

Living the Law of Origin: The Cosmological, Ontological, Epistemological, and Ecological Framework of Kogi Environmental Politics



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Abstract

Living the Law of Origin: The Cosmological, Ontological, Epistemological, and Ecological Framework of Kogi Environmental Politics

This project engages with the *Kogi*, an Amerindian indigenous people from the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta mountain range in northern Colombia. Kogi leaders have been engaging in a consistent ecological-political activism to protect the Sierra Nevada from environmentally harmful developments. More specifically, they have attempted to raise awareness and understanding among the wider public about why and how these activities are destructive according to their knowledge and relation to the world. The foreign nature of these underlying ontological understandings, statements, and practices, has created difficulties in conveying them to mainstream, scientific society. Furthermore, the pre-determined cosmological foundations of Kogi society, continuously asserted by them, present a problem to anthropology in terms of suitable analytical categories.

My work aims to clarify and understand Kogi environmental activism in their own terms, aided by anthropological concepts and “Western” forms of expression. I elucidate and explain how Kogi ecology and public politics are embedded in an old, integrated, and complex way of being, knowing, and perceiving on the Sierra Nevada. I argue that theoretically this task involves taking a *realist* approach that recognises the Kogi’s cause as intended truth claims of practical environmental relevance. By avoiding constructivist and interpretivist approaches, as well as the recent “ontological pluralism” in anthropology, I seek to do justice to the Kogi’s own essentialist and universalist ontological principles, which also implies following their epistemological rationale. For this purpose, I immersed myself for two years in Kogi life on the Sierra, and focused on structured learning sessions with three *Mamas*, Kogi spiritual leaders and knowledge specialists. I reflect on how this interaction was possible because my project was compatible with the *Mamas*’ own desire to clarify and contextualise the Kogi ecological cause.

After presenting this experience, I analyse the material as a multifaceted, interrelated, and elaborate *system* to reflect the organic, structured composition of Kogi and Sierra, also consciously conveyed as such by the *Mamas*. I hereby intend to show how the Kogi reproduce, live, and sustain this system through daily practices and institutions, and according to cosmological principles that guide a knowledgeable, ecological relationality with things, called ‘the Law of Origin’. To describe this system, I develop a correspondingly holistic and necessary integration of the anthropological concepts of *cosmology*, *ontology*, *epistemology*, and *ecology*. Based on this, I argue that Kogi eco-politics are equally embedded in this system, and constitute a contemporary attempt to maintain their regulatory relations with the Sierra Nevada and complement their everyday care-taking practices and rituals. In Kogi terms, this continuity and coherence is a moral imperative and environmental necessity. Thus framing and clarifying Kogi eco-politics may enrich insights into the nature of indigenous ecological knowledge, and may help address environmental problems.

This dissertation is dedicated to the great Mama Pedro Juan Noevita. To the immense regret of everyone in the Sierra Nevada and beyond, he left us unexpectedly, taking his kindness, wisdom, and great knowledge with him. *Hate*, I will never forget what you and the *Haba* did for me, and although our work could not be finished, you shall be there in *Aluna*.



Image: *Aluna the Movie*.

I also wish to dedicate my work to my dear grandfather, Karl-Otto Witte. Granting me much contentment, he waited to hear that I had successfully passed my oral examination for the PhD before passing away shortly after and finding peace. His enthusiastic words of encouragement before the Viva gave me strength for this. *Ich bin sehr glücklich und dankbar dass Du das noch mitbekommen hast mein lieber Opa. Prost!*

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Table of Contents

Abstract	III
Acknowledgments	VII
Abbreviations	XIV
Tables	XIV
Figures and Maps	XV
Glossary of Kogi Terms	XIX
Introduction	1
I. The Sierra Nevada and the Four Peoples	3
II. The Kogi emergence	7
III. The Kogi eco-politics.....	8
The Sierra and environmental damage.....	8
An ecological way of being?.....	11
IV. Aims, rationale, and structure.....	14
Chapter 1 The Sierra, the Kogi, and the outside world: from the Law of Origin to current eco-politics	18
1.1. The Kogi and the Sierra	19
1.1.1. The Four Peoples	19
1.1.2. A living Heart as an organised landscape.....	20
1.1.3. Communal organisation	21
1.1.4. The Mamas: regulating the Sierra and the Kogi.....	23
1.1.5. The equilibrium of forces	26
1.1.6. Further practices and relations to the Sierra	27
1.1.7. A knowledgeable ecology.....	30
1.2. The ethno-historical roots of Kogi society.....	30
1.2.1. Complex regional connections	30
1.2.2. The Kogi and the Tairona.....	32
1.3. Kogi relations with the outside world	35
1.3.1. Retreat, material simplicity, and spiritual prominence.....	35
1.3.2. Kogi peaceful resistance	36
1.3.3. Secular pressures and suspicion of outsiders	37
1.3.4. Drastic changes.....	38
1.4. Continuing an old ontology	39
1.4.1. Continuity through change.....	39
1.4.2. “Religious persistence” as ecological imperative.....	41
1.4.3. From cosmological principles to eco-political activism.....	42

Chapter 2 Approaching Kogi Ontology and Epistemology	46
2.1. A problem of communication and understanding	46
2.2. Interrelating fieldwork with Kogi ontology and ecology	50
2.2.1. Previous work on the Kogi.....	50
2.2.2. Spiritually consulted fieldwork: the Sierra responds	51
2.2.3. A base in the Sierra Nevada	55
2.3. A realist approach towards a realist way of being	56
2.3.1. From constructivist worldviews to multiple worlds.....	56
2.3.2. A realist approach	59
2.4. Adjusting to Kogi ontology is following Kogi epistemology	62
2.4.1. Knowledge and being	62
2.4.2. Translation and adjusting to Kogi epistemology	65
2.4.3. Co-theorisation.....	66
2.4.4. Interaction during the sessions	69
Chapter 3 Water	71
3.1. The Origin: darkness, Aluna, and water	72
3.2. The high lakes	75
3.2.1. The birth of the world	75
3.2.2. A generational descent from the top	76
3.2.3. The sun and water	78
3.3. The creation of Mother Zaldziwê: the Sea	79
3.3.1. The interplay of forces generates order.....	79
3.3.2. The Sea and the Sierra Nevada	81
3.3.3. The Black Line and the Ancestral Territory	83
3.4. Aluna and water	85
3.4.1. Communication and exchange	85
3.4.2. The global, spiritual cycle of water.....	90
3.4.3. <i>Aluna ishguashi</i> in Kogi society	92
3.5. Notes on the ecology of water	94
3.5.1. A disrupted water cycle.....	94
3.5.2. Damaging the shoreline	96
3.5.3. Spiritual connections and taking care of water.....	98
Chapter 4 The Earth and the World	103
4.1. The Sierra as ‘Government’	104
4.2. Outwards from the Centre: the formation of the world.....	106
4.2.1. Establishing the Centre.....	106

4.2.2. A structure that sustains life	107
4.3. Composition and structure.....	109
4.3.1. Making the model	109
4.3.2. The four celestial realms	111
4.3.3. The water cycle and the cosmic structure	112
4.4. Resemblances between the Sierra and the Kogi.....	114
4.4.1. Cosmological structure, the Sierra, and architecture	114
4.4.2. The worldly body and the Fabric of Life	118
4.5. ‘The missing roof and mud’: How Seizhankua covered the Earth.....	122
4.5.1. Black earth, territorial organisation, and the sacred sites	122
4.5.2. Damage, order, and behaviour	124
4.6. ‘Naming’ as being and knowing	125
4.7. Interrelating Cosmos and Earth.....	127
4.7.1. Mapping a planetary scheme unto cosmic layers	127
4.7.2. A network of life	130
4.8. Alterations to Earth and Cosmos.....	131
4.8.1. Destablising the Government.....	131
4.8.2. Hurting a person.....	132
4.8.3. Disarranging earths, sites and objects	133
Chapter 5 Trees and Forests	135
5.1. One trunk, many branches.....	135
5.1.1. The World Tree or Tree of Life	135
5.1.2. Threads and branches	137
5.2. Planting a bare Sierra	140
5.2.1. Offering trees	140
5.2.2. Sowing the seeds.....	142
5.3. Trees, order, and life	143
5.3.1. Distribution of trees	143
5.3.2. A balance of trees.....	145
5.4. <i>Kaxsouggi</i> : Kogi relations to trees.....	146
5.4.1. Sacred sites and scared trees	146
5.4.2. The Kogi and the <i>Kaxsouggi</i>	148
5.4.3. The Kogi, trees, and nourishment	150
5.5. Ontological correspondences.....	152
5.5.1. Trees, <i>ezwamas</i> and lineages.....	152
5.5.2. Trees, hair, and thatched roofs	156

5.6. Watering Kalbəsánkua	158
5.6.1. The axe and the chainsaw	158
5.6.2. To think and act well is to know and care	160
Chapter 6 Food and Nourishment	161
6.1. The origin of food: taking care of the world	162
6.1.1. ‘Human origins are the origins of food’	162
6.1.2. Nourishment as knowledgeable ecological behaviour	163
6.1.3. Nourishment and Aluna	165
6.2. Creating foodstuffs: studying, making, and implementing	166
6.2.1. Learning is caring	166
6.2.2. Nuhuakalda and emulating the ancestral <i>Kuivis</i>	169
6.3. The story of <i>gakue</i>	171
6.3.1. Paying for foodstuffs to ensure future nourishment	171
6.3.2. Distributing crops around the Sierra	175
6.3.3. The <i>Kuktuma</i> stones and the <i>Kagguba</i> plants	176
6.4. The practice of nourishing	178
6.4.1. <i>Kualdama</i>	178
6.4.2. Organised nourishment, balance, and reciprocity	181
6.4.3. The ecology of debt and un-nourishment	184
Chapter 7 The System	188
7.1. The Mamas: teaching the whole	189
7.1.1. An organised presentation	189
7.1.2. Conscious wholeness	190
7.1.3. Two forms of teaching	191
7.2. Understanding Kogi holistic realism through four anthropological concepts	192
7.3. A fractal model	196
7.3.1. Chains of associations and levels of interpretation	196
7.3.2. Nine levels	197
7.3.3. Teaching interrelated layers by overview	201
7.4. A causal, cosmological framework	203
7.4.1. The Sierra as Sea: cosmological origin	203
7.4.2. The Sierra as House: cosmological structure	204
7.5. The interweaving of ontology and epistemology	206
7.5.1. The Sierra as Government: ontological order	206
7.5.2. The Sierra as World Tree (and Fabric of Life): epistemology and functionality	208
7.6. The knowledgeable, ecological regulation of being	210

7.6.1. The Sierra as Organism: nature and society as one <i>being</i>	210
7.6.2. The life of the Organism	212
7.7. The Mother and the Law	213
Chapter 8 Systemic Eco-Politics	216
8.1. Destabilising the system.....	217
8.1.1. Systematic disruption.....	217
8.1.2. Sacred sites: focal points of destabilisation	219
8.1.3. The health of the Organism.....	220
8.1.4. Alteration and regulation	222
8.2. The Sierra Nevada and Kogi eco-politics	223
8.2.1. Cosmo-social administration.....	223
8.2.2. Practicing onto-political governance.....	225
8.3. Four Fields of action	227
8.3.1. Holistic Kogi-Sierra politics: Autonomy.....	227
8.3.2. Relating epistemologies: Education	228
8.3.3. Sierra Ecology through Kogi Health.....	230
8.3.4. Regulating the Territory through political means	231
8.4. The inside and the outside	236
8.4.1. Directing and regulating from within	236
8.4.2. Incorporating the external	237
8.4.3. Taking understanding and practices out into the world	240
8.5. Systemic Eco-Politics	242
8.5.1. Ethnic politics and local knowledge	242
8.5.2. Political ontology, literal truth, and environmental relevance	243
8.5.3. Enacting and maintaining the system politically.....	244
Chapter 9 (Conclusion) The Law of the Mother	247
9.1. Living the Law today.....	247
9.2. The Mother speaks.....	249
9.3. Failing the Mother.....	251
9.3.1. A moral system.....	251
9.3.2. Social disorder	252
9.3.3. Renovation	254
9.4. Realism as ethical principle?	255
Bibliography	259

Abbreviations

- CIT:** Confederación Indígena Tayrona (Arhuaco Organisation).
CTC: Consejo Territorial de Cabildos (Council of all Four Peoples).
IEK: Indigenous Ecological Knowledge.
FHW: *From the Heart of the World* (Kogi film).
KMA: Kogi-Malayo-Arhuaco. The indigenous reservation where the Kogi mostly live.
OGT: Organización Gonawindúa Tairona (Kogi Organisation).
OIK: Organización Indígena Kankuama. (Kankuamo Organisation)
OWYBT: Organización Wiwa Yugumaiun Bunkuanarrua Tayrona (Wiwa Organisation).
SNSM: Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta.
THT: Tairona Heritage Trust.

Tables

Table 1: Generally opposed cosmo-epistemological rationales involved in my thesis.....	67
Table 2: Timetable of learning sessions with the Mamas	70
Table 3: Complementary learning sessions with other Mamas	70
Table 4: Principal cosmological complementary dualities	74
Table 5: The <i>ezwamas'</i> different reactions to the offering of trees	142
Table 6: Examples of Kogi and non-Kogi trees	145
Table 7: Aspects of the system according to the three frames of reference.....	194-195

Figures and Maps

Figure I:	Location of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta.....	2
Figure II:	The Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta.....	3
Figure III:	Men from the Four Peoples exchanging coca leaves.....	6
Figure IV:	Political map of the Sierra Nevada.....	6
●		
Figure 1.1:	The Sierra Nevada is a sacred territory par excellence.....	18
Figure 1.2:	Steep, rugged and compact mountains	23
Figure 2.1:	Anthropology and cultural worldviews	59
Figure 2.2:	“Worlds” as meta-ontological assumption	59
●		
Figure 3.1:	‘First there was the sea’	71
Figure 3.2:	Upper peaks within which ‘black water’ is held.....	74
Figure 3.3:	Black frog.....	75
Figure 3.4:	A primordial, creational lake	76
Figure 3.5:	Kogi leader Mariano and Mama Dúkua	81
Figure 3.6:	Kogi woman picking coca leaves	82
Figure 3.7:	A cosmological space delimited by the Black Line	84
Figure 3.8:	Mamas making payments by the coast.....	85
Figure 3.9:	Water as an intermediary state between spirit and matter	86
Figure 3.10:	A primary, cosmic <i>zhátukua</i>	87
Figure 3.11:	A secondary ‘bowl’, a coastal estuary descended from the lakes	87
Figure 3.12:	A tertiary divination bowl	87
Figure 3.13:	Mama Salé holding and watching a human divining bowl	87
Figure 3.14:	A collective divination on a sacred site.....	88
Figure 3.15:	Mama Félix divining alone in his house	89
Figure 3.16:	Main flows of life and communication	90
Figure 3.17:	The crew of the film <i>Aluna</i> confessing.....	93
Figure 3.18:	Kogi system of confession.....	93
Figure 3.19:	Dried out riverbed in the mountains	95
Figure 3.20:	Effects of damning the Ranchería River.....	95
Figure 3.21:	Damage to the Ciénaga Grande lagoon.....	95
Figure 3.22:	Puerto Brisa harbour from the air	98
Figure 3.23:	The basic cosmological hierarchy of sacred sites	99

Figure 3.24: Kogi returning to Dumingeka after a communal confession	101
Figure 3.25: The ‘toes’ of the mountains.....	101
•	
Figure 4.1: The Kalbəsánkua peak	105
Figure 4.2: Concentric and hierarchical understanding of ontological governance	106
Figure 4.3: Approximate basic layout of the foundations of the cosmos.....	107
Figure 4.4: The ‘mountains’ of a Kogi village	108
Figure 4.5: Mama Manuel holding an initial model of Kalbəsánkua and the fifth level.....	109
Figure 4.6: Mama Manuel, Mama Luntana, and Juan holding the complete cosmic model.....	109
Figure 4.7: The fifth level of the cosmos.....	110
Figure 4.8: The slogan of the Kogi Organisation	112
Figure 4.9: The logo of the OGT	112
Figure 4.10: The cosmos according to the Mamas	112
Figure 4.11: The Kogi <i>nuhué</i> with its layers	116
Figure 4.12: Building a new <i>nuhué</i> in Dumingeka.....	116
Figure 4.13: The <i>nuhué</i> ’s four hearths, occupied by the Four Fathers	116
Figure 4.14: Invisible lower four cosmic layers of the <i>nuhué</i>	116
Figure 4.15: My drawing of Mama Manuel’s description of the <i>nuhué</i> ’s interior.....	117
Figure 4.16: Mama Bernardo baptising the finished <i>nuhué</i>	117
Figure 4.17: Juan making payments to the four cardinal directions	117
Figure 4.18: Rocky mountain side as door into Nuhuakalda	118
Figure 4.19: <i>Comisario</i> wearing crossed bags.....	120
Figure 4.20: The Kogi loom, <i>zhakwánkalda</i>	120
Figure 4.21: The five main Kogi <i>ezwamas</i>	120
Figure 4.22: The four quadrants and the Four Peoples’ territories	120
Figure 4.23: The Kogi spindle (<i>sukalda</i>) as model of the cosmos	121
Figure 4.24: Kogi bag.....	121
Figure 4.25: The ‘deep’ origin of the cosmos with its levels.....	121
Figure 4.26: Generational, expanding descent of sacred sites	123
Figure 4.27: Mama Manuel’s second model, integrating flat and spherical views of the Earth	128
Figure 4.28: Mama Manuel explaining the model.....	128
Figure 4.29: Mama Manuel and Mama Luntana sitting by the sacred site	129
Figure 4.30: Drawing of the Sierra’s nine levels, nine earths and gold figures.....	131
Figure 4.31: The open-pit mine of El Cerrejón.....	133
•	

Figure 5.1: Yggdrasil (Oluf Olufsen Bagge, 1847)	136
Figure 5.2: The cosmos and the Cosmic-Pillar Kalbəsánkua	137
Figure 5.3: Kalbəsánkua as World Tree	137
Figure 5.4: The descent and expansion of the world	139
Figure 5.5: Expanding concentricity as a ramifying tree	139
Figure 5.6: Inside of Kogi Cosmic Bag as Fabric of Life.....	140
Figure 5.7: The transformation of spiritual people into natural elements	143
Figure 5.8: A forest of tall, ‘non-Kogi trees’	145
Figure 5.9: A Kogi homestead surrounded by small ‘Kogi trees’	145
Figure 5.10: A sacred site marked by trees and stones above the village of Luaka	147
Figure 5.11: A <i>Kaxsouggi</i> tree on a sacred site	147
Figure 5.12: Seizhua, the <i>ezwama</i> where Mama Shibulata learned.....	153
Figure 5.13: Mama Salé, his beard, and his special bag.....	153
Figure 5.14: The <i>ezwama</i> of Kuamaka	153
Figure 5.15: Mama Bernardo, from Kuamaka, has no facial hair	153
Figure 5.16: Lineages and valleys ramifying out from the World Tree Kalbəsánkua	154
Figure 5.17: The four main Kogi male and female lineages	155
•	
Figure 6.1: A Kogi homestead in the lower parts	162
Figure 6.2: A homestead in the mid-range.....	162
Figure 6.3: A family compound in the higher parts.....	162
Figure 6.4: A traditional bowl and spoon	162
Figure 6.5: Alejo and the Tungeka Mamas sitting at another sacred site.....	166
Figure 6.6: A simulation of two <i>Kuivis</i> being trained.....	170
Figure 6.7: Territory of the Ñañi.....	173
Figure 6.8: Territory of the Kogi	173
Figure 6.9: Rock on the boundary by the path.....	173
Figure 6.10: A Kogi village surrounded by plantain bushes	175
Figure 6.11: Possible <i>Kagguba</i> plants	178
Figure 6.12: A Mama wearing the mask of Hiséi	179
Figure 6.13: Kogi dancer in ritual attire wearing the mask of Mama Surli Uakai	179
Figure 6.14: Kogi men playing music.....	181
Figure 6.15: Kogi women dancing	181
Figure 6.16: Kogi procession during a <i>kualdama</i> -type ceremonial period	181
Figure 6.17: Payments deposited at stones	184

Figure 6.18: Ancestral <i>Comisarios</i> and <i>Cabos</i> turned into stone	184
•	
Figure 7.1: Model of the Kogi system.....	213
•	
Figure 8.1: The OGT's logo	224
Figure 8.2: The OGT's structure, mirroring cosmic concentricity	225
Figure 8.3: Four Peoples marching towards Hukulwa in protest.....	226
Figure 8.4: Summit of Kogi Mamas, <i>Comisarios</i> and OGT leaders	227
Figure 8.5: Map of the official Indigenous Territories in Colombia	233
Figure 8.6: OGT map of sacred sites on the north-western coast	234
Figure 8.7: Journeying around the Black Line 1	235
Figure 8.8: Journeying around the Black Line 2.....	235
Figure 8.9: Alejo at the recently erected Kogi houses by the sea	236
Figure 8.10: The place that connects to Bogotá	237
Figure 8.11: The Colombian President, Juan Manuel Santos, holding the staff	238
Figure 8.12: The Colombian President confessing at the meeting	239
Figure 8.13: The president with leaders of the Four Peoples	239
Figure 8.14: Alejo with his poporo at the Guatavita lake in the Colombian Andes.....	241
Figure 8.15: Systemic eco-politics.....	246

Glossary of Kogi Terms

(Foreign terms are always italicised, excluding proper nouns, when as part of a quote in English, and the title 'Mama[s]' due to frequency of use)

Aldu: Spear

Aldwáñiku: One of the principal Four Fathers. Ancestor of Alejo's lineage, Sauna.

