the text or image, Espino Relucé's comments on this dual spectatorship as both viewer *and* reader of Canayo's designs and descriptions of Shipibo *dueños* highlight the invitation into the Shipibo world and cosmovision through both image and word.

These complementary forms of narration through image and text furnish an invitation into both cosmogonic (that is, relating to the Shipibo cosmovision) and physical (that is, relating to Shipibo territories in the Ucayali region) landscapes. For example, in the collection's first *dueño* description, Canayo's written text announces that the corresponding image portrays the Dueño de la Planta de Huasaco and describes the being's humanoid body. The narration guides the reader/viewer's eyes between text and image with written and visual details, offering two complementary, but not mutually exclusive, sensorial invitations into this world of Shipibo knowledge. Canayo explains how a spoonful of the plant's dried roots together with cotton in a person's nose serves as a "remedy to cure people who never know how to work for their own good and as well for their children" (10).<sup>4</sup>

Immediately, the viewer/reader is confronted with the cosmogonic knowledge of the *dueño* in tandem with Canayo's depiction of the more-than-human being. Territoriality in Canayo's work extends from the Ucayali region to the cosmogonic plane and back, a confrontation and subsequent negotiation of words and worlds at hand in the pages of her visual/textual work. For instance, Canayo explains how the Dueño de la Planta de Huasaco's name stems from the fish also known as huasaco that rarely swims still, uncovering additional relationships between more-than-human beings themselves alongside human and cosmogonic knowledges.

In this and other *dueño* descriptions and designs throughout *Los dueños*, Canayo deploys an ancestrally-informed territoriality rooted in Shipibo relations to plant beings in Amazonia. Ancestrality and territoriality serve to textually and visually demarcate Shipibo social-environmental relations in Amazonia, highlighting how

<sup>2</sup> Pablo Macera notes that Canayo utilized felt-tip markers on Canson cardboard for her designs in *Los dueños* (Macera 7).

<sup>3</sup> "no se puede leer el relato sin mirar el dibujo como no se puede visualizar el dibujo sin leer la narración."

<sup>4</sup> "remedio para curar a las personas que nunca saben trabajar para su bien y así también a los niños."

diverse plant beings along the Ucayali River and its tributaries, as cosmological substances, multinaturally bridge human and more-than human Shipibo worlds. Canayo depicts an imaginary of Amazonia that centers on human and more-than-human socioenvironmental interactions, inviting the viewer/reader into Shipibo worlds and her multinatural conception of territoriality.

Carmen Del Águila Rodríguez notes that for Shipibo communities like Canayo's the universe is both life and art, leading Shipibo culture to center on being full of life and art (García and Rodríguez 241). Canayo's textual and artistic work speaks to the universe's vitality, both in terms of the human Shipibo communities to which she belongs, and in terms of the plant beings, their practical uses, and the knowledge embodied within them that Canayo's designs and descriptions highlight. This vegetal vitality, as we shall see throughout this essay, carries forth a conception of Shipibo belonging to their territory that is cosmogonically informed; this is to say, cosmovision remains inextricable from understanding Canayo's visual/textual work, the relationship between image and text, and the plant pedagogy from which we outside Canayo's community can learn as a counterpoint to extractivist logics and imaginaries of Amazonia.

In the rest of this essay, I will first discuss concepts of ancestrality, territoriality, and multinaturalism as they relate to *Los dueños*. I will then offer a brief discussion of the Shipibo artistic practices of *kené* and *kené de la palabra* that serve as the foundation of Canayo's visual/textual work, alongside conceptions of ownership that inform the notion of *dueños'* guardianship in the Shipibo world. I will close the essay with additional examples from *Los dueños* to further explore Canayo's imaginary of Amazonia informed by the plant pedagogy developed throughout her visual/textual work.

