

Phytopoiesis: Plants in Amazonian Women's Poetry¹

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Abstract

The ontological turn within anthropology postulates that there is a multiplicity of worlds and that taking Indigenous worlds, realities and thought seriously enriches Western philosophy and culture. Taking a cue from the ontological turn, I argue in this article that Amazonian Indigenous and non-Indigenous literatures offer readers an entry point into worlds where more than human beings take center stage. I analyze the *phytopoiesis*, or the poetry on/with plants, by two Amazonian women authors from different countries and generations—Brazilian Astrid Cabral (1936-), and Peruvian Dina Ananco (1985-)—to show the centrality of vegetal life in Amazonia. I contend that these poets reflect upon traditional, communal ties to plants and resignify them to bolster women's empowerment.

Keywords: Ontological turn, contemporary Amazonian poetry, contemporary women's poetry, Astrid Cabral, Dina Ananco.

Resumen

El giro ontológico dentro de la antropología postula que existe una multiplicidad de mundos y que tomar en serio los mundos, las realidades y el pensamiento indígenas enriquece la filosofía y la cultura occidentales. Siguiendo el ejemplo del giro ontológico, sostengo en este artículo que las literaturas indígenas y no indígenas amazónicas ofrecen a los lectores un punto de entrada a mundos donde los seres más-que-humanos ocupan un lugar central. Analizo la fitopoiesis, o poesía sobre/con plantas, de dos autoras amazónicas de diferentes países y generaciones—la brasileña Astrid Cabral (1936-) y la peruana Dina Ananco (1985-)—para mostrar la centralidad de la vida vegetal en la Amazonía. Sostengo que estas poetisas reflexionan sobre los vínculos comunitarios tradicionales con las plantas y los resignifican para defender el empoderamiento de las mujeres.

Keywords: Giro ontológico, poesía amazónica contemporánea, poesía contemporánea de mujeres, Astrid Cabral, Dina Ananco.

Turning to Amazonian Poetry

Amazonian Indigenous worldviews have been a crucial inspiration for the so-called “ontological turn” in anthropology and related fields.² The underlying premise

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² Based on his extensive writings on Amazonian Amerindian societies, Martin Holbraad and Morten Axel Pedersen consider Eduardo Viveiros de Castro to be the “father of anthropology's ontological turn” (157).

of the ontological turn is that differences in the way in which communities see reality are not only a matter of cultural disparity or the reflection of multiple interpretations of a pre-given natural world. Rather, the nature of the world and its constituents, i.e. their ontology, diverge from one community to the next. The epistemological issue of how a people relates to things becomes an ontological question of acknowledging that what is there to relate to can vary, that actuality changes depending on who is interacting with it (Holbraad and Pedersen 5). The core task of Western philosophical ontology, namely defining what each entity is, is thus challenged in this new paradigm that acknowledges not merely a variety of multicultural approaches to the world but a multiplicity of worlds.

As Martin Holbraad and Morten Axel Pedersen point out, the ontological turn contributes to the emancipatory project of Indigenous peoples (157), often depicted from the outside as purportedly living in a situation of conceptual immaturity (*Unmündigkeit*), to quote Immanuel Kant's famous essay "What is Enlightenment?" It attributes the same significance to the discourse of Indigenous peoples and to that of anthropologists, abolishing, in the words of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, the "strategic advantage of the anthropologist over the discourse of the native" (115).³ The world(view) of an Indigenous community becomes as valid as that of the (usually Western-trained) anthropologists studying it.

Concomitantly, the ontological turn opens the path for engaging in reverse anthropology and for contemplating Western societies from an Indigenous perspective, thus relativizing Western values. The ontological turn thus challenges the pretense of universality of Western ontological and epistemological frameworks. It affords a glimpse into the reality created by these systems from an Indigenous perspective, thereby becoming, for Viveiros de Castro, a "powerful philosophical instrument, capable of enlarging a little bit the very ethnocentric horizons of our [Western] philosophy" (127). It draws attention to the ways in which Indigenous peoples conceptually reciprocate and respond to what has been written about them by highlighting the blind spots, incongruences and outright absurdities inherent in the Western mode of thinking.

In the field of Amazonian literature and literary studies, as in Amazonian ethnography, focusing on the discourse of Indigenous communities and, more broadly, of non-Indigenous Amazonian writers, also contributes to provincialize established themes, forms and genres. While Indigenous peoples have long been depicted as the subject of literary texts, the irruption of Indigenous literature—as opposed to Indianist and Indigenist literature written by non-Indigenous peoples about Indigenous characters or communities (Dorrico 229-37)⁴—by Indigenous

³ This and all subsequent quotes in a language other than English are rendered in my translation. The page numbers refer to the original listed in the Works Cited.