Aluna: The universal consciousness, the Mother's thought, the spirit in all things.

Aluna gakue: Spiritual food.

Aluna hanguté: To think well.

Aluna ishguashi: Confession, to deposit one's spiritual essences, to 'do in spirit'.

Aluna kaggaba: Spiritual people, living in the otherworld Nuhuakalda.

Aluna nusegatsé: Bad, dirty, or improper thought/spirit.

Aluna zhakwá: Spiritual clothing. Following Reichel-Dolmatoff, the 'Fabric of Life'.

Awimaldué: One of the five principal mountains in Mama Shibulata's story of the Earth.

Black Line: The spiritual perimeter that surrounds the Sierra Nevada's base, made up of hundreds of sacred sites.

Cabo: An assistant of the Kogi village headmen, carries out the latter's instructions.

Cherúa: Place where the Four Peoples were born.

Comisario: The Spanish term for a village headman, *Húgukui*.

Dahke: Female lineages.

Dibændshizha: Taught, initiated, and fertilised the spiritual tree-people.

Duekue: 'Elder Brothers', or also the village elders. Just *due* can address someone by 'sir' or 'mister'.

Duleshkawa: The place of origin of disease.

Dumingeka: My base during fieldwork, Mama Shibulata's village.

Eizua: One

Ezwama: The first heat. Principal sacred sites, places of organisation.

Gaka: General Kogi term for 'sacred site'.

Gakue: Food and nourishment.

Gakue abaksæ: Black food, the primary, cosmic state of food.

Gamá: Knitted bag.

Guasũñze: Forbidden, something that should not be done.

Gonawindúa: The seed of existence from which everything germinated and has developed through time. The navel of the universe, the world's principal mountain. Name of the Kogi Organisation.

Goltué: One of the five principal mountains in Mama Shibulata's story of the Earth.

Gukasá: One of the four ancestral apprentices who learned and created food.

Guxsé: Fire and energy in general.

Haba: Mother.

Haggi. Stone.

Hantshibé: Good.

Hâñú: Coca leaves.

Hate: Father. Used for sacred sites, spiritual powers, and to address a Mama.

Hatsá: Protective spiritual wristbands given by the Mamas.

Háxkbelda: Female ancestor stones.

Háxksinkanna: Male stones, formerly Mamas/Comisarios, who watch over Kogi villages.

Haxsunkalda: Conscious stones usually located at sacred sites and/or by the *Kaxsouggi* trees.

Héñkalaha: One of the four celestial realms.

Hiúnguldê: Path, whether physical or path of learning. The Four Topics were four paths.

Huésgwi: Father-in-law.

Húgukui: A village headman. Ensures order of Kogi society and adherence to cosmological principles through a combination of knowledge, morality, and discipline.

Hukulwa: The coastal sacred site where tensions in the sea's story were settled, now destroyed by a coal port.

Hukumeizhi: Mama Salé's lineage, originates in a forested valley where people have more facial hair.

Îtueld: General term for divination. Literally, to see spiritually, beyond.

Kabizhi tueld: To dream (and interpret those dreams).

Kággaba: Kogi self-designation. People of the Earth / Initial People.

Kaggi: Earth, soil, territory, or world.

Kagguba: Primary, unique plant specimens through which Mamas make payments to all plants.

Kaknabbøggølda: Ice, a sister of the sea.

Kaldakshé: The Father of Trees.

Kaldāwiā: The Mother of Trees.

Kaldzi: Tree(s).

Kalbəsánkua: The Cosmic-Pillar, World Tree, and Tree of Knowledge.

Kalguasha: A creational character, a “deity”, collectively ‘the Spiritual Fathers and Mothers’.

Kasa zǎlda: From the source.

Kashívítukua: A type of divination that involves moving the hands.

Kaxsəma: The mother that have the seeds of trees.

Kaxsouggi: A special sacred tree. Also, the people that deceived and ate the Kogi.

Kaxzinama: The first of the four ancestral apprentices who learned and created food.

Koggian: The Kogi language.

Kualdama: The set of ceremonies, dances, and payments that nourish and renew life.

Kualdzhiubañ: The Mother of Food.

Kuamaka: The *ezwama* of Mama Bernardo. It rejected trees in the story.

Kuivi: A Mama apprentice.

Kuizêld: To play music, or the flute more specifically.

Kuizi: Kogi flute.

Kuktuma: Nine-tiered, nine coloured stones to make payments to plants and crops.

Kunchabitawêya: One of the principal Four Fathers of creation.

Lama: Life and growth.

Law of Origin: The cosmic principles and rules that organise and regulate life. Also called the Law of the Mother and Law of Sé.

Luaka: A Kogi village where payments are made to protect Bogotá, the Colombian capital.

Magutama: One of the most important *ezwamas*, related to fire.

Makú: Father Thunder. Also, a supreme Kogi authority who combines spiritual and civil powers.

Mama: A Kogi spiritual leader, knowledgeable man, and cosmic care-taker. Means ‘sun’ and ‘double heat’.

Mamaishkagaka: The place beyond the sea where all the rivers go to confess.

Mamaldwué: One of the five principal mountains in the Earth’s story.

Mamawixka: A male character that watches over the high lakes, helped the sea confess, and is an example for the Mamas.

Mamougi: A male character that received the Kogi’s cotton.

Mandáouldo: A mal character who both established the world’s final tree-cover and acquired important seeds for the Kogi, teaching them how to plant and tend to those fields.

Mantakalda: The Mother of Plantain in the story of food.

Mébangokui: The high lakes.

Mochila: The Kogi bags.

Mokuákukui: Father Sun.

Mukuánabue: Another apprentice who learned and created food.

Mukuátsiwê: A lake, origin of humans.

Mulkuaba: One of the four celestial realms, communicates with the Cosmic Base (*Shkuákalda*) below.

Mulkueke: The wise, neutral Spiritual Father who often acts as arbiter and foresees things.

Mulzigabba: Words, speech.

Mundaldzika: The coming dawn.

Næbbæguizhi: Mama Pedro Juan's *ezwama*.

Nabbækádziwê: A high lake, origin of certain animal species.

Namak: True.

Nâmto: The Mamas' hat.

Nañi: A younger brother.

Nañi Sægaká / Nañi Uldabángwi: Indigenous peoples living in the lower Sierra in the story of food.

Nañi(kue): The 'Younger Brother(s)'.

Naxku: Salt, a sister of the sea.

Nebæshizha: A time to make rituals for water, rain, and crops.

Noxlawiâ: The sea's Mother.

Nuabi: Snow, a sister of the sea.

Nubaka: Sacred site where I visited Mama Pedro Juan.

Nuggi: The lime or sea shell-powder used for the *poporo*.

Nuhuakalda: The spiritual otherworld inside the mountains, the blueprint of existence and the support of everything that exists. The soul of the Earth. Meso-cosmic realm.

Nuhué: The Kogi cosmic-house where the men gather.

Nuk: Everything.

Nukasá: The sea's Father.

Nulkuhaluwa: The Sierra Nevada.

Nulkukehe: The essence of the Sierra Nevada.

Ñi: Water.

Ñibaksø: The primary, dark, spiritual state of water.

Ñibuñi: The physical sea.

Ñikâlda: Rain.

Ñíkuma: A Kogi village community.

Ñikwitsi: Transparent objects to make payments to water.

Ñiuba: Gold, gold objects.

Ñiuwabake: One of the four celestial realms. Holds the Cosmic-Pillar in place.

Ñiuwî: The physical sun.

Padres Espirituales: The Spiritual Fathers.

Pldañsé: White People, or Europeans.

Poporo: The Kogi lime gourd.

Samineizhi: A Kogi village associated with strong traditions.

Saha: Moon. Knowledgeable Kogi women, normally wives of the Mamas.

Sañ: Hair.

Sé: The original darkness of creation from whence everything arose.

Séishizha: The Kogi term for the Black Line. The thread of Sé.

Seizhadzhíñmako: Distributed trees around the world.

Seizhankua: The principal Spiritual Father. Father of Earth. Ancestor of the *ezwama* of *Seizhua*.

Seizhua: An *ezwama* related to *Seizhankua*. Mama Valencio was in charge of it.

Séneka: The Mother of the nine earths.

Sénekañ: The Spiritual Mother who have indications to *Siókokui* to confess and name all things.

Sénenulang: The physical world, fifth cosmic layer. A Mother.

Sétuke: He impregnated *Zaldziwê* for her to become the physical sea.

Sewá: An object that channels learning, consolidates life-stages, and is a source of spiritual connection. Also means 'to be well'.

Shaldá: Term for exchange, or the lack thereof as debt.

Shi: Thread (cosmologically speaking, Thread of Life).

Shibuldama: Knowledge. The hot threads of truth, knowledge, and being.

Shibuldama akué: To be knowledgeable.

Shibuldzi: Rope.

Shikaka: The messenger bird.

Shkuákalda: The Cosmic Base-cross. Communicates with the celestial realms.

Siagawĩ: To organise.

Siókokui: One of the four principal Spiritual Fathers. Baptised and named all things.

Sintana: Defended the Kogi against the *Kaxsouggi* people.

Subá: Bald.

Sugamé: Another word for bag.

Suggi: The original word for the lime gourd.

Sukalda: The Kogi spindle.

Teikú: The Father of Gold, related to *Teizhuna*, the *Tairona* Lost City. Also, one of the four celestial realms.

Teizhuna: The Kogi term for the *Tairona* Lost City. A Mother.

Trabajos espirituales: Spanish term to designate all 'spiritual jobs' and rituals that the Kogi do.

Tuhke: Male lineages.

Tuma: Coloured stone-beads to pay different natural elements. Used by the *Tairona* too.

Tungeka: The village of Mama Luntana and Mama Manuel.

Ubastunka: A clairvoyant person. Something like 'seeing with inner eye'.

Ubatashi: The green-eyed ones, a kind of demon.

Uldu: Ceramic pots for cooking, and which at sacred sites hold gold objects.

Zalabata: The lineage of Silvestre, Mama Shibulata, and Mama Valencio.

Zaldziwê: Mother Sea, a spiritual person.

Zeiñzhakldé: To positively acknowledge something.

Zénduldzi: One of the four apprentices who learned and created foodstuffs.

Zhakwá: Clothes.

Zhakwánkalda: The loom.

Zhaldzhi: Mestizos or non-Indians, 'the ones that eat everything'.

Zhántana: The male character who chased *Seizhankua* and now confesses the rivers at *Mamaishkagaka*.

Zhátukua: The divining bowl, a Mother.

Zhigoneshi: To help. Name of the Kogi Organisation's communication centre.

Zhuluka: To be in agreement.

Zubield: To pay.

Introduction

Everything has an *origin*, a source. Everything has an *order*, and its place. Everything has a *function*, a reason to be. Everything is *related*, in mutual sustenance. These are what I call the 'Four Pillars' of life as understood by the Kogi Indigenous People of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta mountain range in northern Colombia. Following the Mamas, Kogi spiritual leaders, knowledgeable men, and cosmic care-takers, the Kogi live according to the 'Law of Origin', which they state applies to all things, and should be acknowledged and respected. For this purpose, epistemologically the Kogi follow and learn *shibuldama*, the diversifying 'threads' of truth, knowledge, and creational development from a common cosmological origin (Sé) and inherent to being. This brings awareness of the need to adhere to and reproduce these principles daily as an ontological order, which has to be constantly regulated to ensure the well-being of life on Earth as an ecological responsibility. For the Kogi, this is a moral duty, 'the path' that the Mother 'has given us', a 'mandate' that 'comes from the universe'. Following how She 'thought' things in Aluna, the mind and spirit of the world, this duty consists of certain teachings, practices, and traditions to be 'in agreement' (*zhuluká*) with the Sierra Nevada.

Based on this 'Law', the Kogi have been engaging in a form of ecological-political activism to address present environmental issues in and around the Sierra Nevada. These efforts are generally shared with the other three indigenous groups of this mountain range (Arhuaco, Wiwa, Kankuamo), and are considered inseparable from their social well-being. My thesis focuses on the Kogi, who have been systematically attempting to raise awareness of the situation according to their understanding of the world, and departs from the following main considerations. How is this Law lived by the Kogi and how does it frame their public, eco-political engagement? What kind of relationship to the Sierra do they have? Which understanding of the world underlies their ecology? In which ways can anthropology address a people who consistently assert being defined by the terms mentioned above, and claim that this has practical, environmental importance? This thesis is an attempt to contextualise, elucidate, and clarify the cosmological principles and categories, ontological understandings and living patterns, epistemological procedures, and ecological practices that together frame and underlie Kogi environmental activism or eco-politics. My work is based on approximately 22 months of intensive ethnographic fieldwork with the Kogi in 2012 and 2013, and focuses on numerous, structured learning sessions with the Mamas.



Figure I: Location of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta mountain range within Colombia. Source: *Instituto Geográfico Agustín Codazzi*.

I. The Sierra Nevada and the Four Peoples



Figure II: ‘The snowy Sierra de Santa Marta, rising abruptly above the sea to a vertical height of over three miles presents one of the grandest spectacles in the New World. Seen from the sea at sunrise, before its crests are wrapped in fleecy vapor or dense clouds, a full view is obtained of its precipitous flanks from the verdant woodlands at its base and the bluish crags following at mid-distance to the crowning glory of its rose-tinged snowy peaks, standing out against the azure sky. [...] Beneath the vertical rays of the sun beating against the multi-coloured bare rocks, the mountains seem all ablaze, as if a vast conflagration were rushing from the glaciers down to the plains’ (Reclus 1897).

The Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta (SNSM) is an isolated, pyramid-shaped mountain range¹ in Colombia that is barely but clearly separated from the northern-most tip of the Andes chain. Steeply reaching an altitude of 5.775mts in just 42km from the Caribbean shoreline, the Sierra Nevada is the world's highest coastal mountain, its fifth most prominent summit, and the highest in Colombia. Completely surrounded by plains, this tropical 'biogeographical island' (Giraldo 2010: 43) possesses all main climatic zones across its altitudinal levels and has an exceptional ecological variation, ranging from tropical beaches to permanently snow-capped peaks². On the east the Sierra overlooks the Guajira Desert, and to the west it borders Colombia's greatest river, the Magdalena, and also the vast and swampy Ciénaga Grande lagoon. As a microcosm of most mayor types of ecosystem in a relatively small area, the Sierra Nevada has a very high level of biodiversity with many endemic species of flora and fauna (Nature Conservancy 2016). An exhaustive study published in *Science* (Le Saout et al. 2013) determined the Sierra to be the most irreplaceable protected area in the world for threatened species³. The SNSM has been a National Natural Park since 1964, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve since 1979, and it is being proposed as a long-overdue World Heritage Site of mixed natural and cultural significance, of which there are only 31 worldwide.

Having always occupied a special place in the national Colombian imaginary (Giraldo 2010), this imposing mountain massif has generated old legends of enigmatic Indians with strange practices, charms, and adorations hidden in its folds (Isaacs 1884). The Kogi (who call themselves Kággaba), Arhuaco (or IkꞮ), Wiwa (or Sanhá), and Kankuamo (or Kánkui), together call themselves the 'Four Peoples' (Cuatro Pueblos)⁴ of the Sierra Nevada. They perceive and relate to this mountain as an unified, interrelated, and organised whole referred to as their 'Ancestral Territory'. This adds a *cosmological* importance to the Sierra Nevada, considered the origin of creation, the principal manifestation of the cosmos, and the regulating centre of life. The Four Peoples therefore call it 'The Heart of the World' (El Corazón del Mundo), a living, nourishing 'body' of the universal 'Mother' who also needs to be cared for in a form of fundamental reciprocity. Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff (1990f), the main anthropologist to have worked on the Kogi, called it their 'sacred mountain'.

The Four Peoples say that they (and all humanity) originated high in the Sierra. The Kogi however, consider themselves to be the *first* human children of the Mother. While the Arhuaco,

¹It has an area of 17.000km² and is about 130 km long on each side.

² In between there are coral reefs, mangroves, marshes, lowland savannah, dry and rainforests, grasslands, mountain cloud forests, high scrublands (*páramo*), rocky tundra, alpine lakes, and glaciers.

³ Out of a total of 173.461 designated protected areas.

⁴ According to official figures, in 2005 there were 22.134 Arhuaco, 12.714 Kankuamo, 9.173 Kogi, and 10.703 Wiwa (DANE 2005).

Wiwa, and Kankuamo are also 'Elder Brothers' (Hermanos Mayores), following my informants they were born in *second* place, and seemingly the other Sierra Peoples also recognise the Kogi as the eldest (Celedón 1886, Reichel-Dolmatoff 1967d). Then came other Indigenous Peoples, first those of Colombia, then the Americas, and finally of the world, who are considered 'Younger Brothers' (Hermanos Menores). Nevertheless, Indigenous Peoples generally are seen as still being elder to non-Indigenous, mainstream humanity, who are perceived as the youngest 'Little Brothers' (Hermanitos Menores). Subcategories of the latter are for instance Europeans or Whites, called the Pldañsé and considered the Mother's *seventh* children, or Colombian mestizos (mix of European and Indigenous), who are called the Zhaldzhi. While in the Kogi language *nañi* is the general word for any younger brother, collectively this designates all external, non-Sierra 'Younger Brother(s)' (Nañi[kue]) in relation to the 'Elder Brothers' (Duekue). Overall, the general term 'Younger Brother' (el Hermano Menor) is used for the wider, non-Indigenous public.

In sharp contrast to the wholeness within which the Four Peoples relate to the Sierra Nevada, the surrounding lowlands have historically seen a complicated and often messy demographic, cultural, and political make-up. A particularly long and conflictive period of colonisation (Langebaek 2007), left behind a highly heterogeneous human landscape comprised of Amerindian, European, Mestizo, and African types. As we shall see, the Sierra is a multifaceted node of economic, scientific, conservationist, political, ideological, and even cosmological relations, spaces, conflicts and discourses. These factors intersect with the Sierra's natural significance, geographical singularity, and complex ethno-historical context. The latter suggests Chibchan, Andean, Caribbean, Central American, and apparently even some lowland Amerindian connections (Chapter 1), while still exhibiting distinctly local characteristics related to a pre-Columbian group of chiefdoms called Tairona.



Figure III: Men from the Four Peoples exchanging coca leaves in greeting. From left to right: Arhuaco, Kankuamo, Kogi, Wiwa. Photo: Amado Villafaña (<http://www.agendasamaria.org>)

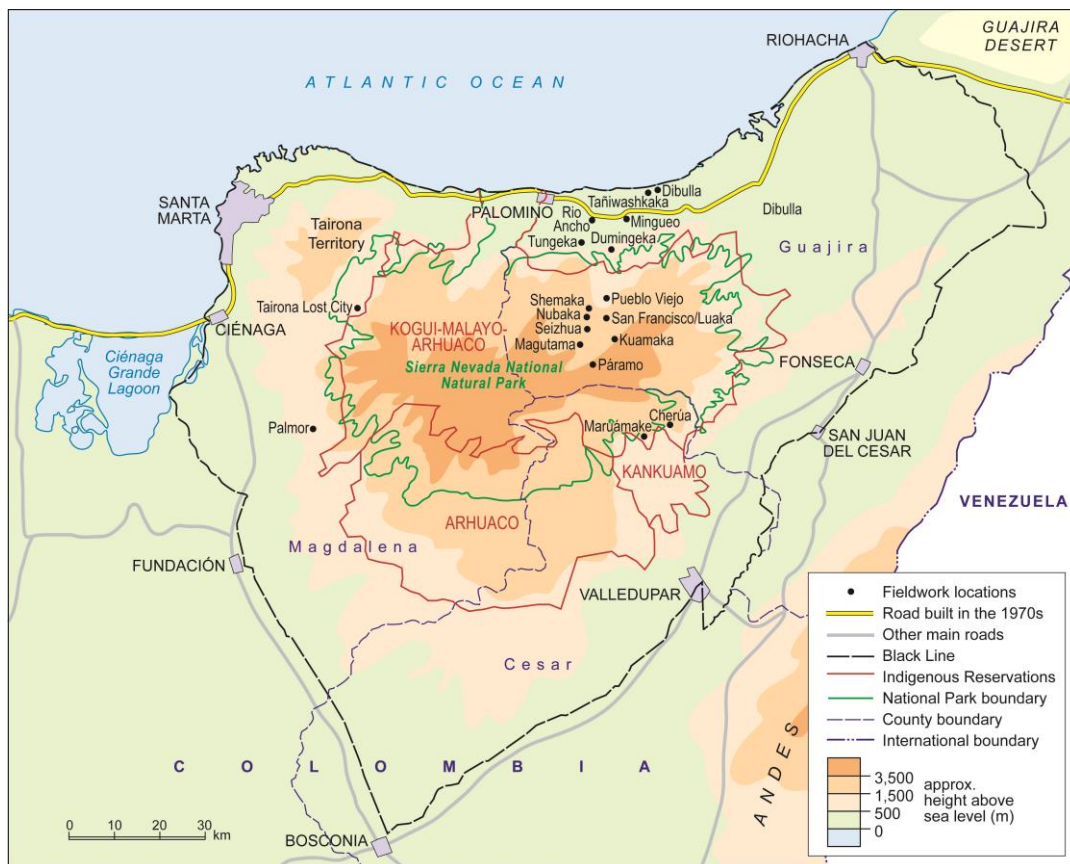


Figure IV: Political map of the Sierra Nevada with fieldwork locations and places mentioned in the text.