### **Ancestrality, Territoriality, and Multinaturalism**

In the context of Indigenous literary and artistic theory and practice from Latin America, definitions and conceptions of ancestrality hinge on the confluence of individual and collective experience, history, and knowledge of human and more-than-human worlds. Macuxi writer Trudruá Dorrico argues that ancestrality is an "Indigenous speaking place" and that "reading the works of these authors of different ethnicities contributes to the knowledge of different places of speech whose expression is announced from their own otherness" (230).<sup>56</sup> To read Indigenous writers from diverse communities spotlights Indigenous knowledges from across the

<sup>5</sup> "lugar de fala indígena;" "a leitura das obras desses autores de etnias diferentes coopera para o conhecimento de diferentes lugares de fala cuja expressão se anuncia a partir da própria alteridade."

<sup>6</sup> In an Instagram post dated July 14, 2022, Dorrico declared that she would go by the name Trudruá, meaning "formiga" ("ant") in the Macuxi language, positing that she is Macuxi and Indigenous above all, even before the name "Julie" corresponding with her Brazilian citizenship (@trudruadorrico). The Works Cited page in this essay includes the name Julie in brackets to correspond with the original publication information.

world, to accept invitations to begin to know and to learn from Indigenous knowledges in tandem with Indigenous perspectives and experiences across history.

Potiguara writer Graça Graúna likewise describes Indigenous literature as writing that “pulses. Its force traverses borders” (172).<sup>7</sup> These borders traverse the words and worlds of texts like Canayo’s, from the Ucayali region of Amazonia to the Shipibo cosmogonic plane and back. Graúna further explains that, “[a]ncestral voices suggest more and more challenges that emanate from contemporary Indigenous literature: a world mirrored by different worlds, dreams, and realities; a world of people who have been prevented from expressing their thoughts throughout more than 500 years of colonization” (172).<sup>8</sup> Now in the twenty-first century in literary and artistic works—like Canayo’s *Los dueños*—ancestral knowledges can be seen, read, viewed, and engaged with outside of the communities to which they belong, offering invitations to different systems of knowledge and perspectives on the many human and more-than-human worlds that human and more-than-human beings, like plants, inhabit.

Ancestral knowledge from the Shipibo cosmovision serves as the foundation for the written texts and visual designs of Canayo’s *Los dueños*. In particular, ancestrality relates to the activation of the senses in the text. For example, in the description of the Dueño de la Planta de Maraca, Canayo describes how the fruit of the maraca plant only makes noise when it matures: “That is why this fruit was very important in the past for making rattles and mothers used its sound to make babies sleep peacefully” (30).<sup>9</sup> The ancestral knowledge about the maraca plant that Canayo communicates in this description activates the sense of listening, both in the literal sense of imagining the maraca fruit’s sound, and in the more metaphorical opening of the ears to this textual cosmogonic confrontation with the Shipibo cosmovision and its ramifications and impacts on the Amazonian landscape of the Ucayali. In (imaginatively) listening to the ancestral maraca sound soothing a Shipibo baby to sleep, the reader is offered an opportunity to learn from this cosmogonic Shipibo knowledge, specifically the significance of the maraca plant (and other plant life more broadly) for Canayo’s Shipibo community.

Moreover, the activated sense of listening in the text, combined with the sense of sight activated in reading the text and examining the visual design, further underscores the relationships between *dueños* and plants as foundational substances for Canayo’s community and their cosmovision. For instance, the accompanying visual depiction of the Dueño de la Planta de Maraca literally and metaphorically opens the viewer/reader’s eyes and calls attention to the complementary narrative forms of text and image at work. In Canayo’s design of the *dueño*, the ripened brown maraca fruit

<sup>7</sup> “pulsa. A sua força atravessa fronteiras.”

<sup>8</sup> “As vozes ancestrais sugerem mais e mais desafios que emanam da literatura indígena contemporânea: um mundo espelhado de mundos, de sonhos e realidades distintas; um mundo de pessoas que foram impedidas de expressar o seu pensamento ao longo dos mais de 500 anos de colonização.”