⁴ Dorrico differentiates between Indianist (*indianista*) writings by non-Indigenous writers who speak in the name of Indigenous communities, thus usurping their voice, Indigenist (*indigenista*) texts by non-Indigenous authors, often written with the help of Indigenous people, who strive to make Indigenous communities better known, and Indigenous (*indígena*) literature written by Indigenous peoples (Dorrico 229-37).

peoples themselves dates back only a few decades. Non-Indigenous Amazonian writers have been around for longer, but their texts were often regarded as regionalist literature that remained on the fringes of the literary canon in Amazonian nations. Even though several key texts of twentieth-century Latin American literature have been about the Amazon—Colombian José Eustasio Rivera's *La vorágine* (1924), Brazilians Mário de Andrade's *Macunaíma* (1928) and Raul Bopp's *Cobra Norato* (1931), or Cuban Alejo Carpentier's *Los pasos perdidos* (1953), to name but a few—none of these works were penned by Amazonian authors.⁵

The silencing and/or marginalization of Amazonian Indigenous intellectuals and, though to a much lesser extent, of non-Indigenous writers from Amazonia, is slowly changing. A case in point is the attribution of the 2022 National Literary Prize of Peru in the category “Literature in Indigenous or Originary Languages” to Wampis and Awajun Amazonian poet Dina Ananco for her poetry collection *Sanchiu* (2021). The irruption of Amazonian authors into the literary limelight in Amazonian countries has broadened the still rather ethnocentric horizons of the literary traditions in those nations, to riff off on Viveiros de Castro, and brought new worlds into the fold of Spanish and Portuguese literary languages. Most Amazonian authors draw heavily on local Indigenous, riverine and other cultural traditions, usually disseminated orally. Miguel Rocha Vivas uses the term “oralitura” to describe recent literary texts influenced by Indigenous cultural practices, including shamanic or healing chants, mythical stories, dialogues with the elders, etc. (Rocha Vivas 12), that frequently incorporate Indigenous words and expressions or, in the case of poetry, are sometimes bilingual editions.⁶ This is the case of Ananco's *Sanchiu*, a bilingual Wampis/Spanish collection, where the Wampis words used in the Spanish version of the poems are explained in a glossary at the end of the book.⁷

But Amazonian writings do more than simply integrate local literary forms and languages into poetry and prose. Following in the footsteps of the ontological turn, I would argue that these texts articulate not only different ways of interpreting reality, but also point to different realities. These works showcase a specifically Amazonian way of being in the world, attuned to more than human existence. This literature therefore translates the basic intuition at the heart of the ontological turn: ontology is pluriversal, rather than universal, and ontological divergences find expression in

⁵ For a discussion of what constitutes Amazonian writing and Amazonian poetry, see Vieira 54.

⁶ The term “oralitura” was coined by Yoro K. Fall to refer to ancestral narratives and poems of African peoples, so as to avoid the contradiction inherent in the expression “oral literature,” given that “literature” goes back to the Latin word for “letter” (Favarón and Haya de la Torre 30). The term has since then been adopted by Latin American Indigenous writers including Elicura Chihuailaf Nahuelpan, Fredy Chikangana and Hugo Jamioy to describe their own texts and has come designate a body of writing that goes back not only to the oral tradition but also to non-verbal forms of expression (Favarón and Haya de la Torre 30).

⁷ The poems in *Sanchiu* were written in Wampis and then translated into Spanish by the author herself, keeping some of the original rhythms and turns of phrase, together with some Wampis words and expressions.

textualities, broadly understood as the modes of inscription of different beings in the world.⁸

Amazonian literary writing is thus eminently political. For one, contemporary Amazonian texts often denounce the destruction of the rainforest fueled by extractivist activities including legal and illegal mining, oil drilling, agribusiness, logging, hydroelectrical power dams and other industries that go hand in hand with human-induced forest fires. But the political reach of Amazonian writings goes beyond the condemnation of environmental devastation. These texts enunciate an ontology that defies traditional philosophical categories and places Indigenous modes of thought on the same footing as Western ones. Similar to the ethnographies written in the wake of the ontological turn, Amazonian literatures give voice and visibility to other worlds, often through the words of Indigenous peoples themselves, thereby contesting and overcoming a centuries-old process of suppressing these forms of knowledge and ways of being.