II. The Kogi emergence

In the 1970's and 1980's, the Four Peoples started mobilising politically to proactively face and regulate issues that were threatening the Sierra Nevada and affecting their related societies in similar ways (Botero Verswyvel 1987, Uribe 1998a). Following Kogi leaders, 'the destruction of the territory' and 'the weakening of our own culture and government' were grave, having already suffered for centuries from external impositions (Organización Gonawindúa Tayrona⁵ 2017). In a sense, the Kogi "emerged" onto the public scene from their long semi-isolation to interact regionally, nationally, and internationally with the state, companies, the media, scientists, conservationists, and development agencies. The following declaration addressed to the government by leaders of the Four Peoples states various problems from their perspective:

'We are currently being ill treated in all senses of the word due to the multiple political and economic interests that place Our Territory at risk. We are victims of the repression exercised by illegal and legal armed actors; of the mega projects planned for Our Territory which do not concord with the agreements signed by the government and our Indigenous Organisations; of the pressure exercised by the conquest of invasive religions; of the educational and health models imposed by the government, which ignore our own health and education models; of the non-recognition of the Sacred Territory' (Indigenous Authorities 2006).

The Kogi hereby became part of the international Indigenous Movement which, often rooted in colonial and post-colonial abuse and resistance, addresses capitalist incursions, government interventions, and development projects (de la Peña 2005: 722, Hodgson 2002: 1039, 1040). These movements were enabled by global political changes (Merlan 2005: 484) such as economic liberalisation, democratisation, and decolonisation (Dombrowski 2002: 1062). Moreover, human rights, multiculturalism, and the ecological movement contributed to political and legal awareness of ethnic politics (Hodgson 2002, Jackson and Warren 2005, Merlan 2005). As elsewhere in Latin America, peasant uprisings, leftist protest, and agrarian reforms in Colombia facilitated indigenous mobilisation (Jimeno Santoyo 1993). The new Colombian Constitution of 1991 accepted other forms of life (Sanchez Botero 1999), recognising indigenous autonomy within a legal framework and wider socio-political rights (de la Peña 2005: 734). This paralleled more inclusive legislative amendments in other Latin American countries (Stavenhagen 2002), where Indigenous Peoples had also experienced more intense economic, political, and territorial pressures around the 1970's.

The Four People's first notorious achievement came in 1973 when the Colombian Ministry of Government declared the so-called 'Black Line' (Línea Negra) an officially recognised "cultural"

⁵ Henceforth OGT.

perimeter around the Sierra Nevada (Parques Nacionales 2011). According to the Four Peoples, the Black Line is an ancient, invisible chain 'of sacred sites' around the Sierra where they make offerings or 'payments' and which defines their 'Ancestral Territory' (Indigenous Authorities 2006). In 1980, the Kogi-Malayo-Arhuaco (KMA) Indigenous Reservation⁶ was established (Bocarejo 2009: 312, OGT 2017), granting its peoples legal rights and official protection as a special administrative territorial unit. This 'complements [...] our own indigenous governance [...] principles [and] customs', and facilitates 'interlocution' with 'external institutions' (OGT 2017). Nevertheless, the Sierra's three Indigenous Reservations overlap with a National Natural Park (Sierra Nevada) and three Colombian states or *departamentos* (Magdalena, Guajira, Cesar), causing the Four Peoples many bureaucratic complications.

Somewhat later in 1987, the Kogi Indigenous Organisation was founded in the city of Santa Marta, which officially 'self-governs' the Reservation. Organización Gonawindúa Tayrona (OGT) was created to coordinate Kogi political action, represent their interests before increasing Western pressures, 'defend the Sierra to its deepest foundations', protect culture and traditions, promote independence and autonomy, control access to the Sierra, and communicate with the 'Younger Brother' (Mama Pedro Juan 2009, OGT 2017, Tairona Heritage Trust 2008 [henceforth THT]). While initially the OGT grouped the Four Peoples, now they have separate organisations for their respective territories (OGT is the Kogi one). Politically embodying their perceived spiritual unity, they sometimes meet under a supra-organisational council (Consejo Territorial de Cabildos, CTC)⁷ to address shared important issues affecting the Sierra as a cultural, spiritual, and territorial whole. The Four Peoples often mobilise together, regionally, nationally, and internationally.

III. Kogi eco-politics

The Sierra and environmental damage

Indigenous mobilisation in the Sierra has focused on a growing number of environmentally harmful activities and developments, mostly at the mountain's base, perceived to be causing large-scale, multifaceted physical and spiritual deterioration. This includes mining, agricultural expansion, deforestation, pillaging of archaeological sites, pollution, damming and deviation of rivers, significant

⁶ It is called *Resguardo Kogi-Malayo-Arhuaco* because most of the Wiwa and some pockets of Arhuaco populations also fall into this reservation besides the Kogi.

⁷ The CTC is seemingly not as consolidated as the individual organisations, and disagreements occur.

landscape alteration, factories, roads, and new infrastructure. Erecting antennas on 'sacred hills' is said to be 'like a knife to the heart', while eco- and ethnic tourism 'will not [be permitted] in our Sacred House' (Indigenous Authorities 2006). Especially the Kogi have been consistent in seeking to preserve/protect the Sierra Nevada from the destructive forces of modern, Western, industrial society, the 'Younger Brothers'. They trace these external pressures back to various negative external influences since European colonisation, and closely tie environmental preservation to cultural continuity. While all Four Peoples have been strongly associated with an aura of ecological awareness by national and international audiences, particularly the Kogi have been perceived as traditional and spiritual.

The Four People's environmental activism centres on their entire Ancestral Territory (Territorio Ancestral), the Sierra Nevada as demarcated by the Black Line, always referred to in meetings, letters, and projects. They differentiate this 'internal' realm of the Elder Brothers from the external realm of the Younger Brothers, and maintain that the stability of the world depends on the Sierra's stability, being interrelated. If the Sierra deteriorates, so does the world, and vice versa. These political efforts focus mostly on the so-called 'sacred sites', perhaps even more strongly than in other indigenous movements (Di Gimiani 2013, Hodgson 2002, Keen 1993). This Western term designates particular places (*gaka*) that for them have vital, specific functions in natural balance. These sites tangibly bring radically different spiritual and cosmological matters into eco-political negotiations, causing profound and complicated tensions. The vast number⁸ of current commercial and development projects are constantly negotiated with companies, environmental agencies, and state representatives through Consulta Previa ('Prior Consultation')⁹. However, this is regularly manipulated to impose external agendas. Most importantly, development projects 'not only violate' international treaties, but especially 'our Law of Origin' (Indigenous Authorities 2006).

Among the Four Peoples, the Kogi have been particularly consistent in attempting to raise awareness among the widest possible public of the Sierra's cosmological significance and its current plight, represented by certain Mamas and Spanish-speaking spokespersons. Seen as a necessary step in changing Younger Brother's ecological behaviour, they have been communicating to explain and warn why and how current environmental developments are harmful according to their ecology and wider understanding of the world. This has been channelled through films, letters to the

⁸ The CTC reports nothing less than 160 mines in operation, 285 mining titles, 132 being implemented, and 1320 titles being requested.

⁹ International Labour Organization's 1989 Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, Article 7. Consulta Previa constitutes the legal right Indigenous Peoples have to: 'participate in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of plans and programmes for national and regional development which may affect them directly' and assess their 'social, spiritual, cultural and environmental impact' (ILO 2016).

government, meetings with institutions, statements in the media, appearances at international events¹⁰, booklets, and online. The 'Kogi message' (as called among the public) has achieved a considerable degree of international attention from the public, certain politicians, journalists¹¹, some academics and scientists, and New Age circles. Meanwhile, the Kogi population supports the Mamas' spiritual-ecological rituals, and at communal meetings public political activities are shared, discussed, and consulted with elders, village authorities, and other Kogi men.

Presenting themselves as 'Elder Brothers', the Kogi affirm to be vividly aware of the causes, mechanisms, and effects of current environmental damage, and invoke the Sierra as an organised, cosmically important centre of regulation. They base this claim on knowledge of certain principles, forces, and truths about natural phenomena that 'Younger Brother' allegedly ignores, and whose disoriented society is thereby capable of mishandling the Mother's creation ('what for you is profit, for us is sacred'). By contrast, through certain traditions and spiritual practices the Kogi say they maintain cosmic balance and natural order as guardians of the Sierra, and now also counteract the effects of environmental destruction. The Kogi regularly emphasise that their well-being and that of the Sierra are interdependent: damaging one damages the other as a whole. In the context of the indigenous ecological movement, Kogi Mamas and leaders have been particularly systematic, and consistently ground their environmental struggles in underlying ontological matters. They assertively address the public *at large* from an educational standpoint as more responsible and knowledgeable seniors about a globally significant mountain range, drawing on an ancient 'mandate' assigned by 'the Mother'.

The first major Kogi attempt at communicating these matters to national and international audiences came in 1990, through a documentary film made by British producer Alan Ereira for the BBC. Entitled *From the Heart of the World* (henceforth FHW), it illustrates some of the main points of this cosmo-ecological discourse. According to Ereira (1992), Kogi Mamas had spiritually divined the need to come out and transmit a message about the Sierra's environmental plight, the Mamas telling him exactly what they wanted to be shown and said, planning and making the film with enormous care (THT 2008). Opening the film, a Mama states:

'We look after nature, and we Mamas see that you are killing it by what you do. We can no longer repair the world, you must. You are uprooting the Earth, and we are divining to discover how to teach you to stop'.

¹⁰ Examples: The UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in 2005; with US congressmen, senators, and the president of the Inter-American Development Bank in 2006; International Tourism Fair in Madrid in 2011.

¹¹ E.g. National Geographic Magazine (Davis 2004)

Following another important Mama:

‘I’m speaking on behalf of us all, to send out a message to all Younger Brothers, and I want the whole world to listen to the warning that we speak to you’.

Unlike the Younger Brothers, they say, who do not understand how to take care of the world and damage it, the Kogi work to keep the world in balance under the guidance of the Mamas:

‘If all we Mamas died and there was no one doing our work, well rain wouldn’t fall from the sky, it would get hotter and hotter [...], and the trees wouldn’t grow, and crops wouldn’t grow’.

Following the Mamas, ‘the Mother’ is being mistreated so gravely that people are ‘taking out her heart, cutting out her liver and guts; she is being cut to pieces and stripped of everything’, as well as damaging Her ‘thought’. ‘Now the consequences are being felt, such as less precipitation, animals dying, trees drying up, and people falling ill’ (FHW 1990). The biggest concern is damage to the sacred sites, which for Mama Pedro Juan (2009) people are ‘massacring’. The Mamas, who ‘take care of all that is below and above’, are worried that ‘the sites are disappearing’ (ibid.).

An ecological way of being?

While my intention is to understand the nature of this ecological knowledge, Kogi eco-politics have been sceptically approached by various scholars, mostly Colombian anthropologists (Bocarejo 2002, 2009, Coronel 2000, Figueroa 1998, Giraldo 2003, 2010, Orrantia 2002a, 2002b, Ulloa 2005, Uribe 1988, 1990, 1998b). These authors see the stated Kogi unity with the Sierra, their environmental activism, and their portrayal as ecologically aware natives in public discourse and by some other anthropologists (e.g. Reichel-Dolmatoff), largely as an essentialist and romantic idealisation of people and place. For them, this is a historically emerged form of representation, which leads them to question the authenticity and significance of the whole phenomenon.

Bocarejo (2009) maintains that NGOs, official bodies, and the Kogi themselves have promoted an image of the latter as ‘natural conservationists’ in a culturally essentialist manner. Following Orrantia (2002b: 46), the Sierra and the Kogi have been inappropriately perceived as a homogenous and symbiotic unity ‘that has [...] spread in environmentalist and anthropological rhetoric’. These ‘historical and social creations’, he argues, combine an inflated discourse on spirituality, a supposedly unobstructed continuity between the ‘lost-civilisation’ of the pre-conquest

Tairona (mentioned earlier) and the Kogi as their living descendants, and an over-emphasis on environmental management. The resulting 'ideal of cultural and territorial defence' merges essentialist, romantic, and conservationist notions to form an image of 'that which is Kogi' as a supposed unity of culture, behaviour, and thinking (Orrantia 2002b: 47). Similarly, Giraldo (2010: 67, 68) questions this 'ideology' of a virtually unchanged, pre-Hispanic, and profound ecologically aware Kogi as a historically emerged "Noble Eco-Savage". This is reinforced by an old image of the Sierra as a remote space 'devoid of and outside modernity, with its peoples and places inhabiting a definitely pre-modern space-time' (Giraldo 2010: 8).

These interpretations fall into a wider tendency in the anthropological literature on Indigeneity to focus on the political, subjective, conflictive, and constructed characteristics of indigenous movements, whether in Colombia (Jackson 2007) or elsewhere. The emphasis is on the strategic use of "indigenesness" for different purposes (Hodgson 2002: 1038). The concept's apparent coherence and wholeness is questioned as a necessarily unstable, relative, socio-historically problematic, and contested 'ethnic politics' of ideas (Dombrowski 2002: 1062, Fano Morrissey 2009: 497). Even indigenous groups themselves can be 'socially constructed' (Dombrowski 2002: 1062). Indigenous Peoples are questioned as supposedly ancient carriers of culture under threat from civilisation, surviving mostly in rural enclaves, whose way of life revolves around an essence surviving from pre-colonial times (Kuper 2003: 390, Sylvain 2002: 1076). Presuming these things therefore, often fails to grasp and downplays various historical, social, and political realities (Dombrowski 2002, Kuper 2003), particularly mixture and change (Merlan 2005).

Moreover, it is argued that these essentialist and romantic notions coalesce around a supposedly authentic native in tune with nature, representing 'a world to which we should return, where culture does not challenge nature' (Kuper 2003: 395). Presented as a unique relationship to the land in need of preservation (Merlan 2005: 484), it is related to spiritual (Sylvain 2002) or even mystical values (Starn 1991: 67). "Noble Savage" and "primitive affluence" ideology (Suzman 2002: 3) turns into a Western image of the "Noble Eco-Savage", which suits the agendas of NGO's, environmentalists, and anti-Globalisation movements, and often deviates from indigenous realities (Conklin and Graham 1995). "Andeanism" for example, is an 'imagery of Andean life as little changed since the Spanish conquest', whose 'closeness-to-nature' is contrasted to the 'individualism and alienation of the West', thereby overlooking shifting identities and long-standing influences (Starn 1991: 64, 68). In this light, Ulloa (2005) considers the Kogi a characteristic example of the stereotypical "ecological Indian" of the Americas.

These observations point to valid issues and discourses surrounding Indigeneity worthy of consideration. Kogi environmental activism is of course embedded in complex historical and political phenomena that are negotiated and contested, being an instantiation of the changes Indigenous Peoples are undergoing (Merlan 2005). Kogi representatives share some strategies and forms of representation with the wider Indigenous Movement, such as emphasising a unique collective identity, and benefit from current global ecological and multiculturalist rhetoric. They use Western concepts such as “culture” or “sacred site” to define traditions and key landmarks, Christian terminology like “confession” to translate native practices (*aluna ishguashi*, Chapter 1), and modern analogies to explain cosmological principles (Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6). Kogi modes of objectification and self-identification (Jackson 2007, Stavenhagen 2002) may indeed appear essentialist, and they have certainly been romanticised/idealised as a kind of “lost tribe” (Kirsch 1997), their “message” appealing to New Age tendencies. Expressions such as that ‘all civilisations that flourished in South America were demolished by conquest, except this one’ (Ereira in FHW 1990), can overstate the Kogi’s historical continuity and cultural coherence.

However, overemphasising this critique may overlook some of the driving socio-historical, ecological, and even ontological consistencies and values of Kogi indigenous activism. These recognitions should not lead to the other extreme of being too sceptical or hesitant about asserting or at least exploring possible actualities in Kogi statements and practices. By seeing them as necessarily fluctuating, strategic, and relative, the authors above seem to dismiss the potentially knowledgeable justification for, and practical relevance of, Kogi ecology. Following Di Giminiani (2013: 528, 541), interpreting indigenous activism ‘primarily [...] through constructivist approaches’ inspired by collective identity politics, neglects how it is more than negotiated meanings, being embedded in complex ontological relations with the world. Is the Kogi case really mostly a matter of representation, political strategy, and cultural construction? Could the essentialist depictions mentioned above nevertheless be founded on a Kogi way of being and understanding that itself happens to be essentialist, and which values and enacts cosmological determinism, cultural permanence, and natural order? To what extent could these people indeed be ecologically knowledgeable, socially coherent, and historically continuous? Rather than constituting a ‘false ethnographic vision’ (Kuper 2003: 395), these characteristics are strongly favoured by the Kogi, and have apparently been part of their way of being for a long time.

Furthermore, perhaps part of the problem lies in that these traits do not correspond to the usual current anthropological and post-modern expectations of mutability, contestation, construction, instability, and hybridity. Do Kogi values clash with the relatively recent “reflexive turn”

that generally speaking questioned ideas such as truth, objectivity, grand narratives, and coherence (e.g. Clifford and Marcus 1986, Rabinow 1978, Rosaldo 1993, Scholte 1999)? In any case, following Mama Ramón Gil (THT 2008) ‘this is not some capricious indigenous complaint; it is a problem that involves the whole of humanity’. MamꞤ Kuncha (1996, an Arhuaco) says that ‘if we wish to reclaim and preserve our territory, it is not to gain an advantage or profit but to protect it, and through the Sierra, to protect the whole world and life itself’.

IV. Aims, rationale, and structure

I propose to try and answer the questions above by entering the Kogi way of being, knowing, and thinking, rather than to start by deconstructing and questioning their eco-politics from an external critique. By suspending this already well-explored line of analysis, this thesis focuses on the ontological *content* of Kogi ecological statements and practices as seemingly part of a knowledgeable engagement with the world embedded in Kogi life on the Sierra. This may open doors to other, new insights and understandings about the nature of this eco-political activism, and the cosmological principles, ontological understandings, social institutions, epistemological procedures, and ecological practices that underlie it. While not ignoring the complicated Sierra politics, I intend to hereby employ the ‘anthropological practice of listening to other voices’ (Gudeman and Rivera 1990: 3, 8), and do justice to the Kogi’s own intentions (Drysdale 1994, Milton 1996): ‘I want the whole world to listen to the warning that we speak to you’ (Mama Valencio 1990). My suggestion is that the Sierra’s environmental problems and the Kogi’s efforts in addressing them, warrant an anthropological investigation into what the Mamas claim to perceive and know, and how this knowledge is learned, applied, and socially mediated. I suggest that *understanding what they understand* (including the non-human) is necessary to better understand the Kogi as a people. This would be generally in line with maintaining what Ingold (2014) calls the ‘ontological commitment’ of anthropology as an ‘educational purpose’, serving to understand ‘human being and knowing’ in the world (Ingold 2008: 69).

In Chapter 1, I start by providing an overview of the Kogi way of life on the Sierra Nevada mainly based on my experience, and I introduce the many ways in which people and mountain are closely interrelated within a cosmological framework. This is followed by an ethno-historical discussion of the Kogi tradition to assess the regional Amerindian background of their current activism, and how this has interacted with their relations with the outside world through time. My aim is to hereby evaluate the appropriateness and applicability of the previous authors’ criticism and scepticism of Kogi historical continuity, union with the Sierra, essentialist self-representation, cultural

coherence, and ecological awareness. Based on the previous discussion, by “Kogi ecology” I generally mean their management and regulation of relations between human and non-human agencies, forces, and places on the Sierra Nevada and, according to them, with the wider world.

Chapter 2 begins by discussing how, as in other indigenous movements, ‘understandings and practices at odds with Western assumptions’ (Jackson and Warren 2005: 563) inherent to Kogi eco-politics have created complicated impasses in communication and interaction with mainstream society. Government actors, companies, scientists, and other public actors often do not properly understand, listen to, or take seriously Kogi interventions, perceiving them as symbolic, cultural, or religious matters. I therefore propose a direct, explanatory, conceptual translation of the *content* of Kogi statements and practices into more familiar, approachable “Western” terms and forms of expression, but which remains close to their intended meaning and purpose. This forms part of my central aim in clarifying and elucidating Kogi eco-politics in terms of a way of being and knowing that permeates all aspects of life. This required purposefully immersing myself in this existence on the Sierra Nevada to better understand and appreciate it as a whole, and also learning directly from a few Kogi Mamas as spiritual leaders, most knowledgeable men, and ecological experts. Accessing the Kogi to this degree and obtaining the Mamas’ knowledge, rested on a compatibility between my project and their interest in clarifying their environmental cause.