<sup>9</sup> “Por eso antes este fruto era muy importante para hacer sonajas y las mamás con su sonido hacían dormir tranquilos a los bebés.”

stands out amidst the less mature green fruits that populate the plant's vines. The *dueño's* own darker orange-brown color calls attention to the fruit's similar color scheme, with both figures standing out against the rest of the green plant and the blue background; nonetheless, both the *dueño* and the ripened fruit share more of a color similarity with that of the brown ground. This color association between the ground and the two more-than-human beings underscores the ancestral link to not just the land but also Shipibo territory more broadly. While the maraca plant may be traditionally used to soothe babies to sleep, this ancestral vitality is likewise dependent on the vitality of the land itself, so that knowledge and human and more-than-human communities can all thrive in tandem. Otherwise, the green maraca plant that sprouts near the *dueño's* feet is at risk of instability and unviability.

Canayo highlights her community's ancestral connections to land and resources on her community's lands, specifically the plant life and their relation to the *dueños*, and this cosmogonic knowledge sits at the foundation of her conception of territoriality, in turn proposing an imaginary of Amazonia that treats plants as pedagogical partners from which to learn in tandem with cosmogonic knowledge. Stuart Elden, who argues that territory encompasses dynamic historical, geographical, and political questions, underscores how specificity remains paramount to understanding territory and to making pertinent territorial claims, on micro- and macro-scales. This tripartite view of territory expands outward rather than reverting to static, determinist arguments that ignore context-specific, lived experiences and context-driven imaginaries of territory (Elden 802). Much as ancestral Shipibo artistic practices like *kené* (to be discussed in the next section) and knowledge like that of *dueños* demand, Canayo's view of territory extends to the specificity of the physical landscape of the Ucayali region and the corresponding cosmogonic landscapes of her community's cosmovision.

Territoriality thus serves as "the means by which space and society are interrelated. Territoriality's changing functions help us to understand the historical relationships between society, space, and time," according to Robert David Sack (5). Dynamism imbues Sack's understanding of territoriality, limited not to a singular moment in time but rather in motion alongside societal, spatial, and temporal contexts at micro- and macro-scales. The flux in these contexts and their interrelated changes lend themselves to changes in power through which Sack conceives of territoriality.

For example, in Canayo's description of the Dueño del Ishanga del Agua, she explains that the ishanga plant "grows on the banks and has quite a few thorns throughout the plant and is used as medicine to cure some body pains. A piece of its branch can be used to hit where someone is in pain," in addition to the fact that there is another ishanga plant not from the water but from the earth (38).<sup>10</sup> At the micro-scale, this description of the *dueño* gestures toward the ishanga plant's medicinal utility for the Shipibo community. The accompanying design of the *dueño* includes a

<sup>10</sup> "crece en las orillas y tiene bastante espinas toda la planta y es medicina para curar algunos dolores del cuerpo con un pedazo de su rama para golpear en donde tiene el dolor alguna persona."

sprouting ishanga plant nearly two-thirds the size of the *dueño*, as if the riverbank were a fertile spot for not just the plant's growth but, by extension, the health of the Shipibo community at large, curing a range of ailments and pains.

At the macro-scale, however, Canayo's description and design of the Dueño del Ishanga del Agua signal a conversation of worlds, not restricting territoriality just to the Ucayali region of Amazonia but extending her conception of territoriality to the cosmogonic plane. This is to say that Canayo develops a territoriality rooted in the communication of ancestral knowledge. Her design of this and other *dueños* stem from her community's cosmovision and become inextricable from understanding the relationship between Shipibo spaces and society. The possibilities that the ishanga plant and the Dueño del Ishanga del Agua offer for human Shipibo communities, standing tall in the design yet covered in spines that the ishanga plant normally grows, are known for Canayo through her community's ancestral knowledge.

This and other humanoid *dueños* more acutely raise the question of the relationship between human and more-than-human worlds. A multinaturalist view of these beings may aid in more profoundly understanding the invitation to cosmogonic knowledge that Canayo's visual/textual work offers the viewer/reader. The notion of multinaturalism stems from Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's studies and formulations of *Amerindian perspectivism*, a way of seeing the world common among Indigenous communities in the Americas that emphasizes animal perspectives as akin to those of humans. Amerindian perspectivism is not a form of relativism, but rather a way of understanding different forms of interspecies relations (Viveiros de Castro 304–05). Multinaturalism thus presupposes a multiplicity of natures but similar minds across humans and animals, emphasizing different species' perspectives, in contrast to multiculturalism, which presupposes a singular nature against which subjects' perspectives are organized (Viveiros de Castro 329). A multinaturalist view of the world may result in Shipibo people conversing in the world with animals, plants, *dueños*, and other more-than-human beings, taking into account their perspectives of both human and more-than-human worlds. Indeed, perspectives are not representations as multiculturalism may want us to claim them, and Viveiros de Castro's idea of multinaturalism underscores the imaginings, not representations, of Amazonia (and the world more broadly) found in *Los dueños* (329).