In this article, I analyze a selection of poetry by women writers as an instantiation of recent Amazonian literature. Close to oral modes of expression that often use poetic structures including rhyme, systems of repetition and meter and an expression of oralitura, poetry has emerged as a privileged means to articulate Amazonian ontologies. I focus on the work of women poets from two Amazonian countries and belonging to different generations: Brazilian author Astrid Cabral (1936-), and the above-mentioned Dina Ananco (1985-) from Peru. I foreground the authors' poetry on plants, which I call "phytopoiesis"—poetry written on/with plants—as an entry point into Amazonian world(view)s where more than human beings take center stage. The selected body of work testifies to the significance of women authors as contemporary, innovative voices within Amazonian letters, who have carved a space for themselves by combining the articulation of local modes of existence with a female—and often feminist—perspective. These works emphasize the close ties binding women and plants, often used in activities traditionally performed by women such as cooking or caring for the sick, a connection that is both alluded to and frequently re-signified in the poems. While Cabral highlights the soul of plants and problematizes plant consumption by humans as food and raw materials, Ananco uses female identification with vegetal life as a means to challenge both patriarchy and environmental destruction. The poetry of both authors offers a glimpse into a world forged from the perspective of plants and puts forth a vegetal infused ontology of becoming that defies the neat ontological categories of mainstream Western thought.

⁸ I have framed this form of more-than-human inscription in human cultural productions elsewhere as zoophytography. For more on this notion, see Vieira.

Astrid Cabral's Ensouled Plants

Astrid Cabral was the only woman to integrate the Clube da Madrugada,⁹ a literary and artistic association founded in the Brazilian Amazon city of Manaus in 1954. One of the aims of the Clube was to reflect upon the depiction of Amazonian nature and on the persistent opposition between humans and the rainforest in cultural productions from the region (Cantarelli 86). Throughout her long literary career, Cabral carried the torch of bringing more-than-human beings into literature from a female perspective. In her early collection of short stories, *Alameda* (Lane, 1963), more than humans become familiar presences that are part of everyday human existence. As Ana Paula Cantarelli points out, the author's narratives make use of hybrid narrators that bridge human and vegetal points of view and plants are the protagonists of several texts (87-88).¹⁰ In her subsequent poetry collections, Cabral continues to focus on more-than-human life, not as representative of an extraneous, foreign environment, but embedded in routine, domestic actions and therefore as part of hybrid human/more-than-human communities (see Lestel 93-98).

Cabral's poetry emphasizes the multiple plant transformation that make life and literary writing possible. In several texts she focuses on plant reification, i.e., its reduction to food and other commodities for humans. The poem "Metamorfose" (Metamorphosis) from the collection *Intra-Muros* (Within Walls, 1998), describes the path of a peach from being a piece of fruit to becoming human stool: "On the lap of a bowl / a very pink peach / is a small sun. / How can hungry teeth / resist the temptation? / Soon the star eclipses / through the tunnel of the body / and becomes a dull pomace / on the lap of another bowl" (17).¹¹ Describing the process of eating and digesting a peach as the fruit's transformation from a glowing sun into a dull pomace is indicative of the author's remorse for causing the death of plants for nourishment, a recurrent feeling in several other poems. I have addressed the topic of food ethics in Cabral's corpus elsewhere, so I will not offer a lengthy analysis of the theme here (see Vieira 164ff). I will just highlight the guilt that transpires in many poems about the transmutation of plants into food. In "Café da manhã" (Breakfast), the last poem from the collection *Ponto de cruz* (Cross Stitch, 1979), the author notes that "wheat, yesterday free in the wind / is captive bread in your belly. / The sugar that tastes so good to you / is the pain of crystalized sugar cane [...] / And the coffee

⁹ Before Cabral, few other women had published literary works in the Brazilian Amazon. Eneida de Moraes published *Terra verde* (Green Land, 1929) and Violeta Branca published the poetry collection *Ritmo de inquieta alegria* (Rhythm of Unquiet Joy, 1935).

¹⁰ Cantarelli considers that Cabral's *Alameda* anticipates recent scientific research on plants by ascribing feelings, desires and volition to vegetal beings (88).

¹¹ "No regaço da louça / o pêssego tão corado / é um pequeno sol. / Como à tentação resistirem / os dentes famintos? / Logo o astro se eclipsa / pelo túnel do corpo / e se toma baço bagaço / no regaço de outra louça,"

in gulps is blood / that you, a vampire, swallow" (*Déu* 86).¹² ¹³ The vocabulary used in the poem, where plants are "captive," made to feel "pain" and whose blood is drunk by "vampire" humans, presents plants as victims of violence and exploitation at the hands of gluttonous humans.¹⁴ This personification of plants invites readers to consider them as intelligent beings with their own worldview and perspective on reality that clashes with the human drive to subjugate plant life.