To theoretically approach the Kogi in a way that corresponds to their own terms and serves my research aims, I propose what I call a ‘realist’ stance. Openly and without a priori analytical assumptions, it focuses on acknowledging Kogi statements and practices as truth claims or reality postulates of alleged practical environmental relevance. Taking seriously Kogi understandings of and relations to the world, implies avoiding constructivist and representational approaches to these matters as mainly symbolic, conceptual, functional, or discursive expressions of human concerns. I argue that the recent ontological pluralism in anthropology is also inappropriate, and accordingly develop a universalist use of *ontology* suited to the Kogi’s own monistic and essentialist way of being. Adjusting and doing justice to Kogi ontology moreover, is inseparable from analytically and methodologically following their epistemological rationale and the nature of Kogi knowledge. I hereby reflect on my own experience, presentation, and analysis of the material.

The previous discussion prepares the central ethnographic Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6, where I present the core of my material: my sessions with the Mamas. Based on spiritual divinations, they jointly established four main topics to teach me and thereby contextualise the current ecological situation, constituting four natural categories that focused Kogi principles, knowledge, and life. These

are 'Water', 'Earth (World)', 'Trees (Vegetation)', and 'Foodstuffs (Nourishment)'. Accordingly, I have devoted my four Core Chapters to these Four Topics to let this elaborate material speak in its own terms and with the length/space this requires. Thus guiding my discussion according to the Mamas' own sequence and structure of teaching, shows how they embedded Kogi lived ontology within an explanatory cosmological framework. The sessions also included questions, comments, and discussion, allowing for a dynamic mediation on which the translation process and my elucidation of the material depended. While presenting these sessions, I also contextualise them within Kogi society based on my wider experiences and observations of life in the Sierra. All this allowed me to tackle questions such as: How is mining or damming rivers a cosmological matter? What is the role of sacred sites in environmental problems? Through which practices do the Mamas claim to regulate the Sierra and what role do the other Kogi play? Why is the Sierra Nevada said to be so important and how is this embodied in Kogi society?

Building on the material's own ordered coherence, in Chapter 7 I attempt to integrate the Core Chapters to assess and make sense of them as a whole. This includes discussing how the Mamas' consciously organised and integrated these teachings through certain principles, rhetorical devices, and models, whereby the content of what they conveyed was closely tied to the form in which it was presented and enacted. The multifaceted, overlapping, and structured nature of what I call Kogi 'holistic realism' on the Sierra poses analytical and theoretical challenges and limitations. As a useful way to start grasping and defining this complexity, I consequently approach it as a complex *system* of organised associations between cosmological principles, spiritual forces, landmarks, natural phenomena, social organisation, objects, and practices. For this purpose, I develop a tentative model to elucidate this multilayered and even fractal organisation. I then propose a necessary integration of the four anthropological concepts of *cosmology*, *ontology*, *epistemology*, and *ecology* as a suitable theoretical framework. By relating this to the Four Pillars of Kogi understanding however (Origin, Order, Function, Relationality), I intend to retain the original logic of their holistic realism. Simultaneously, the conceptual translation suggested above can hereby become part of the analysis as a 'co-theorization' (Rappaport and Ramos-Pacho 2005) between Kogi, anthropological, and general "Western" frames of reference.

In Chapter 8, I am then in a more comprehensive position to attempt to fulfil my aim of clarifying, contextualising, and better understanding the nature and sense of current Kogi eco-politics. I start by explaining why and how, in Kogi terms, environmental damage constitutes a wider, interdependent destabilisation of the system itself, including their society as part of it. This leads me to evaluate the ways in which the Kogi system directly defines their public, political engagement and structures the running of their indigenous organisation according to the Sierra Nevada.

Consequently, I consider how approaches to indigenous ecological knowledge and politics in terms such as “development”, “resource management”, and “local knowledge” fall short of this type of environmental activism. Since the recent alternative of “political ontology” is equally not entirely adequate, I propose Kogi *systemic eco-politics* as a way to conceive how this activism is an adaptation and extension of their usual practices and understandings about the world.

In the concluding Chapter 9, I reflect on the insights gained by having approached and processed the Kogi way of being and knowing in the way proposed here. I also consider the nature of the morality inherent to the Kogi system and its eco-politics, and how their so-called “message” plays into this. In doing so, I return to some of the opening issues about Kogi cultural coherence, historical continuity, ecological purpose, and their public emergence. Finally, I reflect on how potentially contributing to current environmental problems by improving understanding of (Kogi) indigenous knowledge and its potential practical relevance, may invite an ethical consideration for anthropology.

Chapter 1

The Sierra, the Kogi, and the outside world: from the Law of Origin to current eco-politics



Figure 1.1: ‘The Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta is a sacred territory par excellence, and is constituted by a great number of equally sacred places. For the Kággaba People, the Sierra is Sé nenulang; the physical and spiritual universe with all its components. In Her reside all the codes of the rest of the Earth: here is Africa, Europe, Asia, Oceania, the seas, and all biodiversity. And here are found the stars, the planets, and the galaxies [...], all embodied in stones, crystals, mountains and lakes. To care and protect the Sierra is also to care and protect what exists on the Planet and the Universe (OGT 2012, description of the Sierra Nevada by the Kogi Organisation, my translation)’.

In this chapter I provide an initial description of how the Kogi are, think, know, and live in relation to the Sierra Nevada as a living cosmic entity of which they consider themselves to be part, and for which they feel responsible. I then place Kogi society in its regional ethno-historical context, and discuss Kogi interactions with the outside world since the Spanish conquest, thereby providing a background to their eco-political emergence. This leads me to argue that Kogi mobilisation can be seen as a modern continuation of Kogi attitudes to long-standing external pressures. This collective stance is seemingly rooted in a consistent and inherently ecological way of being and knowing, of which Kogi eco-politics would be a current public expression.

1.1. The Kogi and the Sierra

1.1.1. The Four Peoples

The Four Peoples say they have a common way of being and perceiving on the Sierra Nevada guided by 'only one thought', constituting an integrated socio-territorial and cosmo-ecological complex. This unity derives from the 'thought' of 'the Mother', who 'saw that someone needed to be in charge of the Heart of the World', assigning them this responsibility as 'Elder Brothers' of humanity. The four groups constitute four 'legs' that jointly sustain the Sierra Nevada, emulating how the four principal 'Spiritual Fathers' (Padres Espirituales) support the world. Geographically reproducing this four-fold composition (Chapter 4), the Four Peoples occupy roughly four quadrants of the Sierra, associated to the world's four 'corners'. These are: north and northwest (Kogi), south and southwest (Arhuaco), east and northeast (Wiwa), and southeast (Kankuamo). The Kogi section is further divided into four main areas (de Brettes 1903). 'Quadripartition' is also a basic Andean 'system of classification' that orders society and 'space, time, the very universe' (Murra and Wachtel 2009: 5).

Literary sources have noted the Four Peoples' strong resemblances as one 'tribe' (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1951b). Since early on, the Sierra Peoples were described as almost equal in type, habit, and customs (Celedón 1886, de la Rosa 1739), or materially and culturally comparable (Bolinder 1925). All groups dress in white (with differences), wear woven bags (*mochilas*), chew coca leaves and use the lime gourd (*poporo* or *suggi*), have similar houses, living patterns and social organisation, and are led by Mamas. The Four Peoples commit to very related rituals and spiritual practices such as 'payments', 'confessions', and water divinations, and venerate sacred sites and landmarks mostly like the Kogi. Stories, deities, and spiritual principles are often even the same. They speak different

Chibcha languages of the same sub-family, the Arhuacan¹² (Simons and Fennig 2017, Trillos Amaya 2005): Koggian (Kogi), Ika (Ika/Arhuaco), Damana (Wiwa), and Kánkui (Kankuamo)¹³. There are degrees of bilingualism and sometimes trilingualism, and some intermarriages and mixed villages exist.

1.1.2. A living Heart as an organised landscape

The Kogi perceive and relate to the mountains, valleys, waters, trees, rocks, and other landmarks of the Sierra Nevada as conscious, influential agencies with particular names, histories and significances. This is similar to how other anthropologists have described human and non-human relations in the indigenous Americas in terms of a *living* environment, whether in the sub-Arctic (Nelson 1986), the rainforest (Descola 1994), or the Andes (Bastien 1978). Beyond the complex web of relations in Amazonia, in the Andes a mountain can be an organised collective of individual entities. In the Sierra Nevada, the *whole mountain range* is considered an integrated living totality, the Mother's body, and globally the world's 'Heart'. All elements have a place, and play a role, in that wider whole in highly structured ways. Kogi society is considered part of this community, so that customs, institutions, and living patterns are always defined *in relation to* the mountain massif. In this light, I found that people and mountain can only be understood together in these terms as an *organic composition*.

Following the Kogi Mamas, all things in the world began or emerged at the top of the Sierra Nevada from its peaks (above 5000mts) and lakes (approx. 3500-5000mts). In successions of primordality, creation developed downwards and expanded outwards through a great pattern of sacred sites as sources of life. These are called 'mothers' (*haba*) and 'fathers' (*hate*) of different things and forces, be they natural cycles, the wind, astronomical bodies, landscape features, animal and plant species, human groups/cultures, or rituals. According to my informants, the Four Peoples were 'born' in a specific place called Cherúa in the high tundra (the *páramo*, approx. 3000-4000mts). The Kogi subsequently split into four main/original lineages, associated to the four cardinal directions, and descended from one of four main 'Spiritual Fathers' (Padres Espirituales), the 'first sons of the Mother' Reichel-Dolmatoff (1950c, 1951d). As their successors, other creational characters (collectively called 'the Kalgusha') then initiated further lineages into which the Kogi

¹² Not to be confused with the "Arawakan" family of languages.

¹³ Because the Kankuamo already started losing custom, language and dress by the 1800's (Celedón 1886), and were seen as assimilated mestizos by the 20th century (Reichel-Dolmatoff and Reichel-Dolmatoff 1961), the Kogi say that one of the four 'legs' is mostly missing (OGT 2017). The Kankuamo language is reduced to a few words, although Kogi Mamas have apparently 'safe-guarded the language'.

subdivided. Every *kalgusha* is the creator and ‘organiser’ of various spiritual-natural elements (e.g. water, the jaguar, the palm tree, thunder, marriage, foodstuffs), making each Kogi lineage correspondingly related to one of those cosmic collectives¹⁴. These collectives ‘originate’ from certain very important mid-altitude sacred sites, the *ezwamas* (approx. 1700 – 2800mts). For example, my friend and translator Silvestre explained that ‘Seizhua is an *ezwama* named after Father Seizhankua, related to the earth, and its lineage is Zalabata, my own’¹⁵. *Ezwamas*, lineages, and villages are segmented into river valleys and sub-valleys.

Each Kogi lineage has names, stories, knowledge specialisations, and rites associated to the creational qualities of its *ezwama* and *kalgusha*, which serve the lineage’s ecological responsibility or even obligation to sustain and balance the related natural elements. This generally happens through: 1. social adherence to spiritual life principles contained in stories as moral and behavioural guidelines, 2. specific dances and songs (‘of the frog’, ‘of rain’, etc.) that can involve certain masks and costumes, 3. communal ceremonies aligned with natural cycles, and 4. daily spiritual practices (*trabajos espirituales*) carried out at specific times and places, for specific purposes, with particular objects, and by different people. While valley life is centred around the villages (50-100 houses), the most important dwellings are the small hamlets (<20 houses) located on the *ezwamas* themselves. These hamlets and *ezwamas* form one entity that shares a name. Here Kogi traditions are considered the strongest, and its inhabitants the most knowledgeable. The most essential ceremonies, dances, and learning processes take place on the *ezwamas* or at related spiritually important landmarks that form part of the valley system. In higher parts of the Sierra generally, associated to cosmological origins, primordial forces and spiritual purity, Kogi society is expected to remain traditional, and limit contact with non-Kogi influences from below, perceived as polluting. For this reason, Mama apprentices (*kuivi*) are trained here. In any Kogi settlement, certain rocks as petrified ancestors ‘watch over and listen to the community’, many rituals being directed at them.

1.1.3. Communal organisation

Politically speaking, the different valley-lineage-village systems have an *ezwama* as their spiritual and cultural ‘head’ and constitute autonomous but complementary units (Ortiz-Ricaurte 2000: 757). My informants referred to each of these as ‘the community’ (*la comunidad*) of e.g. Luaka, Samineizhi, or Taminaka. Each ‘community’ (*ñíkuma*) has its Mamas, elders and ‘traditional authorities’ or headmen. *Ñíkumas* may thus be loosely comparable to the Andean *ayllus* in Peru and Bolivia (Bastien

¹⁴ Reichel-Dolmatoff (1950) calls these associations totemic, yet for reasons more closely discussed in Chapter 5 and 7, classic understandings of the term are not really applicable here.

¹⁵ Literally this lineage would be called Séija-tuxe (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1950).

1978). These defined (vertical) networks or descent groups combine territory (*llahta*), ecological principles, and kinship in reciprocal relations, are cosmologically associated to gods/common ancestors, mountains and rocks, are in charge of sustaining related sacred sites/earth shrines (*huacas*), and have a leader called *mallku*¹⁶ (Bastien 1978, Zuidema 2009). While there is no overarching integrating Kogi power or authority, a few great Mamas enjoy Sierra-wide influence and admiration, yet not as an elite, hierarchy or political power, but by virtue of their knowledge and ritual efficacy (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1950c). Sometimes Mamas and authorities from different valleys hold wider summits on sacred sites to discuss and divine matters of Sierra-wide importance.

Kogi villages and their thatch-roofed, round houses are usually quiet and uninhabited, serving rather as occasional gathering places for communal affairs or ceremonies. Kogi nuclear families are normally scattered around the deep valleys and steep slopes tending to their various homesteads, fields, and animals. They practice a form of small-scale agriculture, where they grow different crops¹⁷ at different altitudinal levels (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1982b): low areas include e.g. plantain, cassava, and malanga (*xhantosoma*), the mid-range exhibits coca leaves, squashes and maize among others, and at the higher levels e.g. potatoes, onions, or different beans are cultivated. This scheme generally corresponds to a widespread Andean pattern coined 'ecological complementarity' (Murra 1972a, 1984), which contrasts with the Mesoamerican marketplace trade system. In the Sierra, this pattern also unites environmental, social, political, and economic aspects, and is generally better conserved than in Andean regions (Fioravanti-Molinié 1982, Platt 1982). Ecological complementarity is practiced by each self-sustaining Kogi family in their lineage-valleys, who own at least three small farms, and complement this loose horticulture, little hunting and gathering, and some domestic animals. By contrast, in former Andean polities or even current *ayllus*, this is organised through elaborate distribution networks (*mitmaq*) and political structures (Murra and Wachtel 2009: 5).

While there are also female communal houses, the large *nuhué* or men's gathering house, which as a male I had access to, is the focal point of every village. While the *nuhués* located at *ezwamas* are the most important ones, all play a role in the rehearsal and dissemination of the principles at the heart of the Kogi tradition. After a hard days' work in the fields, here men listen to the elders' creational stories, dance, sing and play music during ceremonies, sleep, discuss vital communal matters, and prepare ecological rituals, sometimes for various consecutive nights. Preuss (1926), Reichel-Dolmatoff (1975c), and Uribe (1998a) call the *nuhué* a 'temple'. While Reichel-

¹⁶ Interestingly, important Kogi leaders that combine spiritual and civil powers are similarly called *makú*.

¹⁷ Generally speaking, the Kogi tend to divide the Sierra into three main approximate areas: the lower (0-1000mts), middle (1000-2000mts), and upper parts (2000mts and above).

Dolmatoff (1975c) also calls it a ‘world-house’, for reasons exposed in Chapter 4 I consider *cosmic-house* to better reflect its architectural reproduction of the universe (Duque Cañas, Salazar Gómez, Castaño Alzate 2004) and its corresponding importance for learning, reflection, and relating to spiritual forces.

Figure 1.2: The often extremely steep, rugged, and compact terrain of the Sierra Nevada makes agriculture difficult and limited, yet allows families to relatively quickly walk up and down. Photo: Bernabé Zarabata.



1.1.4. The Mamas: regulating the Sierra and the Kogi

The Kogi Mamas have long lineages of their own (Preuss 1926)¹⁸, being a combination of spiritual, hereditary, and master/apprentice successions. The Spiritual Fathers (like Seizhankua) were the first Mamas and teachers. While a Mama’s son is often trained, Reichel-Dolmatoff (1976d) explains how other Kogi families may also give up sons. An apprentice (*kuivi*) is ideally determined by divination (*iltueld*), by what the Mama perceives in a boy, or by his interest in learning. Since the word “Mama” also means ‘sun’, he has to similarly shine life-giving light and warmth on everything through his care-taking practices. In ritual contexts, the Mamas therefore wear gold (*ñiuba*) pieces, which are related to the sun (also called *ñiuwī*), like other priests in Colombia did in pre-Hispanic times (Bray 2003, Casilimas Rojas and López Ávila 1987, González de Pérez 1996). Each *ezwama* has one or more Mamas of that lineage who are in charge of/responsible for the place and its related cosmological principles and spiritual-natural forces. Each Mama and his *ezwama* are said to be imbued by the same spirit and thus interdependent. While the *ezwama* teaches the Mama, he takes care of it. After death, a Mama’s son or apprentice (same lineage) will assume his authority, responsibility, and knowledge, and inherit related dances, amulets, and spiritual baggage. The Mamas all have a common understanding of the world, undergo the same training, and share the same basic practices.

¹⁸One Mama listed fifty-four generations of ancestors starting with *Seizhankua* until himself (Preuss 1926: 32).

Yet they specialise in different areas of knowledge about the cosmos according to their lineage's spiritual-natural associations, thereby complementing each other to manage the Sierra as a whole.

According to Mama Pedro Juan (2009), the Mamas guide Kogi thought and action in line with the 'Law of the Mother' or 'Law of Origin', a vast set of principles and truths that order humans and nature. According to Reichel-Dolmatoff (1990f), this is the basis of a well-led life and informs a reality that the Kogi strive to be in close, daily contact with. As he explains (1976d), the preparation, knowledge, and memory of a Mama is therefore very extensive. He learns long 'myths' to interpret and transmit creational events; relates to cosmic structures and principles; remembers his village's genealogies; reads the heavens; listens to natural signs; monitors cycles; is intimately familiar with geographical aspects; performs many dances and songs; identifies the names, locations, and functions of numerous sacred sites; determines time place, and form of rituals; and communicates with the Spiritual Mothers and Fathers. Divination (*iltueld*) serves to navigate and mediate with Aluna, the conscious, life-giving spirit and consciousness that permeates all things, holds truth, and animates the 'Law'. For the Kogi, lakes, mountains, humans, rocks, the wind, and other forces all 'think' and 'have Aluna'.

While all my informants perceived forces, signs, and presences that I did not, Arbeláez-Albornoz (1997) discusses how a Mama's training also develops strongly refined extra sensory abilities, for example by inverting circadian rhythms. The Mamas mostly do not use hallucinogens or other specific consciousness-altering techniques like Amazonian shamans. Rather, their different state of mind seems to be constant and controlled. As my Kogi friend Alejo says about his father-in-law (*huésgwi*), Mama Shibilata: 'when my huésgwi passes a place, he senses what has happened there, things talk to him, and so he can know what the place is, and what it needs'. Like Reichel-Dolmatoff (1950c, 1951d, 1976d), I also learned that traditionally a Mama is trained in darkness. Being wakeful at night and sleeping during the day, this can happen at the *ezwamas*, in specific secluded huts, or in caves as doors to the spiritual otherworld (Nuhuakalda), also being entrances to the Mother's 'womb'. Proper Kogi *kuivis* are ideally trained from birth for nine or eighteen years (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1976d), are only allowed contact by their Mama mentors, perhaps elders, and initially their mothers, and have a restricted diet. 'What', then, 'must it be like to emerge into the light?' (FHW 1990).

This training prepares the Mamas to sustain and preserve the Sierra and the world (Rodríguez-Navarro 2006: 62) through various ancient practices and rituals with their communities. While dances and songs 'nourish' (Chapter 6) spiritual forces and power natural cycles, of particular importance is a kind of spiritual offering called 'payment', or *zubiold* in Koggian. Hereby they 'pay

back' the Mother for her life-giving forces to avoid 'debt' and imbalance and keep things 'in agreement' (*zhuluka*) in a form of fundamental ecological reciprocity. The Kogi may pay for the use of material resources, to rebalance a personal issues, to alleviate communal impurities, to restore negative weather patterns, to spiritually nourish animal species, or to regulate crops. Payments are deposited at sacred sites, through which they are transmitted to the Spiritual Fathers/Mothers. They often constitute the Kogi's personal essences (e.g. bodily fluids, thoughts, feelings), and are channelled through seeds, crystals, certain leaves, or coloured little stone-beads (*tuma*). As mediators, Mamas normally receive collective payments from their Kogi communities, yet often the Mamas do special payments by themselves, and sometimes other Kogi know how to pay. What, when and where something is paid is guided by divination (*iltueld*) and depends on the situation/issue, the natural element and corresponding spiritual character paid to, the lineage, and the sacred site.