For example, in her description of the Diablo del Maquisapa, Canayo writes that the *diablo* lives in the mountain trees and is exactly the same as the real maquisapas, white-bellied spider monkeys (52). The maquisapas may see and recognize each other as people, wearing the mask of the monkey. The Diablo del Maquisapa also might be recognized as a different species, since it is a *diablo* pretending to be a real maquisapa, although a species' ability to recognize these other types of perspectives is not guaranteed (Viveiros de Castro 306). This is to say that Canayo's multinaturalist narrations of *dueños* emphasize the human and more-than-human perspectives present in her community's cosmovision, populating both cosmogonic landscapes and physical landscapes in the Ucayali.

### ***Kené, Kené de la palabra, and Ownership in Shipibo Artistic Practice***

Canayo's designs in *Los dueños* follow in the *kené* tradition of Shipibo art and material culture. *Kené* is a Shipibo word that means "diseños" ("designs") and is often practiced by Shipibo women in their communities (Belaunde 15). *Kené* designs are representations of the Shipibo cosmovision, "part of a complex system that covers the range of cosmology, medicine, music, and figurative arts" (García and Rodríguez 243).<sup>11</sup> Historically, *kené* designs have been present in every object of the Shipibo material universe, from homes and canoes to ceramics and human body paint, interdependently representing, ordering, and communicating the Shipibo cosmovision through material and artistic practices (Casaverde 54).

*Kené* designs traditionally entail fine, angular, and curved lines in the physical design, with the design's primary motivations relating to "form figures complemented by filling in blank spaces, reproducing the old principle of 'horror of emptiness' existing in pre-Hispanic cultures" (Casaverde 55).<sup>12</sup> Carolyn Heath notes that looking at a *kené* design is like looking through a window toward infinity, following an unending imaginative trajectory (18). Analyzing *kené* designs therefore requires both concentration and specificity. Since *kené* designs can be found on all sorts of everyday objects of material culture, attention to their presence can be fleeting; moreover, each *kené* is related to and communicates specific beings and aspects of the Shipibo cosmovision (Casaverde 57). *Kené* designs demand the same level of specificity as the ancestral knowledge expressed throughout Canayo's *Los dueños* and Canayo's own conception of territoriality,

In *Los dueños*, Canayo transforms more traditional *kené* designs found in Shipibo material culture and artistic practice into *kené de la palabra*, which "appeals to ancestral memory, uses design, its colors, focuses on the spoken word, and transmits it to other generations" (Espino Relucé 258).<sup>13</sup> This *kené de la palabra* style corresponds to Shipibo knowledge often communicated in traditional *kené* designs yet expands the artistic form to that of the written word. This interpretation of art and life, as García and Rodríguez remind us about the Shipibo cosmovision at large, relates to textual and visual invitations into Shipibo cosmogonic knowledge (243). This is to say that Canayo's written text serves as a vehicle to transmit Shipibo knowledge to readers of Spanish—in great part, to non-Indigenous communities—to come to know the Shipibo world in multinatural word and color.

The addition of the visual designs of the *dueños* as a complementary form to the *kené de la palabra* style in Canayo's text further emphasizes the role that plants play in their associations with the *dueños* and with the ancestral knowledge that forms the basis for *Los dueños* as a visual/textual work. In an interview for the

<sup>11</sup> "parte de un complejo sistema que abarca los ámbitos de la cosmología, la medicina, la música y las artes figurativas."

<sup>12</sup> "formar figuras complementadas por trazos de relleno sobre los espacios en blanco, reproduciendo el viejo principio de 'horror de vacío' existente en las culturas prehispánicas."