The set of poems "Portal do dia" (Portal of the Day), "Natureza morta" (Still Life), "Feira" (Fair) and "Buffet miniatura" (Miniature Buffet), all from *Intra-Muros*, continues Cabral's reflection on the transmutation of plants into consumables. In the first poem, the author asks: "What are oranges doing here / emigrated from the trees? / They would be better on branches [...] / instead of the aggressive plate / from which they look at me furtively" (1).¹⁵ The use of the adjective "aggressive" signals the poetic voice's awareness that eating is a form of coercion exerted upon the fruit, depicted as being held hostage on a plate, fearfully looking at their human tormentor instead of hanging on their rightful place on a tree. "Natureza morta" describes oranges as "[p]ackaged liquid sun / for human thirst" (13),¹⁶ which points to the injustice of reducing fruit to a means to quench human thirst. In "Feira," the poet portrays vegetables on display for sale as being "in exile" and "nostalgic for soil" ("exílio"; "saudosas da terra," 15), personifying vegetables and hinting at their resentment for being sold as commodities in a market. "Buffet minitatura" itemizes the vegetables available in a buffet in a language that becomes increasingly critical of their transformation into food items as the poem progresses. Towards the end, broccoli are portrayed as a "fallen forest," hearts of palm as "chopped columns" and tomatoes are "agonizing" ("Floresta tombada"; "colunas decepadas"; "agonizando," 16). The violent language employed is a sign of the poetic voice's condemnation of the careless way in which humans turn plants into nourishment.

While the obliteration of edible plants for human nourishment troubles Cabral, other forms of vegetal life are recognized as the substratum that makes human culture possible. In "No papel" (On paper), from the poetry collection *Palavra na berlinda* (Word in the Spotlight, 2011), the author writes that the "word in paper / brings the aroma of the woods. / And when a book opens / it brings the breath of

¹² "trigo, ontem livre ao vento / é pão cativo no teu ventre. / O açúcar que te sabe tão doce / é dor de cana cristalizada [...] / E o café aos goles é sangue / que, vampiro, engoles."

¹³ Cabral's poetry collection *Ponto de cruz*, together with four other poetry books, including *Lição de Alice*, was re-published in the anthology *De déu em déu: poemas reunidos 1979-1994* (From Door to Door: Collected Poems 1979-1994) in 1998. The quotes in this article are from the anthology.

¹⁴ In the poem "Passeio a flores" (Tour to Flores) from *Visgo da Terra* (Birdlime of the Earth, 1986), later included in *De déu em déu: poemas reunidos 1979-1994*, Cabral returns to the idea of humans as vampires, when she recalls that, as a young child, she would eat fruit growing in a cemetery that she visited with her mother. She describes her childhood self as a "sacrilegious vampire / sucking the sap of the dead / in the living blood of the fruit" ("sacrílega vampira / chupando a seiva dos mortos / no sangue vivo das frutas," *Déu*, 174).

¹⁵ "Que fazem aqui as laranjas / emigradas das árvores? / Bem estariam nos galhos [...] / em vez do agressivo prato / de onde me encaram furtivas."

¹⁶ "Sol líquido embalado / para a sede do homem."

eucalyptus / and pines from the hill" (40).¹⁷ Written words evoke the smell of trees, but Cabral emphasizes that vegetal beings need to perish for the body of the plant to be transformed into paper: "In the skin of the former tree / that's where the word is housed" (40).¹⁸ In the poem "Ritual" (Ritual), part of the collection *Lição de Alice* (Alice's Lesson, 1986), she writes: "I ask the trees for forgiveness / for the paper in which I plant / words of stone" (*Déu* 239).¹⁹ The poetic voice evinces a strong environmental consciousness in asking trees to forgive her for the use of their trunk as raw material in the production of paper that allows her to exercise her poetic craft. The contrast between the living trees and the words "of stone" in the poem suggests that human culture thrives at the expense of plant existence, and the poet is uneasy about the sacrifice of vegetal life for the sake of mere words.

In "Jardim de palavras" (Garden of Words), also from *Palavra na berlinda*, Cabral returns to the transmutation of trees into paper and allegorically presents writing as a "garden of words / virid in any season" (19).²⁰ In her literary garden, "[t]rees are paper in pages / where I pluck rare flowers / that have not withered for centuries / and I even dare to sow a vegetable garden / of certain weeds and tubers" (19).²¹ The poet underscores the materiality of literary works and juxtaposes the trees used to produce paper to the "rare flowers" of literary language that do not wither precisely because they are unliving. Cabral inscribes herself in this literary tradition not as another creator of lofty, flowery language, but as a sower of weeds and tubers, thus pointing to a more mundane approach to poetry that is nevertheless still beholden to plants. The author is keenly aware of the fact that literature involves the transformation of plants into the material where writing is etched and the transmutation of concrete vegetal life into metaphors for literary language.

In her writings, Cabral avoids broad stroke vistas of the rainforest and its flora and focuses instead on familiar plants and human dependence upon them for the basics of existence, which implies their transformation from living entities into consumable goods.²² The poetic voice in her texts often puts itself in the shoes of vegetal beings, approaches the world from their perspective and imagines how they would react to their exploitation by humans. Beyond the assimilation of vegetal beings through digestion and the use-value of plants in human culture, Cabral emphasizes the plantness of humanity and the porous boundaries that separate species and even different biological kingdoms.