A Mama also guides his lineage/village in spiritual, ecological, moral, social, political, (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1990f) and psychological-emotional aspects. He tells creational stories, upholds existential principles, and reminds people of the way of the ancestors. The Mama oversees children's education, knows the different families, divines and rebalances communal issues, and guides relations to the landscape. Village members regularly seek out a Mama to discover the origin and solution to a problem or to placate ailments. He spiritually prepares, organises, and ends ceremonies, blesses a new house, and harmonises a field before being worked agriculturally. Additionally, a Mama can spiritually support an undertaking, 'confess' someone's negative experiences, emotions, and thoughts (*aluna ishguashi*), and give protective wristbands (*hatsá*). While a Mama can heal, his medicine is mainly preventive by keeping the community aligned with cosmic principles, spiritual truths, natural forces, and territorial order.

The literature uncritically refers to the Mamas as 'priests' (e.g. Oyuela-Caicedo 2002, Preuss 1926, Uribe 1987, 1998a). Reichel-Dolmatoff (1976d) argues this is based on their regulated functions, the long training, their 'solemn rituals', their profound knowledge of 'tribal custom', and on their influence in 'every aspect of family and village life'. This also sets them apart from being 'curers or shamanistic practitioners' (1976d: 271). In my experience, the character and variety of qualities and functions described above suggests a more complex designation. Moreover, the Mamas do not embody "religion" in a priestly, institutionalised sense, nor is their expertise appropriately called "religious" (see Chapter 7), as Reichel-Dolmatoff (1950c, 1951d) defines it. He recognised the Mamas' preoccupation with balance, maintenance, and management of forces, but not in explicitly *ecological* terms. I suggest that the Mamas are rather *cosmic care-takers* and *ontological experts*. Their class and status (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1976d: 271) is principally based on knowledge rather than

on religious doctrine, political power, hierarchy, or wealth. The Mamas are very simple, look unceremonial, and are not easily distinguishable from other Kogi, whether by dress or lifestyle, given that Kogi society is quite egalitarian.

1.1.5. The equilibrium of forces

Kogi cosmology exhibits a typical duality of forces and concepts that is fundamentally about complementarity and balance. Kogi lineages for example, are traditionally split into male (*tuhke*) and female (*dahke*) ones. This is not exactly a system of cooperating, intermarrying moieties or descent groups (Bastien 1978, Harris 2009, Murra and Wachtel 2009), but a form of bilateral descent where boys are in the father's lineage and girls in the mother's, and stay so after marriage. This ideally occurs between certain combinations of lineages according to their cosmological compatibility of associated natural elements (see Reichel-Dolmatoff 1950c).

The balance of forces is often gendered. Kogi knowledgeable women, the *Sahas* (meaning 'moon'), complement the Mamas' work (the 'sun') as often their wives. While they divine through visions and dreams at night-time as a clairvoyant ability (*ubastunka*), a Mama divines mostly during the day and on sacred sites. *Sahas* are visited for particular needs more related to their expertise and female forces, and educate girls. For reasons not entirely clear, the *Sahas* have seemingly decreased in number and importance, the Mamas having partly taken over their tasks, and the literature scarcely mentions them. Kogi women are usually reserved and shy, especially with (male) foreigners (Preuss 1926), making access difficult. Noted from Espinosa ([1693], in Langebaek 2007) to Reichel-Dolmatoff (1950c), the female realm is traditionally quite separate from that of men (e.g. housing, eating, learning, responsibilities, dances), leading Zuidema (1992: 249) to call this 'an extreme expression' of Andean gendered duality (Gelles 1995).

To guide the Kogi, the Mamas need the support of the village 'headmen' (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1976d). Called *comisarios* in Spanish, a term derived from colonial interventions (Section 2), the original Kogi term is *húgukui*. As 'owners' of natural elements and 'organisers' of mountains, rivers, animals, trees, and other landmarks. (OGT 2017), these men ensure that the order of society corresponds to that of the Sierra and follows the Mother's directives, the ways of the ancestors, and the responsibilities and rituals of lineages and *ezwamas*. Since this 'cosmo-political' (De la Cadena 2010) role requires familiarity with creational, spiritual, and ecological orders, the *Húgukuis'* training partly resembles the Mamas', although it is not as long or profound. Knowing and understanding a creational story, for example, provides the moral imperatives to instruct a Kogi by the Law of Origin.

While the Mamas are more associated to the *ezwamas*, the *Húgukuis* or *Comisarios* govern more the village sphere, yet these domains overlap in a kind of ‘civil-religious’ complementarity (Oyuela-Caicedo 1986). The *Húgukuis* should therefore constantly communicate and cooperate with the Mamas, implementing the latter’s knowledgeable guidelines and spiritual divinations in the community. The Mamas in turn should be subject to the political authority and discipline of the *Húgukuis*, who can reprimand them if necessary. As Reichel-Dolmatoff emphatically notes (1950c, 1951d, 1990f), Kogi culture greatly values social order, discipline, and strict adherence to the ancestors’ laws. The *Húgukuis*, always watchful of deviant/incorrect behaviour, devise penalties and corrective measures. Moreover, the *Comisarios* can supervise the building of a new *nuhué*, coordinate ceremonies, or direct joint spiritual practices. Each village has a ‘major’ and a ‘minor’ *Comisario*, who work with two lower-ranked assistants, the equally ‘major’ and ‘minor’ *Cabos* (also a colonial word). These men also need to be trained and knowledgeable, yet less so than the *Comisarios*. *Cabos* fetch people from surrounding homesteads for village gatherings, physically enforce punishments, or push the men to complete work on a footpath.

Having the same lifestyle, dress, and everyday occupations than everyone else, the *Comisarios* and *Cabos* are not a political class or a hierarchy as such, but ‘traditional authorities’ as the Kogi call them. While sons tend to take over from fathers within lineage parameters, *Comisarios* and *Cabos* can be replaced by the Elders (also ‘traditional authorities’) and the wider male community if deemed to be ineffective or undisciplined themselves. The *nuhué* or cosmic-house is also where conflicts, disputes, and misbehaviour are expressed, argued, reprimanded, and settled collectively, which is complemented by the Mamas’ diurnal divinations on sacred sites. Ideally, Mamas, Elders, *Comisarios*, and *Cabos* together maintain the cycles that rule the ecosystem’ (Rodríguez-Navarro 2006: 62).

1.1.6. Further practices and relations to the Sierra

Kogi relations to their surroundings are often maintained via so-called ‘confessions’ (Chapter 3), a missionary translation of the concept of *aluna ishguashi* (‘doing in spirit’). Whether individually or collectively, personal essences like thoughts, emotions, or memories are discharged on a sacred site or rock, constituting energies and information that ‘nourish’ the site. Dreams are understood as an important channel for agencies and forces in the landscape to communicate with the Kogi as signs and warnings with specific meanings and associations. These need to be heeded with the help of the Mamas as interpreters and diviners through payments, confessions, other rituals or rectifying a behaviour/lifestyle. While some non-Mama Kogi can also divine to access Aluna, certain individuals

have psychic/clairvoyant abilities, and all Kogi have insights, intuitions, and premonitions about natural phenomena that influence thoughts, decisions, and conversations. One may sense in the chest that someone is coming, understand the messenger bird's (Shikaka) indications, listen to how different roars of thunder are 'conversing', or interpret aberrant phenomena (e.g. strong rains) as bad omens. When walking the Sierra, the Kogi normally introduced me to the significances of various landmarks and told me stories about related spiritual characters. This intimate and detailed perception of, and appreciation for, their surroundings involved many, for me, unseen and unknown realities, meanings, and orders of causality. My parallel sessions with the Mamas as experts (Chapter 2) provided a more elaborate knowledge of all this within a wider cosmological framework.

The Kogi also relate to the Sierra Nevada via small objects called *sewá*. These pebbles, shells, or little semi-precious stone-beads (*tuma*) embody different cosmic-natural elements depending on their colour, shape, and type, and thereby fulfil different spiritual functions in 'endless' combinations of 'stone medicine' (Nicholas 1901: 640). A Kogi will keep some *sewá* throughout his or her life, having received them from a Mama as objects that channel the person's energies and spiritual connections at important life-stages such as birth, adulthood, or marriage. They also consecrate the acquisition of, and involvement with, certain types of knowledge and ritual practices, e.g. a black *sewá* for funerals and death, or a white one for divining. Other objects help restore personal instabilities, or treat particular diseases, and the Mamas determine which object is needed for which problem. The Mamas' own more powerful *sewás* channel their care-taking powers according to their lineage and *ezwama*. More generally, the concept *sewá* derives from Sé, the darkness of creation, and from *wa*, meaning 'well'. Being connected to cosmological origins thus equals to 'be well', stabilised, supported. In the mutually complementing spiritual union of marriage, husband and wife call each other 'my *sewá*' (*na sewá*).

Like the *sewá* objects, the richness of Kogi material culture lies in its cosmological associations and spiritual significances. Life is generally quite simple, minimalistic and plain, even drab and coarse in its physical manifestations, almost ascetic. There is little colour, ornamentation, comforts, and sophistication. Affectively, the Kogi are quite reserved, rarely cry or become angry (de Brettes 1903), and limit physical contact. As Reichel-Dolmatoff (1976d: 266) describes, a 'dishevelled and sullen countenance' combines with 'an austere and withdrawn manner'. Kogi culture may therefore initially suggest poverty and neglect. 'But nothing could be more misleading than appearances', he says, as the Kogi 'lead a rich spiritual life in which the ancient traditions are being kept alive and furnish the individual and society with guiding values [that make] the conditions of physical survival [...] almost unimportant' (1976d: 266). Only gradually did I sense this richness by

listening to elders by the firelight, learning about the landscape, or hearing the Kogi sing to the Father of Cattle. All physical items have their place, origin, and explanation in the stories, reproduce cosmological principles, have territorial associations, and provide different spiritual connections. The Mamas' white pointy hats (*nâmtó*) for example represent the snow-peaks, and clay pots (*uldu*) were created at a particular sacred site.

Previously used by other pre-Columbian indigenous societies in Colombia but now only found in the Sierra Nevada, the *poporo* (Koggian *suggi*) is a small gourd used by all men of the Four Peoples. It is charged with cosmological meanings and is a key epistemological device that serves for knowledge acquisition, concentration, productive discussion, and spiritual communication (Chapters 3, 4). Kogi men dry out the gourd, drill a hole into it, and fill it with white lime powder (*nuggi*) derived from burned sea-shells. While chewing coca leaves (*hâñú*)¹⁹, the person inserts a polished wooden stick to extract some of this lime, and then quickly rolls it on the mass of leaves inside the mouth. The mix of leaf-juice, saliva, and lime produces a yellowish paste that is finally rubbed off against the *suggi* in repetitive, sliding movements that over time create a growing, solid layer. Kogi men say that rubbing the stick is like 'writing one's thoughts' onto an expanding 'book', and a thick, even layer indicates a 'strong heart' and mind. The *poporo* is regularly used during everyday activities such as walking, resting, or chatting, but especially in the *nuhué* and on sacred sites while listening to the Mamas' lessons, the Elders' stories, the *Comisarios'* directives, and others' speeches. The mixture is not hallucinogenic, only slightly stimulates the mind, enhances concentration, and helps overcoming hunger and sleepiness. Coca chewing is an 'essential [spiritual] accompaniment' to discussions of tradition and morality 'underpinning community life' (Zuidema 1992: 249).

The *poporo* is crucial for Kogi male initiation as a time of introspection and learning. For a few sleepless nights the boy has to sit in the *nuhué* and listen fully concentrated, without moving, to Mamas and elders speak about creation, the ancestors, the Sierra, and Kogi traditions. During the day a Mama takes him to a sacred site to 'confess' his life, which is spiritually cleansed to prepare a correct new life aligned with the Mother. The boy starts being knowledgeable, becomes spiritually more aware, and formally assumes an adult's moral and communal roles and responsibilities. Wearing a man's clothes now, he looks for a wife to create a household, and joins the other men in the *nuhué* with the *poporo*²⁰.

¹⁹ To greet each other men exchange both tobacco paste (*nuai*) and the spiritually important coca leaves by putting a little handful into each other's bags.

²⁰ Women's communal houses also fulfil girls' initiation ceremonies, yet I did not have access to them.

1.1.7. A knowledgeable ecology

Reichel-Dolmatoff (1950c, 1951d) emphasises that for the Kogi life greatly revolves around knowledge, starting with childhood. It drives men to the *nuhué* and can become a competition of who better knows the myths and traditions, or a way to settle disputes. Knowledge leads to social standing or rather recognition and makes a great Mama, and if something grants “power” among the Kogi, it is literally knowledge (Bray 2003). As I have indicated, practically all practices and institutions are informed by knowledge and learning. Reichel-Dolmatoff even states that ‘the *object* of the life of the Kogi is “to know much” ’ (1950c: 222, my emphasis). In such a culture, he says, ideally material richness ‘do[es] not mean anything’, being disapprovingly considered a form of maladaptation that is irresponsible, dangerous, crazy, and causes envy and hostility (ibid.: 222, 223). As I understand it, material accumulation would also contradict the Kogi principles of reciprocity and balance.

Most importantly, Reichel-Dolmatoff (1950c: 224) notes that acquiring knowledge serves to observe the cosmic laws, on which depends the well-being ‘of the universe and of humanity’. I also learned how cosmological principles and knowledge (*shibuldama*) therefore guide what is evidently an *ecological* regulation of the Sierra Nevada, its constituent elements, and their interrelation with Kogi society as an interactive environment. Whether through lineages, sacred sites, valleys, spiritual practices, objects, the *Kalguasha*, the Mamas’ and *Húgukuis* guidelines, natural elements, communal gatherings, or perceptual dispositions, life is geared towards ‘the maintenance of a viable equilibrium’ between humans and nature (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1976d: 266). Since according to my informants Kogi customs are a responsibility assigned by the Mother to care for the Sierra through the Law of Origin, for them this Kogi-Sierra interrelationship has to endure. In this light, I now explore the ethno-historical background to this way of life, which suggests that Kogi principles, institutions, and practices are embedded in an old and complex Amerindian regional tradition.

1.2. The ethno-historical roots of Kogi society

1.2.1. Complex regional connections

The greatest expert on the Kogi, Reichel-Dolmatoff (1953f), maintains that they do not easily fit into South American cultural patterns. For Bray (2003: 325), the so-called ‘Tairona-Kogi tradition’ has roots in an antecedent ‘cosmopolitan, perhaps multiethnic, coast-oriented, essentially Caribbean Culture’, sharing e.g. gold iconography. Yet Nicholas (1901: 637) reported that the Sierra Peoples were so peculiar, and differed so completely from many others near the Caribbean Sea, that ‘they

must be remnants of a very ancient [people]'. Some point to Mesoamerican connections. These include migrations from there suggested by similar cosmological and philosophical traits (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1951b, 1953f), calendrical parallels like the number nine (Zuidema 1992), rock-figures comparable to Toltec ones (Isaacs 1884), or resemblances with the distribution of goods (Oyuela-Caicedo 1986) of the pre-Columbian Tairona polities of the Sierra Nevada (next section). Influences on the Sierra Nevada from Central America (particularly Costa Rica, Panama) are also considered, such as archaeological similarities (Zuidema 1992), historical contact (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1951b, 1953f), the importance of gold (Preuss 1926), and related Chibcha languages (Costenla Umaña 1995, Jackson 1995). Bray (2003) nevertheless thinks the 'Tairona-Kogi' tradition developed in situ, suggesting an opposite cultural flow from Colombia to Central America.

Since Chibchan languages were and are also found in Colombia's interior mountains, Zuidema (1992) rightly points to simultaneous Kogi (and Tairona) connections to chiefdoms there, especially the pre-Hispanic Muisca peoples. This includes jade carving, metallurgy, gold and its relation to the sun, circular stone houses and paved roads, cist tombs, coloured stone-beads (*tuma*, above) for spiritual practices, mythical similarities, the *poporo* for chewing coca leaves, and a comparable lineage-system (Bray 2003, Casilima-Rojas and López-Ávila 1987, González de Pérez 1996, Reichel-Dolmatoff 1951b). Importantly, Muisca priests (*Jeque*²¹ or *Mohán*) followed forms of meditation, fasting, and other abstinences similar to those of Kogi Mamas. Their apprentices (*Moxa*) were apparently also separated from society and trained for ten years in the dark, whether at night, in caves, or equally circular and restricted huts and temples (Casilima-Rojas and López-Ávila 1987, González de Pérez 1996). Everyone gave offerings to 'placate' natural sanctuaries, administered by the *Jeque* (Londoño Laverde 1996), like Kogi 'payments' to sacred sites via the Mamas, and there were similar analogies between territorial, socio-political, and mythical/astronomical orders (Correa Rubio 2004, 2005). Finally, the 'civil-religious' complementarity (Oyuela-Caicedo 1986) mentioned earlier between Kogi Mamas and *Húgukuis* (headmen) with their assistant *Cabos*, probably parallels the Muisca one. Their priests also worked with major and minor chiefs (*Caciques* or *Sybyn tiba*), who in turn were assisted by major and minor *Capitanes* (or *Utatiba*) (Londoño Laverde 1996).

Additionally, Chibcha linguistic commonalities may indicate an ancient 'Chibcha cultural diasystem' (González de Pérez 1996: 58), or 'Macro-Chibchan' region (Bray 2003) based on similar worldviews, beliefs, practices and organisation, making the Sierra a possible subsystem. In this vein, Correa Rubio (1998b) has found striking analogies between the Kogi and one of the few still

²¹ Pronounced "heke"

functioning Chibcha peoples of Colombia's north-eastern Andes, the U'wa or Tunebo, even calling these two contexts 'parallel Sierras'. Among the U'wa these traditions also serve an ecological purpose which, like the Kogi, nowadays manifest as strong eco-political activism (Osborn 2009).

More generally, the Kogi (and Muisca, U'wa) clearly resemble 'an ancient widespread Andean tradition' (Zuidema 1992: 251) where society, the territory, and cosmology form an ordered, holistic composition (Chapter 7). These complex associations organise sacred sites, gods, ancestors, descent groups (Bastien 1978), temples (*nuhué*), ceremonial centres/sacred sites (Lorandi 2009), astronomical features, idols and objects, and ritually important landmarks like rivers, peaks, forests, caves, lakes, and stones (Casilima-Rojas and López Ávila 1987, Correa Rubio 2005). Other Andean equivalences are coca leaves, gold, vertical ecological complementarity (Murra 1984), the significance of mountains (Castro and Aldunate 2003, Leoni 2005), and 'priests' similarly associated to long training and caves (Zuidema 1992). The spiritual importance of stones (Zuidema 2009) and powerful objects found at sacred sites called *huacas* or *wak'as* (Bray 2015, MacCormack 1991, Nuñez del Prado 1995) have many equivalents in Colombian contexts like the Sierra Nevada.

Finally, Zuidema (1992) suggests some Amazonian parallels such as feather crowns symbolising the sun, or shamans' ceremonial seats resembling the Mamas' ones. The jaguar and the snake also have cosmological and ritual importance, and some Kogi myths I heard indicate seemingly 'perspectivist' themes of transformability (Viveiros de Castro 1998). After all, the Kogi's vertical habitat extends to similar rainforest-like lower slopes. In summary, while clearly sharing various Andean features, the Sierra is not the Andes, marked by the characteristic Chibcha context and an overlapping range of seemingly Caribbean, Central American, and perhaps some Amazonian similarities. Simultaneously however, the Kogi belong to a distinctly Sierra Nevada Amerindian complex or 'cultural circle' (Bolinder 1925) constituted by the Four Peoples, and also by other local historical connections that I now turn to.

1.2.2. The Kogi and the Tairona

During colonisation, the multitude of pre-Columbian tribes and confederations (e.g. Bonda, Gaira, Taganga) surrounding the Sierra Nevada almost entirely disappeared or were assimilated, whether through war, disease, slavery, brutalities, religious conversion, division, resettlement, prohibitions, persecutions of priests, or village destructions (Giraldo 2010, Langebaek 2007, Oyuela-Caicedo 1986, Reichel-Dolmatoff 1951b, 1953f, Uribe 1996). Consequently, the Sierra Peoples were disconnected from former cultural links, and only three indigenous groups survive. The 1.500 or so Chimila stem

from the directly adjacent Western plains and also speak a Chibcha language, but are different. The Yukpa (around 4000) live further away on the Perijá mountain range bordering Venezuela and speak a Cariban language. In the eastern Guajira Desert the numerous Wayúu follow a caste system and speak an Arawakan language. However, some valuable historical reports and archaeological information make it possible to partly examine the former Sierra context.