<sup>13</sup> "apela a la memoria ancestral, utiliza el diseño, sus colores, fija la palabra hablada y la trasmite a otras generaciones."

*Amazonistas* catalogue, Canayo explains the importance of maintaining knowledge from nature in Amazonia, in order to “improve and promote people’s skills. We in the rainforest are sometimes very quiet and many of us cannot get ahead. [...] It is important to know nature to develop imagination and to be able to work with it” (Vidarte and Bendayán 137).<sup>14</sup> Catalogue editor Christian Bendayán likewise describes how “the collective stories that explain the origin of men, animals, and artifacts but that also contemplate a hidden wisdom that draws the balance between the self and the world, and teaches how to live with nature” are central to art from the Peruvian Amazon (13).<sup>15</sup> Canayo’s *kené de la palabra* texts and designs highlight how this Shipibo wisdom is ancestral in nature, informed by her community’s Shipibo cosmovision.

Furthermore, the notion of the *dueños* as guardian spirits or “owners,” in a crude translation of the word, further emphasizes the *kené de la palabra* form’s relationship to conceptions of ownership in Shipibo and other Indigenous Amazonian communities. Jacques Tournon argues that private property related to land falls out of concept in Shipibo communities in the Ucayali region, but personal property is either individual or familiar, reduced to few objects (168). Canayo’s designs and descriptions present conceptions of territory and territoriality, as well as land and landscape more broadly, as related to Shipibo cosmovision and her community’s ancestral knowledge, involving human and more-than-human beings, rather than as private property in the Western sense. In this sense, in her visual/textual work Canayo narrates an alternative notion of territoriality that learns from a partnership with cosmogonic and earthly landscapes and beings, notably plants and their associated *dueños*.

Marc Brightman, Carlos Fausto, and Vanessa Grotti further relate questions of ownership and property as linked to processes of place-making broadly across Amazonia, involving human and non-human persons (11). In the case of Canayo, designs and descriptions of Shipibo *dueños* speak to human conceptions of ancestrality and territoriality informed by the non-human *dueño* beings. In other words, Canayo’s conceptions of ancestrality and territoriality are part of the process of place-making in Shipibo lands, narrated in *Los dueños* in multinatural word and color. This is to say, the *dueños*’ “ownership” (or, better, “guardianship”) of the cosmogonic landscape and the knowledge therein is communicated through the multinatural narrations of Canayo’s visual/textual narrations, centering on vegetal vitality and a plant pedagogy from which to learn about human and more-than-human Shipibo worlds.

<sup>14</sup> “mejorar y promover las habilidades de la gente. Nosotros en la selva a veces somos muy callados y muchos no podemos salir adelante. [...] Es importante conocer la naturaleza para desarrollar la imaginación y que con ella puedan trabajar.”

<sup>15</sup> “los relatos colectivos que explican el origen de hombres, animales y artefactos pero que también contemplan una sabiduría oculta que dibuja el equilibrio entre el yo y el mundo, y adiestra en la convivencia con la naturaleza.”

## Los dueños of Canayo's Shipibo Worlds

Additional examples of a *dueño*, a *dueña*, and a *diablo* from Canayo's work stress the dynamic relationship between ancestrality, territoriality, and the expansive plant pedagogy developed in *Los dueños*.<sup>16</sup> Canayo offers an imaginary of Amazonia rooted in the vegetal vitality of her Shipibo community, emphasizing the possibilities from which vegetal life offers human beings to learn, through the lens of Shipibo customs and cosmogony. This imaginary allows us to begin to understand the power of vegetal life, disrupting an extractivist gaze upon Amazonia that looks toward resource exportation for profit. Indeed, plants are pedagogical partners with which to learn rather than from which to extract. Canayo's narration of the multinatural worlds across whose porous boundaries vegetal vitality sprouts sits at the intersection of ancestral knowledge and practical uses for her Shipibo community.