In the poem "Comunhão/excomunhão" (Communion/Excommunication), from *Lição de Alice*, she writes: "The world outside is not that much outside. / In the

¹⁷ "A palavra no papel / arrasta o aroma dos bosques. / E o livro ao entreabrir-se / traz hálito de eucaliptos / e pinheiros da colina".

¹⁸ "Na pele de extinta árvore / eis que a palavra se hospeda."

¹⁹ "Peço perdão às arvores / pelo papel em que planto / palavras de pedra."

²⁰ "jardim de palavras / em viço qualquer estação."

²¹ "Árvores são papel em páginas / onde colho flores raras / que não murcharam por séculos / e até ousou semear horta / de certas ervas e tubérculos."

²² As Malcolm McNee points out, "Cabral largely avoids majestic vistas and wilderness landscapes in favor of more intimately figured scenes where the proximities and limits between nature and culture are both highlighted and destabilized" (55).

garden of nostrils there are jasmine petals,” “in the retinas thrive jade green trees” and “[t]here is fruit flesh in our palate” (*Déu*, 275).²³ Humans integrate plant life in their sensorial organs through smelling, seeing and tasting. The poetic voice problematizes the existence of an autonomous human “I” and highlights that vegetal existence lies the core of human experience. In “Cenário arcaico” (Arcaic Scenery) despeciation goes further as we read about a mango tree that had animal features—“Once upon a time there was an enchanted / mango tree that had the hips / back and mane of a horse” (*Déu*, 162)²⁴—in a process that evokes a primordial time of ceaseless metamorphosis described in many Indigenous cosmologies.

As Vera Coleman points out, Cabral’s poetry “aligns itself with many [I]ndigenous philosophies of the Amazon that recognize the fundamental continuity and shared intersubjectivity of human and nonhuman individuals” (217). The poem “Sapato tem alma” (Shoes have a Soul), from *Lição de Alice* harks back to Indigenous animism²⁵ when it states that: “I always suspected that things have a soul. / The nostalgic vibration of roses / and the persistence of heliconias / whispered that subtle secret. / I always told myself: There is the anima / in the flowering tureen of Spring” (*Déu*, 285).²⁶ The poem underscores that ensoulment cuts across all forms of existence and undergirds beings’ ability to experience their world from a specific perspective. Tellingly, plants were the ones that let the poet know about the soul of things, which she recognizes in the flowering of Spring. Acknowledging their exploitative transformation into food and raw materials and her own participation in that process, the poet nevertheless regards plants as guides that point to the anima of all forms of existence. Cabral’s poetry articulates a vegetal ontology, predicated on ongoing metamorphoses, that contests the mainstream Western understanding of vegetal beings as subordinated to the needs of human life and as the substratum of human culture. Instead, it showcases the positionality of plants, critical of human depredation, as an instantiation of alternative world(view)s.

Plants and Women’s Emancipation in Dina Ananco’s Poetry

Part of a new generation of Indigenous women writers that straddle traditional knowledge and modes of cultural expression and contemporary poetic language, Dina Ananco stands out for embracing different layers of her identity as an

²³ “O mundo lá fora não é tão fora assim. / No jardim das narinas há pétalas de jasmim;” “vingam nas retinas árvores verde jade”; “Há polpa de frutas no céu de nossa boca.”

²⁴ “Era uma vez a mangueira / encantada, tinha ancas / lombo e crinas de cavalo.”

²⁵ Anthropologist Philippe Descola considers that, for Amazonian animist peoples, all forms of existence share the same culture or interiority and distinguish themselves only through their physical appearance (121-22). Viveiros de Castro’s perspectivism is therefore a form of animism.

²⁶ “Sempre suspeitei da alma das coisas. / A nostálgica vibração das rosas / e a persistência das helicônias / me sussurravam esse sutil segredo. / Sempre me disse: Lá está a anima / na terrina florida da primavera.”

Amazonian Wampis/Awajun author who now lives in the capital of Peru.²⁷ Her poetry collection *Sanchiu* is dedicated to her Wampis grandmother, the name of whom gives the book its title and who figures on the cover of the volume. As Ananco states in an interview: “[a]ll I know about the history of our ancestors and oral culture is thanks to my grandmother. My grandmother told me about the great myths of our ancestors and also her personal stories. [...] All that vast oral culture [...] served as my inspiration for creating my book” (“Entrevista”).²⁸ The traces of the poet’s Indigenous heritage impact the language, structure and topics addressed in *Sanchiu* and the treatment of plants in the author’s work.