Before conquest, villages between current Kogi territory and Santa Marta had ceremonial houses and temples comparable to their cosmic-house *nuhué*. The *Naomas* or *Mohanes*, ‘priests’ compared to today’s Mamas (Oyuela-Caicedo 1986, 2002), apparently had an equivalent apprenticeship (Bello [1578] in Langebaek 2007). Similar stones, crystals, and plants (e.g. *frailejón*) were used for healing and rituals, and certain natural cycles and learning processes were also understood in stages of nine. The Tairona (approx. 500 to 1600 A.D.), a group of polities or village federations (perhaps a city state), lived in the (now Kogi) middle-lower north-western slopes of the Sierra Nevada (Bray 2003, Oyuela-Caicedo 1986). According to Bray (2003), the way social differentiation²² was indicated by elaborate Tairona clothing, adornments, and objects is comparable to how subtle differences in bags, clothing, and lime-dippers indicate Kogi lineages. The Tairona chewed coca leaves, held offerings in similar clay pots, gold was of equally spiritual/supernatural significance, and some objects apparently depicted Kogi deities like Seizhankua (Oyuela-Caicedo 2002, Reichel-Dolmatoff 1951b).

Unlike many square, divisive, and restrictive pre-Columbian towns, Tairona (and Muisca) Chibcha dwellings were round, curvilinear, and more open, favouring movement, low-density, social visibility, and homogeneity (Giraldo 2010, Zuidema 1992), resembling pre-Incaic societies and Kogi villages. The Tairona ‘lost city’ (Ciudad Perdida) of stone terraces, canals, and stairways may have reflected cosmological and moral orders (Giraldo 2010: 7) and unified ‘landscape with architecture’ (Zuidema 1992: 251)²³ as among the Kogi, whose architecture strongly embodies that cosmological concentricity (Duque Cañas et al. 2004, Reichel-Dolmatoff 1975c).

As with the Muisca chiefdoms, the Tairona religious sphere was seemingly determinant, constituting ‘complex theocratic chiefdoms’ (Giraldo 2010). According to Oyuela-Caicedo (2002), earlier shamanistic forms had undergone a ‘religious routinization’ into a regionally integrated Tairona ‘priest-temple complex’ which presided over the economic, political, and linguistic realms. In

²² Nobles, commanders, speakers, merchants, craftsmen, weavers, goldsmiths, carpenters, farmers, warriors, priests, and chiefs.

²³ Zuidema speculatively links this Tairona urban organisation to *Machu Picchu* in Peru and *Tiwanaku* in Bolivia.

the characteristic ‘isomorphism’ (Londoño Laverde 1996: 65) between the distinct but complementary religious-ceremonial and civil-political spheres (Giraldo 2010: 61), priests and chiefs (*Caciques*) worked together, or even combined both functions (González de Pérez 1996, Zuidema 1992). The chief’s political power/authority was legitimised by ‘access to the divine and supernatural world’ (Bray 2003: 318, Oyuela-Caicedo 1986). All of this resembles the complementarity between Kogi Mamas and *Húgukuis/Cabos* described earlier. Tairona priests (*Naomas*) also underwent strict fasting in mountains and caves for 16-20 years (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1951b).

Consequently, the literature has debated the extent of Kogi-Tairona cultural and religious parallels or continuities, and especially whether the *Naomas* could be ancestors of modern Mamas (Bray 2003, Langebaek 2007, Zuidema 1992) as a so-called ‘Tairona-Kogi priestly elite’ (Oyuela-Caicedo 2002). Various authors advocate resemblance/consistency (Fischer 1992, Oyuela-Caicedo 1998, 2002, 2005, Reichel-Dolmatoff 1951b, 1953f, 1982b, Rodríguez-Navarro 2000, Zuidema 1992), others question this (Coronel 2000, Figueroa 1998, Giraldo 2010, Uribe 1990), and some balance change and continuity (Bray 2003, Langebaek 2007). A few scholars say that the Kogi are *descended* from the Tairona (Bray 2003, Oyuela-Caicedo 2002, Reichel-Dolmatoff 1953f), an ancestry they apparently trace themselves (Giraldo 2010, Reichel-Dolmatoff 1982b). Preuss (1926) however, affirms that the Kogi rather *coexisted* with the Tairona, like the current Chimila and Wayúu (Giraldo 2010). Indeed early Spanish chronicles describe ‘Tairona’ and ‘Arhuaco’²⁴ provinces separately (Oyuela-Caicedo 1986). Consequently, Bray (2003: 321) thinks that the Kogi could help resolve these historical ambiguities, uncertainties, and archaeological gaps. Conversely, the regional archaeology could help understand the Kogi.

To Preuss (1926) for example, the Kogi spoke of the Tairona as knowledgeable people (*shibuldama kaggaba*), and to Reichel-Dolmatoff (1953f) as ‘brothers’, spiritually and culturally related neighbours from whom they inherited e.g. the coloured ritual stone-beads (*tumas*). My informants also spoke in this way of the Tairona and the Lost City²⁵, which they call Teizhuna, related to the Spiritual Father of Gold, Teikú, and some Mamas still speak a related ceremonial language, Teizhúañ (also Preuss 1926). Rather than being ‘anthropological constructions’ as Giraldo (2010: 70) thinks, overall the Kogi-Tairona resemblances are evident. Despite notable changes recognised by the natives, there seem to be real ‘ethnographic continuities’ (Bray 2003: 308). Nevertheless, this begs a critical look at historical change and continuity in the Kogi/Sierra since the Spanish conquest, as well

²⁴ In the past the term *Arhuaco* was used to refer to all Sierra peoples.

²⁵ Following archaeologists, its stone terraces were used for cultivation. According to the Mamas, they rather serve ancient fertility rituals that the Kogi can no longer perform due to missing Tairona objects.

as their attitudes and reactions to foreign influences, to more fully contextualise their current eco-politics.

1.3. Kogi relations with the outside world

1.3.1 Retreat, material simplicity, and spiritual prominence

It is commonly assumed that the societal breakdown/disintegration caused by conquest (Oyuela-Caicedo 1986, 2002) led to a retreat or flight of the lower populations (e.g. Tairona) into the Sierra Nevada's higher mountains (Bray 2003, Zuidema 1992). In light of the aforementioned debate, scholars have discussed whether these peoples either gradually became the current Kogi, merged with Kogi already living up there, or lived alongside them. In any case, apparently the complexity of Kogi/Tairona kinship (lineages), political, technological, and social structures was reduced (Bray 2003, de Brettes 1903, Oyuela-Caicedo 1986, 2002, Reichel-Dolmatoff 1982b). Due to the disappearance of coastal indigenous groups, long-standing vertical exchanges/trade with the sea were interrupted (e.g. fish for mountain potatoes), partly modifying subsistence into a more semi-nomadic lifestyle of smaller settlements and a less varied diet (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1951b, 1982b).

Reichel-Dolmatoff (1953f) claims that these limitations brought about the more austere, materially simpler, secluded, peaceful, and mostly non-hierarchical Kogi of today. Because the civil-political authority of (Tairona) chiefs (*Caciques*) was gradually dismembered (Langebaek 2007), for Bischof (1983) and Bray (2003) the priests (*Naomas-Mamas*) became the main leadership and moral authority. Oyuela-Caicedo (2002: 60) calls this the 'modified religious order' or 'fundamentalist theocratic chiefdom' of the Kogi which even more heavily emphasises the spiritual aspect (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1950c). The Kogi village headmen (*Húgukui*) may thus be a simpler contemporary form of the old (Tairona) *Caciques*. But that as it may, hidden in the mountains the natives could retain their culture, although according to these modified social, economic, and political conditions (Oyuela-Caicedo 1986: 42). As Reichel-Dolmatoff (1951b) explains, the densely forested, coastal, northern lowlands on the Kogi side facilitated the retreat mentioned above, remaining largely un-colonised until the latter 20th century. In addition, the remote mountains beyond this jungle-like barrier are steep, rugged, not easily penetrable, and remarkably there has never been a permanent foreign settlement. This has allowed the Kogi to retain relative historical isolation to this day (Botero Verswyvel 1987, Reichel-Dolmatoff 1951b, 1982b).

1.3.2. Kogi peaceful resistance

Historical records indicate that Spanish colonisation in the northern and western lowlands around the Sierra Nevada was very conflictive, difficult, and long due to particularly strong native resistance (Oyuela-Caicedo 1986), and that European control there was quite weak (Giraldo 2010). ‘Stingy’ Indians ‘do not pay tribute’ and ‘do not [adopt] Spanish plants’ (Bello [1578] in Langebaek 2007), often ‘assaulted’ the Spanish and for centuries impeded developing infrastructure (Isaacs 1884). In a very poor state of Christianisation, they ‘rejected crosses and churches’, followed ‘idolatry’ and ‘abominations’ (Langebaek 2007: 54 [1580]), and were ‘inclined to keep their rites and ceremonies’ (Bello [1578] in Langebaek 2007). The Tairona famously rebelled²⁶ as an organised confederation never incorporated into the colonial state, until in 1599 they apparently ‘disappeared’ (Giraldo 2010: 63). These polities also particularly rejected evangelisation attempts, and wanted to expel the Spanish for imposing laws and customs other than their ancestors’ (Giraldo 2010: 66, Zuidema 1992).

Regarding the mountain peoples, the few reports by Spanish priests who ventured up there likewise emphasise strong resistance. In contrast to the lowland Indians however, these ones were ‘never in arms [...] so peaceable [...] so rarely annoyed and their natures [...] so serene’ (de la Rosa 1739: 616), refusing interventions rather passively. Described as being (even) more independent and resilient to colonial influences (de la Rosa 1739, Nicholas 1901, Zuidema 1992), ‘up there’ Indians were ‘more vigorous’ (Bello [1578] in Lanegbaek 2007), being ‘happy and satisfied with living far from Spaniards’ (Romero [1693] in Langebaek 2007), whom they had ‘never seen’ (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1951b: 32). These ‘still wild’ Indians were ‘strange’ and ‘sad’, lived ‘isolated’ and ‘in caves’, and were ‘very attached to the land of their ancestors’, preferring to ‘commit suicide’ instead of serving the Christians (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1951b: 110). As in the lowlands, sporadic missionary attempts (16th-17th centuries) were generally ‘futile’, and ‘preaching’ and punishments were ‘in vain’, having ‘no fear’ of ‘God’ (de la Rosa 1739: 616, Isaacs 1884, Zuidema 1992: 247). Despite the colonists destroying/burning temples (Uribe 1996), sanctuaries, ‘idols’ and the Mamas’ graves, trying to prohibit the *poporo* (Romero [1693] in Langebaek), and practicing other persecutions (Reclus 1861), the Sierra Peoples hid things and always reconstructed them (Oyuela-Caicedo 1986). Attempts to impose tributes were abandoned (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1951b), and the Kogi ‘silently continued cling[ing] to ancient customs’, beliefs, and adorations (Langebaek 2007, Nicholas 1901: 637).

²⁶ Apparently ‘supernaturally’ aided by ‘priests’ (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1951b: 35).

By the 18th and 19th centuries, these priests nevertheless influenced some aspects of Kogi culture, myth, and ritual (Celedón 1886, de Brettes 1903, Uribe 1990). They gave the Kogi Christian names, and together with later government officials and traders tried to centralise them in villages. Unofficially however, the Kogi kept their ‘mysterious names’ (Reclus 1861: 275), and the villages remained empty as usual (Oyuela-Caicedo 1986). While the priests erected some rudimentary square chapels, ‘one never says mass in them’ (Reclus 1861), Christian baptisms or marriages were simply repeated the Kogi way (Celedón 1886), and Kogi ‘confessions’ (the priests’ designation) are a pre-conquest practice (*aluna ishguashi*, de Brettes 1903). Standing out from Kogi round houses, I saw the chapels are rather used as storage spaces. Later explorers also found that ‘their heart lies’ in ‘the ancient [persistent] paganism’ (Reclus 1861: 275), and that the Kogi carefully guard their ceremonies and ‘mysterious religion’, and ‘venerate the old customs’.

1.3.3. Secular pressures and suspicion of outsiders

After Colombia’s independence (1810), the government periodically sent officials (‘inspectors’) to Kogi territory to exercise some state control/administration (Preuss 1926), and channel national justice through Kogi village authorities, renaming them *Comisarios* and *Cabos* (Isaacs 1884) to the Kogi’s dissatisfaction (Reclus 1861). Celedón (1886) also mentions a rustic government-built school attended by ‘one or two dozen’ Kogi children learning Spanish.

Through some economic exchanges, over time certain European goods gradually entered the Sierra such as cows, sheep, mules and chickens, sugar cane and onions, and also shovels, knives and pots. Nevertheless, this has been limited, and the Kogi have objected to many things, including foreign medicine (Nicholas 1901: 637). According to Reichel-Dolmatoff (1951b, 1953f), the Kogi proactively and carefully consider which few items they can safely adopt without altering the culture *if divinations approve it*. In the 1800’s and early 1900’s, a few mestizos temporarily traded with the Kogi from an improvised hamlet (Pueblo Viejo) located at about 800-900 m.a.s.l (Celedón 1886, de Brettes 1903)²⁷, beyond which the Kogi lived entirely among themselves, and still do. These merchants provided the Kogi with goods they were deprived of such as fish or sea-salt in exchange for rope, crops, bags, or hard labour. However, they continually abused, manipulated, and indebted the Kogi, and also introduced cheap alcohol and other corrupting vices (Preuss 1926, Reclus 1861, Reichel-Dolmatoff 1950c). No wonder then, wrote Bolinder (1925: 199), that the Kogi retreat to their mountains and rarely descend, increasing their suspicion and fear of outsiders (de Brettes 1903).

²⁷ It was located in the valley where I focused my fieldwork on, and it is still a corridor in and out of the northern Sierra.

Consequently, back then some Kogi migrated to the Western Sierra (Preuss 1926, Reichel-Dolmatoff 1950c), where Summer Institute of Linguistics missionaries later influenced them with evangelical ideas (Stendal and Stendal 1996). Finally, from 1848 onwards an intermittent flow of explorers, adventurers, and researchers have visited the Sierra (Giraldo 2010)²⁸, including some anthropologists (Chapter 2), who all coincide on the Kogi's reserved and unwelcoming attitude. Being of 'few words' (de la Rosa 1739: 612), 'with strangers [the Kogi] are reserved, and few gain their confidence' (Nicholas 1901: 644). The Kogi often said that foreigners 'must not stay long', 'he will not stay much longer [and] must travel', 'another road awaits him' (ibid.). Moreover, they were 'shy' and 'guarded' (Preuss 1926), inhospitable (Celedón 1886), and only received de Brettes (1903: 22) unwillingly. The Mamas watched Reclus (1861: 267, 270) with mistrust, indifference, 'a certain repugnance', and an 'attitude of disdain [...] not even deigning to greet me'.

1.3.4. Drastic changes

The 20th century saw more intense socio-economic developments, territorial invasions, and assimilationist projects (Oyuela-Caicedo 1986: 32) which more directly threatened the Kogi's integrity and hitherto relative peace. External pressures increased especially since the 1950's (THT 2008), and crucially also started affecting the Sierra itself. By the northern, densely forested Sierra, up until the 1970's all foreign movements came via the sea and were mostly limited to the coast, permitting the Kogi to remain reasonably undisturbed in the mountains. However, the construction of a highway communicating the cities of Santa Marta and Riohacha along the coastline dramatically increased traffic of people and goods, and it strategically connects the Atlantic Ocean, the Colombian interior, and Venezuela. For centuries, the only proper non-Indigenous settlement had been the coastal Dibulla, yet now various small towns along the highway have shops, loud music, and holiday destinations. Since this highway connects with tracks and footpaths into the mountains, where roads are non-existent, the Sierra is now somewhat more accessible.

Also during the 1970's, the discovery of the Tairona Lost City fostered new archaeological investigations (Giraldo 2010), often in tension with the Kogi, and attracted treasure hunters and pillagers looking for gold and other sellable objects (THT 2008). Coupled with the Sierra's great beauty, this was later followed by eco- and ethnic tourism. The mountains' natural significance has also drawn scientific interventions from biologists, ecologists, geographers, etc., whose conservation

²⁸ A couple of French explorers tried setting up small anarchist colonies at low levels, but these ventures failed quickly.

model often clashes with the natives' ecological understandings. The plantation of marihuana and later coca fields on the lower slopes for the illegal drug trade in the 1980's, 1990's, and 2000's, generated chaotic land occupation, unprecedented deforestation, and increased violence (Fundación Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta 1997, Reichel-Dolmatoff 1982b). This attracted Colombia's armed insurgency (paramilitaries, guerrillas), who often abused and threatened the natives, and transgressed their territory and sacred sites (Bocarejo 2009, THT 2008). Moreover, violence and poverty elsewhere in the country caused displacements of peasants (*colonos*) to the Sierra's foothills. The region's many natural resources have allowed significant resource extraction and commercial developments.

Besides being cut off from previous socio-economic exchanges with extinct coastal indigenous populations, now the Kogi also have difficult access to *sacred sites* lower down, inhibiting corresponding ecological practices. To complement their hampered subsistence, some Kogi occasionally descend the mountains to sell their crops in *mestizo* towns by the highway, and buy a few groceries and simple tools. Sometimes Kogi individuals get a bus to the city for medical reasons or to visit the Kogi Organisation. The usually quiet and reserved Kogi with their white garments and bare feet seem out of place in these boisterous *mestizo* towns, often looking insecure and taken advantage of economically. In summary, all these drastic changes have made the Kogi historical semi-isolation increasingly difficult to maintain (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1982b). Mainstream society now effectively "encircles" the Sierra Nevada, and many Kogi perceive their society as being destabilised alongside the mountains, decreasing in tradition, knowledge, order, and spirituality (Chapter 8).

1.4. Continuing an old ontology

1.4.1 Continuity through change

As Uribe (1990) has discussed and the preceding section showed, conquest, colonisation, missionary attempts, and governmental impositions had many important effects on the Kogi. This is of course key to understanding them (Bischof 1971). Nevertheless, the current "outside world" starkly contrasts to the still distinctly and mostly indigenous, rural mountains, the Sierra being not only a 'biogeographical island' but also a sort of 'cultural island' (Giraldo 2010). Kogi exposure to the outside world and knowledge of Spanish²⁹ generally decreases with altitude in the Sierra (some have

²⁹ From my experience, no Kogi speaks Spanish perfectly. About 5% speak really well, 10% well, 25% do not speak good Spanish but make themselves understood, 30% have quite a broken Spanish and very little vocabulary, and the rest is basically monolingual.

apparently rarely descended/seen this world), while inversely remoteness, isolation, strength of traditions, and spirituality increase. In contrast to many other indigenous groups, the Kogi were not subjected to tributary impositions, debt peonage, estates, capitalist trade and production, or institutionalised land tenure (Gudeman and Rivera 1990, Murra 1984, Tassi 2012). Unlike most Andean settings, the Kogi have not become Christian, peasants, or wage labourers. Money circulation is limited, and most Kogi foods and objects are still their own, being largely self-sufficient.

The literature therefore tends to argue that overall, historical alterations to Kogi society have been comparatively few, its Amerindian roots having persisted to a remarkable degree (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1953f, 1982b, 1990f). Even if not all practices are followed as before (de Brettes 1903)³⁰, in all their life and customs ‘an ancient descent seems indicated’ (Nicholas 1901: 637), and even sceptics (Giraldo 2010, Uribe 1990) recognise ethno-historical continuities. The Kogi are described as the ones having best maintained their traditions among the Four Peoples (Botero Verswyvel 1987, Chaves 1947, Fischer 1992, Langebaek 2007, Ortiz-Ricaurte 2000, Oyuela-Caicedo 2002, Rodriguez-Navarro 2000). Following Section 3, there is a general consensus that the Kogi’s: 1. particularly strong adherence to their principles and traditions, combines with 2. a marked, almost stoical refusal of external cultural and religious influences, and 3. a reserved, rather unwelcoming demeanour.

The Kogi themselves continue to favour separation from mainstream society, having a strong tendency to distinguish what is theirs from what is not, cosmologically divided between the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’, as I shall explain. Reichel-Dolmatoff (1950c, 1951d) describes how the Kogi strongly value the past, permanence, and remembering principles and traditions, ‘[so] that nothing might be lost’ as Nicholas (1901: 639) was told. Especially memory and knowledge of ‘religious’, ‘mythical’, and geographical affairs bring social esteem and are central to life (de Brettes 1903: 329, 348, Oyuela-Caicedo 1986: 43). For Oyuela-Caicedo (1986), these principles have allowed the Kogi to survive as a group and underlie their rejection of national society, perceived as materialist. The Mamas affirm that their traditions ‘[have] been so from long ago’ (Mama Pedro Juan 2009), and that ‘we’re still here and we haven’t forgotten’ (Webb 2001b). Even the Arhuaco, Wiwa, and Kankuamo seem to regard the Kogi as the greatest repository of Sierra tradition, and Kogi Mamas as the most knowledgeable leaders (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1974b).