The first example to examine here is that of a *dueño*, the Dueño de Cetico. The *cetico* is a type of *Cecropia* tree typically found in tropical regions, especially in areas that flood, like the Ucayali river and its tributaries (Horna and Reig 28). The Dueño de Cetico has humanoid features: ashy-colored skin, a short tail, bow-leggedness, and a thin rope on its shoulders mark the *dueño's* physical appearance. Additionally, the *dueño* is covered in thorns that are invisible to a human being when he enters a human body (Canayo 14). In the visual depiction of the Dueño de Cetico, the tiny thorns remain visible along the being's entire body, although relatively faint. The *cetico* tree also stands to the right of the *dueño*, with leaves branching out at the top of the tree covered in thorns similar in shape and size to those covering the *dueño* being's body. These parallel forms between that of the *dueño* and that of the *cetico* tree highlight the inextricable relationship between the Dueño de Cetico and the plant to which it belongs, as an "owner" or "guardian" being.

The Dueño de Cetico stands on what appears to be a blue-colored river or riverbank, emphasizing not only the cetico tree's flood environment but also the *dueño's* ancestral relationship to rivers that Shipibo communities historically have traversed. For instance, Canayo explains that the Dueño de Cetico helped Shipibo ancestors travel more speedily along the Ucayali River and its tributaries. This *dueño*

is not evil, nor a witch, and he helps us a lot. That is why our ancestors, when they went far away in a canoe and came back tired and wanted to get to their destination quickly, would cross a dry dock, dock and collect cetico to cut piece by piece to put in a line and thus they would beach the canoe and when several people pushed it, they would go very quickly. (Canayo 14)<sup>17</sup>

Here, Canayo deploys ancestrality in narrating a utilitarian yet nonetheless cosmogonically grounded perspective on the roles of the cetico tree and the Dueño de

<sup>16</sup> Macera notes the Christian influence on the Shipibo community in the naming of certain *dueños* as *diablos* (5).

<sup>17</sup> "no es malo, ni brujo y nos ayuda bastante por eso nuestros abuelos antepasados cuando iban lejos en canoa y venían cansados y querían llegar rápido a su destino surcaban un varadero, atracaban y recogían Cetico para cortar pedazo por pedazo para poner en fila y así varaban la canoa y cuando la empujaban entre varios se iban bien rápido."

Cetico. These ancestral connections between the Shipibo people today, the tree, and the *dueño* highlight the vitality that the tree and the *dueño* provide for the Shipibo in their riverine navigational feats, stretching from the past of Shipibo oral history to the present moment of Canayo's visual/textual narration.

This confrontation with the riverine environment in the visual/textual narration raises the salience of ancestrality for Canayo's conception of territoriality in her visual/textual work. Here, ancestral knowledge traverses time much like the Shipibo have traversed the Ucayali waterways: across the past imbued with cosmogonic knowledge, and into the present moment of the narration. Shipibo ancestors' experiences with the same *dueños* that Canayo and her Shipibo community encounter in the present underscore the vitality of the cetico tree and its accompanying ancestral knowledge. The cetico tree's vitality for the Shipibo sprouts from this mediation across temporal, cosmogonic, and physical landscapes, allowing the Shipibo to literally and metaphorically navigate their ancestral territories in Amazonia more efficiently.

Territoriality emerges here as inextricable from ancestrality, emphasizing the multinatural narrations of local Shipibo environments vis-à-vis the *dueño's* power and educational lessons. In narrating the ancestral history and knowledge embodied in the cetico tree, Canayo's conception of territoriality serves to emphasize the sustenance that her Shipibo community can achieve on their historic, ancestral lands, a guide of sorts for life in an ancestrally-strengthened present. Much as the Dueño de Cetico guided Canayo's Shipibo ancestors along the river, the cetico tree today in the Ucayali region stands as a physical reminder of this ancestral knowledge and of the *dueño's* continued presence in Shipibo society, navigating not only rivers but also time and space more broadly. Indeed, the cosmogonic presence of the Dueño de Cetico inheres in the cetico tree a recognition of its cosmogonic significance as a substance for individual and collective travel, in tandem with its significance for territoriality's extension from the physical landscape of the Ucayali region to the cosmogonic landscape of Shipibo ancestral knowledge.