Ananco’s poetry is written in an Indigenous language, Wampis, and then translated into Spanish by the author. The structure of the Spanish language bears traces of the translation, with the usual sentence structure often inverted. Beyond the clear influence of an Indigenous language in the collection, Gonzalo Espino highlights the text’s indebtedness to the structure of Indigenous chants, such as the Wampis and Awajun *anen* songs performed in communal rituals (“Dina Ananco”). Indigenous deities such as the females Nunkui, connected to fertility, and Tskunki, a mermaid, and the male Tijai, who inhabits the hills, feature prominently in the poems, which also emphasize the Wampis and Awajun connection to vegetal beings.

In the poem “Guardianes del Bosque” (Guardians of the Forest) for instance, Ananco mentions her community’s close ties to the forest: “We, the ones from the forest / like a snake [...] / Respecting the forest / dialoguing with plants, we live” (95).²⁹ Through the use of a collective “we”—the line “We, the ones from the forest” is repeated twice in the short poem—Ananco identifies with her community of origin, characterized by its intimate ties to plant life. Indigenous peoples are not only guardians who take care of and respect their territory, but they are also “of the forest,” which points to an indistinction between more than humans and humans, who do not see themselves as separate from the place where they live. The poem signals that existence in the rainforest depends upon dialogue with more than human beings, especially plants, which are also used for healing: “We take plants [...] to heal ourselves” (95).³⁰ The poem goes on to state that “[w]e like to live in harmony” (95),³¹ pointing both to a balanced link to other beings and, obliquely, to the tense relationship between Amazonian Indigenous communities and non-Indigenous peoples.³²

²⁷ Ananco was born to a Wampis mother and a Awajun father but lived most of her life with her mother’s side of the family. She moved to Lima, where she completed a BA and MA in Literature and where she works as a translator and interpreter.

²⁸ “Todo lo que conozco sobre la historia de nuestros ancestros y la cultura oral es gracias a mi abuela. Mi abuelita me contaba sobre los grandes mitos de nuestros ancestros y también sus historias personales. [...] Toda esta vasta cultura oral [...] me sirvió de inspiración para la construcción de mi libro.”

²⁹ “Nosotros los del bosque, / como una serpiente, [...] / Respectando el bosque / Dialogando con las plantas, vivimos.”

³⁰ “A las plantas [...] llevamos para curarnos.”

³¹ “Nos gusta vivir en armonía.”

³² The poem goes on to state that the perception of Indigenous peoples by non-Indigenous society as aggressive is erroneous: “We of the forest / as if we waited for someone / with our spears in our hand

While many poems from *Sanchiu* are beholden to Wampis and Awajun tradition, Indigenous topics and forms coexist with elements from Western culture in shaping the singular voice of the author (Sánchez 6; Espino and Mamani 67). One of the most analyzed poems of the collection, “No sé ustedes” (I Don’t Know about You), thematizes the contradictions of embodying a plurality of identities. The poetic voice wears traditional Wampis facial painting and adornments, which brings her recognition on social media: “I am Wampis / Oh my god! Arutmarua [...] / I take pictures for my Facebook / In less than 1 hour I have 5 thousand likes” (29).^{33 34} The text alludes to the increasing acceptance of Indigenous peoples within mainstream Latin American circles, perhaps due to the growing visibility of Indigenous struggles over the past decades. Still, the praise of indigeneity is portrayed as shallow in the text, based only on appearance and translated into Facebook likes.

In another section of the same poem, we read: “I need the lens to exoticize me in the foreground” (31),³⁵ showing that Ananco is fully conscious of the exoticization that goes hand in hand with the praise of Indigenous culture. This leads the author to distance herself from Wampis roots—“Suddenly I am not myself / I feel distant from my ancestors” (29)³⁶—and to a change to Western attire, including high heels, red dress and shiny earrings, which again proves popular in social media: “I take pictures and publish them in my Instagram / Everyone compliments me / I have 5 thousand likes” (31).³⁷ Within the superficiality of multiculturalism celebrated in social media, identities seem interchangeable. Still, rather than criticizing the insubstantiality of social media likes, the poet embraces her “multiple identity” (“identidad multiple,” 33): “I don’t know about you / But I don’t know myself / And I prefer it that way / To be from everywhere” (33).^{38 39} The poem certainly celebrates Ananco’s Indigenous roots, but it presents these as only a part of her being and asserts her right to navigate the various facets of her identity. While Ananco’s texts on plants reflect her cultural heritage as an Indigenous woman, she emphasizes that she is also intimately conversant with contemporary Western culture.

The poet’s refusal to essentialize her indigeneity led some critics to refer to her writing as an embodiment of a postindigenous condition that goes beyond

/ never keep watch of the path / the way we are usually seen” (“Nosotros del bosque / como si esperásemos a alguien / con la lanza en la mano / nunca vigilamos el camino / como nos suelen ver,” 95).