Consequently, for Reichel-Dolmatoff (1982b: 290) the Kogi are ‘among the very few surviving native groups whose social, political, and religious institutions still contain many elements

³⁰ Such as the rule of not eating salt, less dancing, or using non-native textiles for clothing.

characteristic [...] of the ancient chiefdoms of northwestern South America'. As I indicated, Kogi society also constitutes a valuable living example of the relatively understudied (Bray 2003: 332) and mostly disappeared Chibcha-speaking (mountain) peoples. Since Giraldo (2010) indicates that Tairona archaeological research could fill knowledge gaps of the northern Andes, which have less missionary/Spanish descriptions than the central-southern Andes or Mesoamerica, I suggest that ethnographic research on the Kogi could enhance this regional understanding. More widely, for Zuidema (1992: 248) the still functioning Kogi society and 'world-view' provide a 'broad cultural perspective', and indispensable comparative possibilities, to interpret ancient Amerindian societies that is 'hardly matched by any other people living in Central America or the Andes'³¹. For Reichel-Dolmatoff (1951b, 1953f, 1982b), noteworthy disturbances among the Kogi have been more related to subsistence, material culture, and political aspects (explained above). The least affected realm was the 'religious' (and linguistic) one, i.e. the cosmological, spiritual, and ritual aspects of life. Oyuela-Caicedo (1986: 42) argues that this guiding 'religious institution' is one of the principal factors of Kogi 'ethnic identity', and the Mamas lead 'strong mechanisms of control' that keep alive key dances, spiritual principles, stories and other practices Fischer (1992) call this the Kogi's 'religious persistence'.

1.4.2. "Religious persistence" as ecological imperative

However, instead of being a "religion", I argue that this is rather a lived *ontology* as described in Section 1. While framed cosmologically, this ontology is strongly tied to the landscape as whole *way of being and knowing*. This includes the spiritual-natural associations of lineages, sacred sites, spiritual divinations, gold, perceiving the landscape, 'payments' to balance environmental exchanges, or objects that reproduce cosmic structures. While Reichel-Dolmatoff (1950c, 1951d) does discuss these things, switching to *ontology* highlights more how this influences *everything* in life, instead of constituting a (separate) "religious sphere". The Kogi's historical persistence then, would hence not be about religious practices, beliefs, and institutions, but about the place of their society in the Sierra. Father Celedón (1886: XII) already noted that the Kogi are 'naturally religious', their 'superstition extending to all acts in life'. To de la Rosa (1739: 615) they explained this as 'neither rite nor adoration', but 'a custom of their fathers'.

Reichel-Dolmatoff and Dussan (1977) explain that among the Kogi, the balancing of forces is *the principal problem* of the human condition. Consequently, the "religious" aspect orients individual

³¹ In the Andes, where anthropology relies more on archaeological-historical records, priesthoods were significantly altered and had to be performed secretly (Correa Rubio 1994).

and collective behaviour towards the regulation of the Sierra Nevada through their social institutions, knowledge practices, and traditions. I therefore suggest that Kogi ecology, which is seemingly inseparable from the cosmological and spiritual, is equally a consistent practice rooted in the old Amerindian tradition discussed in Section 2. After all, Oyuela-Caicedo (1986: 42, 2000) argues that Kogi 'religious tradition' is tied to a centuries-old ecological knowledge about the Sierra, constituting a 'management of the sacred' within a shared system of cosmological principles. Similarly, Reichel-Dolmatoff (1953f, 1982b) sees the relation between religion and ecology as a key aspect of Kogi-Tairona cultural continuities, reliant on how the Kogi back the Mamas' authority. For example, Tairona rituals seemingly also regulated natural forces at sacred sites through payments with stone-beads (*tuma*) (Bray 2003). Finally, Preuss (1926: 30) mentioned ceremonies which, 'based on religion and world-view', served life and communal well-being. Overall, Reichel-Dolmatoff (1982b: 294) calls this 'the resilience of [the Kogi's] age-old ecological awareness'. If this *lived ontology* is centred on maintaining the Sierra, in Kogi terms their "religious persistence" would be an *ecological necessity*. Practicing this in turn implies the continuity of their society and culture. For them, this derives from a *responsibility* assigned by 'the Mother'.

1.4.3. From cosmological principles to eco-political activism

The Kogi political emergence then, marked an unprecedented turning point in Kogi history, when deliberately they partly moderated their centuries-old 'policy of isolation' (THT 2008, Introduction). Kogi political mobilisation started when external pressures facing the Sierra Nevada drastically increased, and decisively, when *environmental* destruction became an additional significant problem. This large-scale deterioration threatened the Sierra and Kogi society more directly and fundamentally, especially the sacred sites on which Kogi environmental activism focuses. This coincided with an overall intensification of development, capitalism, and modernity in the Colombian region during that time (Escobar 1998). Rather than resisting colonial, religious, and social impositions and interventions in a mostly passive way and through retreat, eco-cultural preservation is now *proactively* managed through Kogi political activities. Contrary to the past, when the Kogi only lived their ecology on the Sierra, nowadays Kogi Mamas and leaders are also practicing it publicly through modern means to face present environmental threats. This includes *inverting* the historical trend and "coming back down" the mountains to regain territorial control (Chapter 8). I therefore argue that Kogi environmental activism can be seen as a contemporary political attempt to continue practicing the old and cosmologically driven ecology discussed above, and maintain the Kogi-Sierra relationship (Section 1).

The Kogi Organisation itself explains that Organización Gonawindúa Tayrona emerged as an 'organising filter' to 'control' and 'manage' external 'interventionism' and its deteriorating effects. For this purpose, the different Kogi valleys needed to be coordinated and politically 'represented as one' to regulate and balance the relation 'between the outside and the inside', and preserve the latter (Mama Pedro Juan 2009, OGT 2017). This implied establishing a 'bridge of communication' with Younger Brother and his institutions, yet 'according to our culture' (OGT 2017). The Kogi indigenous movement has been less mediated by Spanish-speaking spokespeople, and has been less entangled with wider mestizo, ethnic, and class politics than in other parts of Colombia (Bocarejo 2009), Amazonia (Conklin and Graham 1995), the Andes (De la Cadena 2010) or Chile (Di Gimiani 2013). Rather, this was apparently a relatively late, significantly self-directed emergence from partial historical isolation, said to have been previously divined 'in Aluna' by important Mamas. Kogi Mamas and leaders therefore perceive current developments as an intensification of Younger Brother's pressures since conquest:

We are still here in our Sierra Nevada despite the suffering after more than five hundred years since the arrival of the Spanish, [...] which for us, the indigenous peoples meant extermination, destruction, humiliation, slavery, the profanation of our Sacred Sites. Our suffering does not seem to be at an end. On the contrary, it has intensified [...]. Our Territory continues under threat of those that ignore our age-old spiritual traditions (Indigenous Authorities 2006).

More generally then, Kogi eco-politics seem to be the present expression of their old resistance to external influences and change (Section 3). The Kogi historical preference for separation from Younger Brother and the Sierra Nevada's ecological protection would in this sense be two sides of the same coin. This coalesces in their cosmological understanding of the Sierra as an 'internal', 'Ancestral Territory' defined by the 'Black Line' (Introduction) and protected by the 'Elder Brothers', contrasting to an 'external' realm of 'Younger Brother'. Following Preuss (1926), this was already a designation for foreigners in his time. 'This is not a new message; we have been saying this for years', says Mama Pedro Juan (2009).

In this respect, a Kogi "myth" tells that Younger Brother's (Nañi) current environmental disruption is a continuation of an ancient conflict³². Although Younger Brother was 'born' in the Sierra Nevada, long ago he disregarded the Mother's rules of conduct, and so She sent him far away 'beyond the sea' to stop harming this mountain. He was generously given large and plentiful lands

³² In the Introduction I explained how for the Kogi everything has an origin. This includes current conflicts around the Sierra.

(Europe), but took the knowledge³³ of tools and technology with him. By contrast, the Kogi (Four Peoples) were left in charge of this ‘Heart of the World’, a small, steep and difficult, yet all-important territory containing all creational ‘thought’. However, Younger Brother returned five centuries ago with the same initial disoriented/destructive attitude, to ignorantly harm the Sierra, even though ‘constructions are only allowed back there, not here’. Following Mama Pedro Juan (2009), ‘the stripping away of the Earth did not happen before the arrival of the Younger Brother’, who has been doing it ‘ever since the first European landing’ (FHW 1990).

Contrary to the views of anthropologists discussed in the Introduction, Kogi political “environmentalism” (Milton 1993) would thus not be mainly a recent construction of romantic ideals of people and place. Neither would it be a product of ethnic strategies where they “portray” themselves as “natural conservationists” for political purposes (Conklin and Graham 1995). These authors neglect, reduce, and distort Kogi eco-politics according to their own, post-modern, sceptical views of history, politics, and Indigeneity, and ‘ignore [its] inherent [underlying] ontological principles’ (Di Giminiani 2013: 528). Such views are quite opposed to lived Kogi principles of spiritual essentialism, cultural permanence, and cosmologically directed ecological imperatives, which are hence also the basis of their public, political self-representation. Rather than being ‘ahistorical’ (Giraldo 2010: 75), or ‘atemporal’ (Orrantia 2002b: 50), the Kogi case shows that these expressed consistencies and coherences can also be inherently historical, and that political forces do not always imply change, volatility, invention, or adoption (Li 2000: 151). In Kogi terms, politics are part of cosmological structures and thus serve ecological purposes (Chapter 8). According to Mamas and Kogi leaders therefore, ‘we have to speak’ publicly (*Aluna* 2011). ‘If we had not seen what is happening, we would not be speaking these words or inviting people from other places to hear us, and speaking to the State’ (Mama Pedro Juan 2009). ‘We are not interested in wealth; we are interested in looking after life’ (Indigenous Authorities 2006).

We seek the support of civil society, [...] indigenous organisations, social organisations, human rights organisations, and ecologists of the world to maintain our age-old spiritual traditions and territories, and in this way continue with our aim to maintain the balance of the world (Indigenous Authorities 2006)

Accurately understanding the Kogi, invites considering this rationale. In Section 1, I explained how knowledge (*shibuldama*) guides societal observance of the Law of Origin to ‘guarantee[...] the functioning of the universe’ (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1950c: 223). Focusing on and elucidating the nature of this knowledge, and how it embeds environmental issues in wider ontological premises, would

³³ For the Kogi, different types of knowledge have their origin in different places of the Sierra.

hence be the first step in understanding Kogi eco-politics, which does this particularly assertively and consistently. In this light, Mama Ramón Gil asks to 'open your eyes. Hear the Mamas' law and story and learn how things really are' (FHW 1990). Beyond feeling cornered and wanting to protect the Sierra, the Kogi address 'Younger Brother's' ecological attitude itself as an issue. Acknowledging the possibility that the Kogi are indeed 'ecological Indians' (Ulloa 2005), can lead to an exploration of *why* and *how* this may be so as part of a lived ontology now enacted politically. After all, for Reichel-Dolmatoff (1982b: 294) 'the [Mamas'] practical environmental knowledge is truly outstanding'.

Chapter 2

Approaching Kogi Ontology and Epistemology

In this chapter I present how the ontological basis of Kogi eco-politics has generated difficulties in communication and understanding with mainstream society. I propose that this invites a clarification and elucidation of those ontological premises as assisted by a conceptual translation into more comprehensible terms. I explain how this was focused on teaching sessions with a few Kogi Mamas, whose interest in making their environmental cause understood coincided with, and allowed my research intentions. These sessions were part of a my immersive fieldwork to experience the all-pervasive, holistic, and radically different Kogi way of being and knowing on the Sierra Nevada. Given these conditions, I argue for a realist theoretical approach that does justice to the Kogi's own essentialist and universalist terms. This involves adjusting to the interrelated rationale of Kogi ontology and epistemology in content and form, and presenting the Mamas' knowledge according to its cosmological structuring.

2.1. A problem of communication and understanding

While making my way up the green and lush Sierra, I once crossed paths with my friend and translator Silvestre, who is also a Spanish-speaking representative at the OGT. Standing under the hot sun, he powerlessly expressed how problematic and frustrating it is to make the public listen to and understand their knowledge and ecological concern, and why current projects and developments are so harmful. Silvestre provided examples of how this has regularly resulted in misunderstandings, dismissals, disinterest, and clashes in meetings with politicians, declarations to government officials, legal battles with companies, or conversations with development agencies and scientists. Arregocés Conchacala, a Kogi ex-Council Governor, states that since 'out there' everything official 'functions on paper, and as we do not have [our principles] written down [...], it has been very difficult to establish agreements' around the '[ancestral] territorial ordering' of the Sierra Nevada (OGT 2002: 5). Despite their assertiveness and consistency, Kogi Mamas and political leaders have had repeated difficulties in articulating their professed knowledge in Spanish, in having it taken seriously or even heard, and in making it conceptually comprehensible.

As other anthropologists have discussed, fundamental differences in ways of being (Berkes 1999) have often been at the root of environmental and political tensions with Indigenous Peoples (Blaser 2009, De la Cadena 2010, Di Giminiani 2013, Nadasdy 2007, Povinelli 1995). While I discuss this in Chapter 8, for now it is important to recognise that for the Mamas the harmful environmental behaviour of mainstream society rests on ignoring certain fundamental realities and spiritual principles. Consequently, to make ‘Younger Brother’ perceive and treat the Earth differently (*Aluna* 2011), they explain *why* and *how* his actions are destructive within a cosmological framework. In an OGT documentary called *Elderly Words: revelations from the heart of the world* (2009), Arhuaco, Kogi and Wiwa Mamas answer key questions³⁴ in this respect. By continuously seeking to make the public understand their knowledge, Kogi eco-politics challenge our own ontological understandings as a way to change our ecological dispositions. This is an ambitious but problematic task within the Indigenous Movement. How then do the Kogi shape/orient their message according to their experiences and objectives, and how do they understand their own process of translation?

As Mama Valencio (1990) says: ‘I’m going to have to say it in a way that they can understand’. One way is to use vivid and graphic analogies and comparisons. For instance, uprooting the land is ‘felt’ by the Mother ‘like an amputation, or tearing out her heart [...] the Mother is like us’ (Mama Pedro Juan 2009). Similarly, rivers are the ‘veins’ of the Earth, and oil its ‘blood’. While these explanations are treated as real correspondences and afflictions, what the Kogi perceive as being required to make the public understand is not always effective or accurate, and may even generate interpretative misunderstandings. For example, adopting non-Kogi terminology such as ‘symbolic’ and ‘represent’ to denote their activities and instruments (OGT 2002) may connote un-reality and discourage taking it seriously. Similarly, the Kogi Organisation (OGT)³⁵ has misleadingly labelled the Black Line around the Sierra Nevada a ‘notion’, an ‘imaginary line’, while for the Mamas this line actually connects coastal lagoons with mountain lakes (Zhigoneshi 2010). Among the Four Peoples, especially the Kogi (e.g. Coronado Conchacala 1993) have difficulties in wording, formulation of ideas, and in effective conceptualisation, being less articulate in Western ways due to less historical contact.

To address these issues, in 2009 the OGT produced a documentary where Kogi, Arhuaco and Wiwa Mamas give brief explanations about environmental problems by answering questions such as ‘Why is there warming?’, or ‘Why do we make spiritual payments?’. Speaking from his ‘ancestral knowledge’, Wiwa Mama Ramón Gil explains that ‘payments’ are a way to ‘cancel debts’ with Nature

³⁴ For example: ‘Why do we make spiritual payments?’, ‘Why is there warming?’, ‘Why are we running out of snow?’, and ‘Who is the Younger Brother?’.

³⁵ *Organización Gonawindúa Tayrona* (see Introduction).

for what is taken from Her. Being familiar with Younger Brother's thinking and lifestyle, he compares this to paying back someone's borrowed money; both instances settle harmful imbalances (Elderly Words 2009). Since 'Younger Brother has profaned Nature too much', and 'does not ask for permission' or consult Her, he is causing earthquakes, illnesses, floods, and hurricanes. The Mama hopes that 'Younger Brother will hereby understand, listen, and nature is not finished' (ibid.). While this may illustrate the general *intention* of paying back environmental forces, most non-Kogi will struggle to comprehend what 'asking for permission' and 'cancelling' mean, and how this is actually performed. Saying that 'gold has its own thought and can speak, [is] a living being', and 'stealing' it is like digging up a tree (Webb 2001b), also sounds very foreign. Would considering the nature of these statements help understand Kogi ecological practices at sacred sites?

Another issue is that the Mamas cannot communicate directly with the public, relying on Spanish-speaking Kogi for translations which may sometimes reduce or alter the original content. Following Mama Jacinto's frustration: 'If I could express myself as you do... I would tell you many things that happen to us' (Elderly Words 2009). By having partly learned the complex Kogi language (Koggian), I experienced its difficult pronunciation, distinct phraseology, concepts without equivalents in European languages, and single syllables that capture entire cosmological principles. The non-Kogi term "sacred site" for example, differs from the original *gaka* and *ezwama* (Chapter 1), which expresses heat, organisation, and primordially. Like the Hopi language studied by Whorf (1967: 213), Koggian 'dissects nature' and 'thinks' very differently than Indo-European languages, partly capturing how the Kogi understand and perceive the world. While Preuss (1926) related the Kogi language to myths, its directly perceptual, ontological aspect has not been studied. While 'Aluna' can mean 'soul', 'thought', 'spirit', 'memory', 'intention', and 'volition', no single term fully translates the concept (Preuss 1926, Reichel-Dolmatoff 1951d: 93). Consider Mama Pedro Juan's difficult statement, translated into Spanish and then English:

Nulkukehe (the essence of the Sierra Nevada) is a Lord who knows the whole of the Law. The Mother told him that he is in charge of manifesting her thoughts. Nulkuhaluwa (the Sierra Nevada) is the material manifestation of the Law (Mama Pedro Juan 2009)

Does Nulkukehe actually connote 'essence' and where is it? How does Nulkukehe differ from Nulkuhaluwa? What are the Mother's 'thoughts', and how do they 'manifest' and relate to 'the Law'? Mama Pedro Juan (2009) continues explaining that the Sierra has the 'codes' of all life, mostly stored in its sacred sites, in which 'everything that exists on earth' is found. Following the OGT (2012: 7), this includes 'norms and principles to maintain life', making the sites 'spiritual fathers and mothers [and] owners' of things. Furthermore, the Sierra's mountains are 'like Mamas', and represent 'cities,

temples, and the governments of all peoples of the world' (Indigenous Authorities 2006). Why are these apparently bizarre understandings stated and even published so confidently? If these 'norms' and 'principles' are also the Mother's 'stories' about natural elements, how do the Mamas apparently 'know and manage' them through specific 'procedures in Aluna' which 'only they know' (OGT 2012: 10)? Understanding why these things are so central to Kogi eco-politics and their very being, also involves asking what these 'untouchable' sacred sites actually *are*, how they apparently 'protect [...] nature', and why 'we *must* physically occupy the sacred places [to] fortify them' (Mama Pedro Juan 2009, my emphasis)? How does damaging the sites supposedly cause local, regional *and* global environmental issues like droughts, floods, temperature changes, erosion, social conflict, and sickness (ibid.)? Moreover, how can these foreign principles, statements, and practices be conceptualised and theorised anthropologically?

Since the first film *From the Heart of the World* (1990, Introduction) was made, Mamas and Kogi leaders consider that the public has not really listened and learned. Being frightened about 'increasingly serious threats', Mama Luntana (2011) says that in 2009 the Kogi Mamas performed divinations to ask in Aluna how to make people understand and react. The spiritual world responded that to address Younger Brother's 'lack of respect for the Ancestral Territory' (ibid.), the Kogi would inevitably have to open up somewhat more. This involved making another film, *Aluna*, to disclose hitherto concealed knowledge and practices. According to producer Ereira (*Aluna* 2011), the Mamas led the process and explained more thoroughly why interfering with cosmic forces causes climate change, epidemics, or violence. Having recognised that mainstream society relies on "seeing for believing", the Mamas' strategy was now to also *show* what they see, know, and do. By filming at sacred sites, their deterioration was displayed. The Mamas also performed care-taking activities for the camera, and traced the invisible 'Black Line' with a golden thread to make it more tangible. They sought to demonstrate that their work has visible and measurable results, that they really are taking care of the entire Earth.

These difficulties in communication invite a clarification of Kogi statements and practices to improve understanding of their eco-politics. I suggest that such an elucidation can build on a descriptive and explanatory conceptual translation into forms of expression more approachable and familiar to non-Kogi "Western" audiences. This can be part of a necessary ethnographic contextualisation of the Mamas' environmental cause within Kogi society and life on the Sierra as the holistic, ecological way of being and knowing exposed in Chapter 1. My intention is to let the meaning and sense of Kogi terms emerge as directly as possible. Thus clarifying and articulating the Kogi material can hopefully provide a more accurate basis to analyse it according to a theoretical

anthropological framework and ask: in which way do Kogi cosmological, ontological, and epistemological premises jointly guide and structure their ecology (Chapter 7), and how does this affect Kogi political activism (Chapter 8)? For this purpose, I develop a realist anthropological approach to Kogi ontology and epistemology that can support this conceptual task and help articulate the Kogi, anthropological, and generally “Western” frames of reference at play.