While the Dueño de Cetico propels the Shipibo in their navigation, the Dueña del Barbasco "is very bad" ("es muy mala") (Canayo 216). The term *barbasco* here refers to the "Poison extracted from the roots of some shrubs" of the short tree itself (Canayo 216n1).<sup>18</sup> In Canayo's image of the *dueña* and two *barbasco* trees, the poisonous yellow-green roots pushing down into the mounds of soil upon which the trees stand appear quite similar to the same long, thin, yellow-green materials found in the *dueña's* two hands. Given Canayo's textual description and visual design, it appears at first glance that this *dueña* can be poisonous. In fact, the *dueña* hunts fish in the traditionally Amazonian *mitayo* fashion, recovering many fish from throwing *barbasco* into lagoons and other bodies of water (Canayo 216).<sup>19</sup> The *dueña* is poisonous to the fish she hunts, providing comestible sustenance for the human

<sup>18</sup> "Veneno extraído de la raíz de algunos arbustos."

<sup>19</sup> Canayo defines "mitayo" as "Actividad de caza o pesca selvática," ("jungle hunting or fishing activity") and "mitayero" as "Cazador o pescador de la selva" ("hunter or fisher from the jungle") (216n3, 216n2).

Shipibo community despite the seemingly *mala* and poisonous physical appearance. Consumption of fish by the Shipibo is not a result of extractivist fish farming, but rather stems from ancestral knowledge and requires permission from the *dueña*.

The description of the *dueña* as “muy mala” stems from the perspective of the fish hunted as prey rather than that of the Shipibo community. For the Shipibo, the *Dueña del Barbasco* is not poisonous but rather provides sustenance; for the fish, however, the *dueña*’s hands themselves are poisonous, leading to her reputation as “muy mala.” In taking the perspective of the fish in terms of how “mala” the *Dueña del Barbasco* can be, Canayo’s text and image of the *dueña* acknowledge the porous boundaries between human and more-than-human worlds. This is to say that the fish’s perspective of the *dueña* complements that of the human, neither perspective hierarchically superior to the other but rather existing alongside one another in the physical landscape of the Ucayali. The barbasco and the *dueña*’s dual roles as hunter and provider according to the Shipibo cosmovision highlight the distinct relationships among both human and more-than-human beings with the *dueños* at large.

At the same time, the vegetal vitality within the education that the barbasco and its *dueña* provide highlights how Canayo’s plant pedagogy remains rooted in ancestral knowledge. The poisonous barbasco root carries an intimate relationship with the Shipibo community because of the dearth of fish often present in their ancestral rivers. Canayo writes, “now if you find them they [the fish] are very tricky and then people put barbasco in, and to do so they take out the root and crush it, and they also have to diet and not let pregnant women get close to them or the fish will get dizzy” (216).<sup>20</sup> Although the barbasco root may be poisonous, it nonetheless brings vitality to the Shipibo community because the community is able to feed itself off the fish hunted with the plant. While the fish die for consumption, Shipibo sustenance remains linked to their local riverine environments and the ancestral knowledge contained within.

In the earlier case of the *Dueño de Cetico*, Canayo’s conception of territoriality emphasizes fluvial navigation and the power of the *dueño* to facilitate faster, more efficient travel throughout Shipibo territory. In the case of the *Dueña del Barbasco*, territoriality underscores the relationship of human imbrication with their local environments, here in relation to hunting and consuming fish from waterways. Canayo deploys territoriality as a way to sketch Shipibo customs in her community’s local Amazonian environments, while highlighting the ancestral knowledge that undergirds these multinatural expressions of social power. The boundaries between the human landscape of fish consumption and the more-than-human landscape of fish hunting become porous, with ancestrality serving as a bridge between these worlds in Canayo’s multinatural narration. Her textual/visual narrative of the *Dueña del Barbasco* propels this conception of territoriality as broaching physical and cosmogonic landscapes forward into the many Shipibo worlds of *Los dueños*.

<sup>20</sup> “ahora si los encuentras están bien mañosos y entonces la gente mete barbasco, y para hacerlo sacan la raíz y la machacan, y también tienen que dietar y no dejar acercarse a las mujeres embarazadas sino se marean los peces.”