³³ “Soy wampis / ¡Oh, my god! Arutmarua [...] / Me tomo fotos para mi Facebook / En menos de 1 hora tengo 5 mil likes.”

³⁴ Curiously, The English language is used in the Spanish translation, though not in the Wampis original.

³⁵ “Necesito que ese lente me exotice en primera plana.”

³⁶ “De pronto no soy yo, / Me siento lejana a mis ancestros.”

³⁷ “Me tomo fotos y publico en mi Instagram / Todos me piropean / Tengo 5 mil likes.”

³⁸ “No sé ustedes, / pero yo no me conozco / Y me prefiero así / Ser de todas partes.”

³⁹ The poem “Transición” (Transition) also addresses the quandaries of identity. It stages a dialogue between the poet and a foreign woman who tells her that she should go back to her own, meaning her Indigenous community of origin. In response, the poet claims her multiple belongings as a Wampis and Awajun woman who lives in Peru’s capital. She then challenges the foreign woman for pretending to know her, in a criticism of the essentialization of Indigenous subjects by non-Indigenous peoples, and shines the light on her interlocutor: “Do you by any chance ask yourself, playful foreign woman, / What I think about you?” (“Te preguntas acaso gringa vacilona / ¿Qué pienso yo de ti?” 87).

stereotypes of what an Indigenous person should be and how Indigenous communities and culture should be represented (Cabel, Lis and Arabaiza 126, 129). While I find the notion of postindigeneity problematic, in that it suggests an overcoming of Indigenous ways of being that threatens to erase Indigenous presence in Latin American cultural and political spheres, Ananco's poetry does point to an Indigenous subjectivity that includes urban and even globalized forms of belonging. The author's condemnation of the more patriarchal aspects of Wampis and Awajun tradition, which she comments upon by highlighting women's connection to plants, testifies to her ability to reflect critically upon some aspects of Indigenous culture, while praising her community's ties to more-than-human existence.

Ananco decries Indigenous precepts that bar women from having access to knowledge. In "Mujer" (Woman) she denounces ready-made notions about women held by some Indigenous and non-Indigenous men. The poetic voice addresses a man and states accusingly: "A woman cannot study because she gets pregnant,' you usually say" (41).⁴⁰ The author claims her right to learn and to study, but she goes beyond that and deplores the belittlement of women's wisdom. In "Palabra del hombre wampis" (Word of a Wampis Man) she critically reproduces caricatures of women uttered by Wampis men: "Women are like lice / They talk baselessly / Don't be like a woman / [...] Be a man, the Wampis usually say, also the Awajun" (97).⁴¹ Such misrepresentations of womanhood can, in the worst cases, lead to violence against women, as depicted in "Mujer": "But you throw your wife on the floor and kick her / [...] You hit her" (41-43).⁴²

The poet challenges the patriarchal values prevalent in some quarters of Wampis and Awajun communities (Pau 380) and, at the same time, highlights the centrality of women in Indigenous culture. "Mujer" list several women deities, including the above-mentioned Nunkui and Tsunkui. About Nunkui, for instance, the poem states: "*Nunkui* is the mother earth / Remember, *Nunkui* is a woman / [...] She has powerful ideas" (41).⁴³ The poet underlines the contradiction of worshipping women goddesses while debasing actual women and draws parallels between the goddess of the earth and Wampis and Awajun women, who are the ones responsible for tending plants in their communities. The poem "Soy mujer y puedo" (I am a Woman and I Can) enumerates the strengths of women: "I can walk, I can fly, / I can flow like water and pamper life, / yes, I can" (15).⁴⁴ The constant repetition of "I can" in the poem signals women's ability to overcome adversity and forge their own path.

In several of Ananco's texts, women are praised for their strong connection to the land and for their ability to cultivate and care for plants. Significantly, in Wampis and Awajun communities the *anen* about agriculture are sung exclusively by women (Espino and Mamani 64). In keeping with her "multiple identity," the writer both

⁴⁰ "La mujer no puede estudiar porque se embaraza,' sueles decir."

⁴¹ "Las mujeres son come [sic] piojos / Hablan sin fundamento / No seas como una mujer / [...] Sé hombre, suelen decir los wampis, los awajun también."

⁴² "Pero arrojas a tu esposa al suelo y la pateas / [...] Le pegas."

⁴³ "*Nunkui* es la madre tierra [...] / Recuerda, *Nunkui* es mujer / [...] Posee ideas poderosas."

⁴⁴ "Puedo caminar, puedo volar, / puedo fluir como el agua y mimar la vida / sí, puedo."

acknowledges women's ties to plants and, engaging a feminist outlook, resignifies this traditional bond not as a mark of passivity, as it has often been cast in Western culture,⁴⁵ but as an argument for women's empowerment. The author underscores women's ability to cultivate plants and their intimate relationship with vegetal beings as an advantageous, distinctive trait, combining both Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives.