The final example to explore in this essay is the *Diablo del Rayo*, which appears just like a human being, though its entire purple body appears electrified with orange rays pulsating from head to toe (Canayo 126). Ancestral knowledge associated with the *Diablo del Rayo* tells the Shipibo that lightning strikes constitute a clear and present danger for them, to be avoided at all cost: "When it rains we are afraid because it is dangerous, and our men can no longer work with machetes or axes because that calls lightning, and the same thing happens with light, that is why we do not get close because the electricity can fall" (Canayo 126).<sup>21</sup> This fear of lightning strikes makes the visual electric currents passing through the being's physical form even more impressive, since it appears in the image that the *diablo* is carrying lightning strikes in its two hands, as well as having a fully electrified body. Unlike the *Dueña del Barbasco*, who carries the poisonous barbasco roots in her hands in order to hunt fish, providing sustenance for the Shipibo community, here the parallel image of carrying charged lightning strikes within a human-like body highlights the clear and present danger for the Shipibo people from common natural phenomena in their local environments.

In fact, Canayo relates that once a man who never believed in the sayings of the community's ancestors died after going out to work during a rainstorm. She explains: "And so, while he was in the woods, he did not notice that his youngest son had followed him. After a while, while he was chopping wood, he was struck by lightning and let out a scream, and when his son ran to see him, he was already dead, all charred because the lightning had burned him, and that is how this man ended up" (Canayo 126).<sup>22</sup> Here, the example of the *diablo*'s power to take away life complements that of plant-associated *dueños*' powers to provide life and sustenance for the Shipibo community. In other words, Canayo's conception of territoriality broaches human and more-than-human relationships with their environments, with vegetal vitality at the base of an expansive plant pedagogy, viewing plants (and other natural beings and phenomena) as pedagogical partners with whom/which to learn.

As Patricia Oliart and Valeria Biffi argue in their study of Indigenous territorialities and environmental conservation in the Peruvian Amazon, for some of the Indigenous leaders they interviewed as part of their research,

[t]he destruction of biodiversity is directly linked to the destruction of their cultures, as the world their children will grow up in will not be the same as the one they knew. Thus, the protection of their territories and the use they may make of them ends up also being associated with the protection of biodiversity/life. (60)<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> "Cuando llueve tenemos miedo porque es peligroso, y nuestros hombres ya no pueden trabajar con machete ni con hacha porque eso llama al rayo, y también pasa igual con la candela, por eso no nos acercamos porque puede caer la electricidad."

<sup>22</sup> "y así estando en el monte no sintió que su hijo menor lo había seguido. Después de un rato que estaba hacheando le cayó el rayo y dio un grito, y cuando su hijo fue corriendo a verlo ya estaba muerto todo carbonizado porque el rayo lo quemó, y así terminó este hombre."

<sup>23</sup> "la destrucción de la biodiversidad está directamente vinculada a la destrucción de sus culturas, pues el mundo en el que crecerán sus hijos no será el mismo que ellos conocieron. De tal modo, la protección de sus territorios y del uso que puedan hacer de él termina estando asociada también a la protección de la biodiversidad/vida."

Canayo's narrations of *dueños* in the Shipibo world tackle the role that ancestrality plays in her text and in Shipibo society and communities at large. Ancestral knowledge may stem from oral traditions and relate to the *kené* and *kené de la palabra*-style images—with both text and image inextricable from one another—but it is in the present moment in which ancestrality additionally provides the Shipibo community strength and wisdom, grounding their relationships to territory.

Additionally, Canayo's visual/textual narratives invite those of us from outside the Shipibo community to begin to learn from said cosmogonic confrontations of words and worlds. The multinatural narrations of this cosmogonic knowledge traversing human and more-than-human worlds highlights the resonances of vegetal vitality not only for the Shipibo communities but for our understandings of Amazonia at large. The boundaries between human and more-than-human worlds begin to evaporate in the pages of *Los dueños*, as the Shipibo world, Amazonia, and other human and more-than-human worlds are illuminated in multinatural word and color.

Submission received 15 January 2025

Revised version accepted 4 October 2025

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