"Supich" (Hard Yuca) addresses female identification with a specific plant, as the poetic voice beings by stating: "I feel *supich*" ("Me siento *supich*," 89). The reason for this feeling is possibly the fact that, as the glossary explains, *supich* is hard yuca, which cannot be cooked and eaten. A hard plant that is not easily turned into a commodity to be consumed is a fitting vegetal correlative to Ananco, who refuses to be pigeonholed into her identity as Indigenous, as a woman or as a city-dweller. "Why can we now not turn into *supich*?" ("¿Por qué ahora no podemos convertirnos en *supich*?" 89), the poem asks rhetorically, only to end with a renewed statement of allegiance to the mode of being of the plant: "Today I feel *supich*" ("En este día me siento *supich*," 89).

Beyond identification with a specific plant, we also find in Ananco's poetry the desire to blur the boundaries between plants and humans by speculating about vegetal life's behavior if it had human features. The poem "La caoba" (Mahogany) bemoans the rootedness of a mahogany tree that makes it vulnerable to violence: "Condemned to remain still, / [...] They kick its trunk without misgivings / the ornate roots groan / sliding imperceptible tears. / Its body wiggles / dodging the blade of a machete" (65-67).⁴⁶ Tied to a place, the tree can only wiggle to avoid cuts and is exposed to blows that are a sign of humans' disregard for vegetal suffering. The tree is personified and imbued with feelings: it fears "[t]he casual blow of humans with a chainsaw" (67)⁴⁷ that would mindlessly cut it down. Its groans and cries of pain draw attention to the distress of vegetal life by making it perceptible for humans. In another section, the poetic voice wonders: "What would it do if it had feet and not roots? If it had hands and not branches?" (65).⁴⁸ The questions go unanswered but invite readers to see the world from the perspective of the plant and imagine what it might do if its body were more human-like.

In "Kion" (Ginger) Ananco describes ginger by comparing the body of the plant to human form, underlining the proximity between human and more-than-human corporeality (Pau 371). While ginger has no voice, tongue, hands and heart, it is able to perform many of the tasks humans accomplish using those organs: it offers advice, cures people and leaves them nostalgic (63). The poem states: "Even though it has nothing, it surprises us" (63)⁴⁹ precisely because humans do not always expect plants to display complex forms of behavior. The text evokes the fact, now widely recognized

⁴⁵ See Merchant and Plumwood *passim*.

⁴⁶ "Condenado a permanecer quieto, / [...] Patean el tronco sin recelo, / las raíces ornamentadas gimen / deslizándose lágrimas imperceptibles. / Su cuerpo se contonea / esquivando el filo del machete."

⁴⁷ "El golpe casual del hombre con una motosierra."

⁴⁸ "¿qué haría si tuviera pies y no raíces? ¿si tuviera manos y no ramas?"

⁴⁹ "Pese a no tener nada, nos espanta."

in biology, that plants are capable of communicating both with one another, with fungi and with human and non-human animals. In return for its curative properties, the poem advises humans to protect the plant: "Take good care of it / Defending it / dreaming of it, singing *anen* to it" (63).⁵⁰ Women, tasked with cultivating plants in Wampis/Awaju culture, tend them almost in the same way as they would take care of a child, which highlights the relations of kinship between human and more-than-human beings.

In her writings, Ananco claims her enduring ties to her Indigenous community of origin, at the same time as she asserts her urban, globalized, female identity. She underscores Indigenous women's close connection to plants as an emancipatory gesture, pushing against patriarchal views of femininity by showing that, through their knowledge of vegetal cultivation and of plants' medicinal properties, women provide the basis for communal life in Amazonia.

The ontological turn, inspired by Amazonian ethnology, calls for a relativization of Western scientific and philosophical precepts and acknowledges not merely a multiplicity of perspectives on the world, but the existence of different worlds. Contemporary Amazonian women's poetry on plants showcases these other worlds, where more-than-human beings take center-stage. Cabral's texts reflect upon human indebtedness to vegetal beings for nourishment and for providing the material basis for human culture, at the same time as she speculates about human/plant identification. While Cabral takes the Western tradition as a point of departure and then incorporates some aspects of Amazonian Indigenous and riverine thought into her texts, Ananco threads the inverse path. She grounds her writings on the teachings of her Indigenous community of origin, but claims her multiple identities as Indigenous, as city-dweller and as a woman. In her poetry, she leverages Indigenous women's special connection to plant cultivation as an argument for female empowerment. Both authors emphasize the ubiquitous presence of vegetal life in Amazonian existence and its significance for both Indigenous and non-indigenous Amazonian cultures.

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⁵⁰ "Cúdaló bien / Mezquinándolo, soñándolo, cantándole el *anen*."

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