2.2. Interrelating fieldwork with Kogi ontology and ecology

2.2.1. Previous work on the Kogi

Besides Reichel-Dolmatoff's monograph (1950c, 1951d), there are no in-depth anthropological studies about the Kogi. An elucidation of Kogi ecology within the wider framework indicated above has not been carried out before, and neither has anthropological research on them been based long-term fieldwork, or on structured and purposeful teachings by the Mamas. Early ethnographic descriptions by Father Celedón (1886), de Brettes (1903), and Bolinder (1925) were brief and general. Preuss' (1926) study was limited to the language, the Kogi's relationship to national society, and myth-recollection. While being the first Colombian anthropologist to write about the Kogi, Chaves' (1947) work on mythology, habitat, and anatomical traits lacked proper social contextualisation.

Despite being the most comprehensive source on the Kogi, Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff apparently never visited the Sierra for more than a couple of months. His mostly descriptive monograph (1950c, 1951d) is admirable in detail, insight, and scope, but does not actively include Kogi voices, and overemphasises certain themes psycho-analytically. Reichel-Dolmatoff's methodical and informative subsequent articles cover cosmology, biological understandings (1951a), spiritual themes, Kogi 'temples' (1975c), economy, material culture, the Mamas' training (1976d), kinship, political organisation, knowledge, 'religious symbolism' (1967c), the afterlife (1984b), and oral tradition. He also addresses both historical continuities and changes Kogi society has undergone since colonisation (1951b, 1953f, 1982b). Reichel-Dolmatoff discusses Kogi ecology (1982b) mostly in terms of subsistence and does not relate it to their emerging eco-political activism. The creational significance of the landscape, especially the sacred sites, is not sufficiently highlighted. While Reichel-Dolmatoff's later works attempted a more integrative understanding of Kogi dispositions to life (1978f), the Great Mother (1987b) and the Sierra Nevada (1990f), he did not focus on ontology and epistemology. I therefore propose to extend his holistic insights through a more systematic and

grounded integration of all these domains as a cosmologically framed but ecologically directed way of being and knowing tied to the land.

Additional anthropological research on the Kogi has been limited, and has recently focused on the critical approach to Kogi eco-politics discussed in the Introduction and Chapter 1 (Bocarejo 2009, Giraldo 2010, Orrantia 2002b, Ulloa 2005). While Reichel-Dolmatoff attempted to describe and analyse Kogi thought, understandings, and practices in their own terms, these authors have turned to a political deconstruction of Kogi ecology that neglects its underlying lived ontology on the Sierra. Carlos Uribe (1988, 1998a, 1998b) has led this trend by seeking to distance himself from Reichel-Dolmatoff's apparently homogenising and idealising analyses, in this way also shaping his useful appraisals of socio-historical developments (1993, 1997). These approaches contrast with perhaps more cultural studies which, generally in Reichel-Dolmatoff's vein, recognise and seek to convey cosmological understandings, historical consistencies, social organisation, and Kogi being. Examples are the relation between cosmology and architecture (Duque Cañas et al. 2004), myth-recollection (Fischer and Preuss 1989), divination and traditional medicine (Arbeláez Albornoz 1997), astronomical notes (Mayr Maldonado 1987), or Kogi parallels with the Tairona (Oyuela-Caicedo 1986, 1998, 2002). Nevertheless, what all these studies share is focusing on specific topics and apparently being based on shorter, periodic visits. My project draws on long-term fieldwork and attempts a holistic elucidation of Kogi being and knowing on the Sierra, which is nevertheless pertinent to the current eco-political situation, contextualises the Kogi ethno-historically, and follows the Mamas' own related teachings.

2.2.2. Spiritually consulted fieldwork: the Sierra responds

Given their withdrawn, conservative, and not easily approachable historical attitude to outsiders, accessing the Kogi to do research is not easy. Bolinder (1925: 196) was received with 'dull silence, indifference, and folded arms', and hardly gained Kogi trust. Kogi men evaded de Brettes' (1903: 335) and Preuss' (1926: 21) questions, saying 'that's how it is' and 'there is no such thing here'. The Kogi initially rejected Preuss' stay, the Mamas were elusive, people left at his sight, 'feared' him, distrusted his desire to see temples and objects, hid the truth and deceived him, and avoided being caught at ceremonies. Despite trying many techniques, ethnography was 'a scientific torture' during which he almost gave up (1926: 21). Reichel-Dolmatoff (1950c, 1951d: 292) confirms the great difficulty in working among the Kogi, who initially asked him 'when will you go?', clearly resisted his questions, and often simply replied: 'I don't know' (1990f). In 1989, visual anthropologist Graham Townsley (2010, personal conversation) was 'left to wait endlessly' before achieving anything when preparing Ereira's (FHW 1990) first film.

Nowadays, Kogi leaders are still wary of people wanting to ‘investigate our culture’ and simply ‘take away information’, slowly and thoroughly evaluating outsiders’ motives and conduct. Involving much time and perseverance, projects are only accepted if they are purposefully aligned with spiritual guidelines, compatible with the environmental cause, and benefit Kogi society. A purely academic, anthropological research intention is not of interest. By participating in the filming of *Aluna* (mentioned above) in 2011 as preliminary fieldwork, I had an invaluable opportunity to befriend some Spanish-speaking Kogi, establish trust, familiarise myself with Kogi life, and start learning Koggian. Moreover, this opportunity effectively kicked off my project, since my job was to translate between Spanish and English on-set, and later oversee translations from Koggian recordings into Spanish. Daily I witnessed the Mamas perform ecological practices/rituals, and heard their felt explanations about the state of the Sierra and Kogi society. I experienced the linguistic, ontological, and practical communication difficulties first hand, evidenced for instance in knotty interactions between the Kogi and the crew, yet also saw that progress and understanding are achievable. I saw how beyond the constraints of audiovisual media and the film industry, my long-term fieldwork could provide the ethnographic contextualisation of Kogi ontology as-lived.

Since the Kogi were visibly interested in this more solid and comprehensive understanding of their environmental activism, once the filming ended I approached three of the Mamas on-set, Shibulata, Luntana, and Manuel. Already knowing me, they calmly expressed their interest and accepted to later work on this together. Still, all external engagements, initiatives, and projects have to be officially approved by the OGT in Santa Marta, especially by the Organisation’s head. He is also Council Governor of the Kogi Indigenous Reservation, its legal representative, and the highest Kogi political authority³⁶. While this approval is normally not easily obtained, given my positive reputation during the film *Santos* allowed my research relatively quickly, although he only directly endorsed it a year later. Other Kogi leaders and representatives reacted well to my work, making my presence accepted and known. When starting fieldwork proper in early 2012, I presented a more detailed proposal to the three Mamas of why and how I thought that Kogi statements and practices invite clarification. I suggested that Kogi efforts in explaining their onto-ecological understandings to a very differently thinking mainstream society, could be complemented by an open approximation from a member of that society to the Kogi side to establish a bridge of communication.

Among the Kogi, every significant decision or course of action has to be consulted and validated in the conscious spiritual realm of *Aluna*, where they say truth resides. Because this communication is greater at sacred sites (*gaka*), divinations are performed and discussed there,

³⁶ His name is José de los Santos Sauna, and is called ‘Santos’ by most people.

including foreign matters like my proposal. Assisted by Silvestre as translator, I started with Mama Shibulata. On a small sacred site behind lush vegetation near his village, Dumingeka, the Mama heard me out without interruptions, merely acknowledging my points with certain sounds and gestures, like Kogi men normally do when someone gives a speech. Despite being usually somewhat inexpressive and withdrawn, Mama Shibulata contently said that this was good and necessary, welcoming my initiative, adding '*zeiñzhakldé!*' ('happy')³⁷. He stayed behind sitting on a rock to settle our conversation by spiritually 'tying' it to the site, thereby 'registering' my words with the Sierra and its forces.

Some days later I went to Tungeka, the equally low-lying village³⁸ of Mama Manuel and Mama Luntana. Silvestre and I spent the night on hammocks in one of Mama Luntana's houses, while the Mamas spiritually consulted about my intentions and prepared our meeting. After I bathed in the river in the morning, the Mamas took us to a secluded sacred site about 15mins walk away that they had previously chosen out of many other potential ones. The place is hidden in scrubland off the dusty track and next to a large mango tree. Despite the hot and sticky day, the Mamas listened carefully and patiently to my proposal, repeatedly nodding and exclaiming approval: '*tuki!*' (that's it!). Before leaving, they said that *the sacred site*, a conscious 'mother', would now process the information, while they performed corresponding divinations overnight. On the site again the next morning, the Mamas explained that the forthcoming answer was not originally theirs. It came from agencies or persons in the spiritual realm who had overheard our conversation, communicated with the Mamas in their dreams, and now officially responded at the site through the Mamas' water-divining bowls (*zhátukua*, see Chapter 3).

These supernatural entities influencing my research accepted my intentions and spiritually endorsed the endeavour I had proposed. They gave Mama Luntana and Mama Manuel *specific indications* for how to proceed and appropriately introduce me to the extensive reality of the Sierra Nevada and its current ecological problems in the time available. We were to gradually work through four main themes in the following (cosmological) order of learning: Water, Earth/World, Trees, and Nourishment/Foodstuffs (*Ñi*, *Kaggi*, *Kaldzi*, and *Gakue*). Silvestre translated that we were now entering a spiritual agreement with the mother in the site, to be respected and fulfilled responsibly by the Mamas, Silvestre, and myself. 'She' wanted to do this, and would guide us and help us, representing the voice and will of the Sierra Nevada. By regularly talking at the site and completing

³⁷ Since there is no word for 'thank you' in Koggian, this term expresses appreciation and sometimes gratitude.

³⁸ It takes about three hours to walk directly from Dumingeka to Tungeka across small hills, streams, fields and woodland. Otherwise one can hire a motorbike down to the main road by the coast, drive west for about 10km, and then up again to Tungeka (takes about 1.5 hours).

the process, the mother would be 'happy'. Our words and presence were 'food' and 'nourished' her in exchange for the knowledge she gave me through the Mamas, instantiating Kogi principles of balance and reciprocity. If not followed, this would lead to a spiritual imbalance that could cause us problems, bad fortune, or illness³⁹. As Silvestre said, 'these things need to be taken seriously'. Initially somewhat intimidated by this "responsibility", gradually I gained confidence and realised that this is what it would take to learn Kogi knowledge (*shibuldama*) and make my project successful. The 'deeper' Kogi knowledge is, the more responsibility it involves and the harder it is for the Mamas to reveal, yet the more rewarding it can be.

Showing enthusiasm about the prospect of being thoroughly listened to, Mama Luntana and Mama Manuel added that this initiative is important and necessary, and started immediately speaking about the Sierra's problems. Without having talked to them, Mama Shibulata said on a later day that he had also divined and separately obtained *the same* spiritual indications to work with me on those four themes. These sessions therefore became the core of my fieldwork, and the Mamas saw in them a more elaborate opportunity to explain things in their terms and at their pace. They felt encouraged to work with me because my project was compatible with the Kogi's need for a better understanding of their environmental cause. I was able to learn *shibuldama*⁴⁰ (knowledge), because for the Mamas my reason to do so corresponded to how knowledge should have an (ecological) purpose in generating well-being. The project was especially satisfactory and justified to the Mamas (and other Kogi) since the Sierra had approved it and it was aligned with spiritual forces, being thus endorsed by Aluna through divination (*iltueld*). Without this mutually beneficial compatibility, I could not have accessed the Kogi this closely and directly, and attained the same ethnographic richness. It also greatly facilitated the Kogi Organisation's formal approval of my presence.

The Mamas' Four Topics also structured my otherwise very broad research on the Kogi-Sierra interrelationship around something concrete and manageable. Besides the Mamas' teachings, explanations and stories, the sessions also included discussions, my questions, and generally comparing Kogi and non-Kogi understandings. Our encounters always took place at sacred sites, who dynamically listened to, monitored, and provided feedback to our conversations through the Mamas. Learning from the Mamas was consequently not an unintentional apprenticeship like Stoller's (1984) sorka-healer training among the Songhay, or Castaneda's (1968) unexpected initiation into 'Yaqui knowledge'. It was rather a purposeful, predetermined course of action that constituted a necessary and productive way to carry out my research. Neither did I become a Mama, like Favret-Saada (1980)

³⁹ Illness is understood as an effect of imbalance and disorder (Core Chapters, Chapter 8).

⁴⁰ The Kogi claim that the Mother gave them knowledge to protect and regulate the Sierra Nevada. Knowing the Sierra means caring for it.

a witch in France, a status only attainable to a Kogi and through elaborate training. My sessions are somewhat more comparable to Griaule's (1965) conversations with the Dogon elder Ogotemmêli, in which through stories and explanations from an expert, Griaule elucidated Dogon religion. However, my structured lessons to better understand this lived ontology entailed practical ecological reasons.

Moreover, I was not tied to the three Mamas as perhaps "super-informants" like Griaule, Castaneda, or Crapanzano's (1980) relationship to the Moroccan man Tuhami and his spirit-guardian. To widen my range of insights about Mama knowledge, personality, rank, and expertise, I also held some complementary learning sessions with five other Mamas from different valleys: Salé, Bernardo, Francisco, Julian, and Pedro Juan. While I approached them on the same grounds as Mamas Shibulata, Luntana, and Manuel, the former five respected the agreement with the latter three as the main learning process. I observed how all Mamas do the same rituals, talk of the same forces and spiritual agencies, share an overall ecological responsibility, and are interested in improving communication with Younger Brother. Additionally, I had the chance to contextualise the Mamas' teachings and practices by experiencing Kogi society as a whole. Observing how the ecology is practiced in all aspects of life (Chapter 1) as a knowledgeable way of being in the Sierra Nevada formed the basis for my translation and elucidation.

2.2.3. A base in the Sierra Nevada

Being regularly in close contact with Kogi society was initially a hurdle, since actually living with them in their settlements is unwanted, and the Kogi are not great hosts to outsiders. As a solution, I was advised at the OGT to become a needed English teacher at one of the Western-type schools, built by the Colombian State on more accessible lower hills, that some Kogi children attend⁴¹. Conveniently located five minutes from Dumingeka (Mama Shibulata's village), I taught here for a year. Locally, this agreement was with the school's rector, a Kogi man named Mateo Sauna, father of Alejo Sauna, my main translator and friend. Like other Kogi I related to, Mateo was aware of my filming role, my anthropological research project, and the Mamas' sessions. By living at the school I could practice the language with the pupils, constantly visit the village and surrounding homesteads, interact with Kogi by-passers, and organise trips higher up the Sierra. In my second year of fieldwork I was sufficiently known and trusted to stop the teaching, go more freely to other places, and participate in Kogi ceremonies and activities. I also regularly visited the OGT and attended some of its meetings and events, while continuing to use the school as my base in the mountains.

⁴¹ See Chapter 8 for a discussion of the role of these schools and OGT 'education' strategies.

Teaching Kogi children was seen positively by the local population as a concrete, practical, and easily identifiable role in exchange for allowing me to stay. The post contributed to the Kogi Council Governor's acceptance of my research, for whom I was thereby not 'roaming the Sierra with unknown whereabouts', uncontrolled. Among Kogi 'communities', eyes are everywhere; the OGT and Kogi village authorities are informed about peoples' doings. Unlike say Evans-Pritchard's (1940) experience with pressuring colonial authorities, the Mamas, my translators, and Kogi leaders respected my PhD as an independent project. Occasional assistance to the OGT or helping out at village events in Dumingeka was sufficient to maintain good relations. Governor Santos also indicated that my teaching post's official link to the Kogi Organisation straightforwardly explained my (otherwise unusual) presence to Colombian *mestizos* and institutions, granting me an unambiguous and safe position. As a neutral, un-affiliated researcher moreover, I avoided associations with governmental, environmental, academic, or social groups and discourses that could have affected Kogi trust in my position on their side. By limiting my exposure to the complicated political sphere that surrounds the Sierra Nevada (Chapter 1), I focused instead on Kogi ontology, the Mamas' teachings, and daily Kogi life. I hereby made more space for the sentient, non-human actors often central to indigenous environmental activism (Blaser 2009, De la Cadena 2010). This non-human factor now leads me to situate my research in the literature on different reality postulates.

2.3. A realist approach towards a realist way of being

2.3.1. From constructivist worldviews to multiple worlds

Following Rapport and Overing (2000: 271), anthropology has struggled to shake off old paradigms that distinguish reasoned, truthful, factual discourse (*logos*) from fictitious or figurative discourse (*mythos*). 'What is, for us, other people's strange and "exotic" statements about reality' have created a 'dilemma of how to interpret other people's insistence that gods, demons and spirits exist' (ibid.: 270, 274). Goulet and Young (1994: 9) find that 'anthropologists normally give little credence to informant accounts which do not accord with the world view of Western Science'. For Edith Turner (2003), 'mainline anthropologists' have explained alien reality postulates (e.g. spirit possession) as an expression, reflection, or construction of a more fundamental human condition. By only using the material as if it were 'metaphor or symbolism, not reality, [...] congruent with the function, structure or psychological mindset of the society', these authors have ignored what for the people themselves is 'the central matter of this kind of information' (2003: 148). Similarly, Rapport and Overing (2000: 275) explain that reasons for these non-conforming phenomena have been found '*elsewhere*- in the reality of the social or political structure, in psychological health, or in thought itself'. Whether as

conscious or unconscious strategies and devices (also performative or pedagogical), the role of human subjectivity is overemphasised (Olsen 2003: 91). Reality postulates are often not confronted as knowledge or possibly valid claims about 'metaphysical truth' (Goulet and Young 1994, Rapport and Overing 2000: 276).

Largely in response to this long-standing problem of 'radical alterity' (Graeber 2015), the 'anthropology of ontology' (Scott 2013) has recently emerged as an alternative. This theoretical strand considers what other peoples say and do about the world as a question of *being* (Bessire and Bond 2014, Di Giminiani 2013, Nadasdy 2007, Smith 1998, Willerslev 2007). In this light, the so-called 'ontological turn' attempts to overcome the idea of an epistemologically "superior" and "objective" anthropologist that conveys what people "really mean", and can characterise it as irrational within the grand scheme of truth (Holbraad 2012). These scholars intend to counter 'the pernicious tendency' of the 'rationalist bias' to explain how people represent, symbolise, construct and conceptualise the world (Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell 2007: 11, Viveiros de Castro 2003). Instead of talking of 'worldviews' that supposedly attach meanings to nature, as Ingold (2000) critiques, these ontological approaches challenge the Western analytical separation between a unitary, given, physical nature and its many biased cultural interpretations, albeit in different ways (e.g. Candea 2010, Descola 2013, Willerslev 2007).

However, to dissolve these long-standing divisions, which include objectivity and subjectivity, universality and relativism (Ingold 2000, Scott 2013, Strathern 1995), various authors have turned to the other extreme of seemingly muddling what is real. In a vague, relativist conception, native discourses and practices now constitute 'ontologies' in the sense of 'multiple realities' or 'life-worlds' (Blaser 2009, Mimica 2011, Pedersen 2011). People(s) supposedly inhabit and perform separate (existential) realms of relationality. This ontological pluralism significantly draws on Viveiros de Castro's (2002) idea of an Amazonian 'relative native' and his concepts of 'multinaturalism' and 'perspectivism'. For him (1998: 477), what changes are not worldviews but the world or nature itself that beings/people see. Holbraad (2010: 36) explicitly states that 'alterity is a function of the existence of different worlds per se'. Echoing this drastic mutability or philosophical indeterminism, Mol (1999: 75) says that because 'reality is done' and 'located' rather than fixed, 'it is also multiple'. According to Candea (2010), these ideas have roots in anthropology's 'epistemological angst' at ascertaining things during the 1980's 'reflexive turn'.

Yet, as Laidlaw (2012) points out, this tendency can become another way of recreating the same, basic, recurrent premise in anthropology that people live immersed in their own, constructed,

meaning-laden cultures. It has therefore been recently discussed whether “ontology” is then simply another word for “culture” (Carrithers et al. 2010)⁴². Despite wanting to take seriously, and follow, what Siberian Yukaghir hunters say about spirits, non-human persons, and souls, Willerslev (2007: 3, 191) still calls their animism ‘symbolic world-making’. This resembles Hallowell’s (2002 [1960]: 29, 33, 35, 42) earlier account of Ojibwa ontology as ‘their world’, where they act ‘as if’ dealing with non-human persons through ‘cultural devices’ and ‘cognitive sets’. In this sense, the ontological turn may be a problematic, more strongly relativistic version of Malinowski’s (1922: 25) intention to ‘grasp the native’s point of view, his relation to life, to realize *his* vision of *his* world’ (my emphasis) as the aim of anthropology. Whether in the earlier constructivist manner, or in the recent ontological pluralism, in both cases people’s reality postulates are limited to their local context.

‘The well-worn anthropological practice of rendering our informants’ ideas [only] “rational in context” ’ (Toren and Pina-Cabral 2009: 15) is consequently not overcome, but rather radicalised. Not only cultural interpretations, but supposedly *things themselves* change relative to local human subjectivity. For Holbraad (2012) for example, Cuban divining powder only has those powers there. Paradoxically, pluralising/relativising *ontology* in this way can undermine the concept’s original universalist concern with *the way things are*. There is still a hesitance at considering differing reality postulates at face value as claims to general truths. Ontological pluralism cannot therefore be a solution to apparently incommensurable differences, such as when the Nuer say that ‘twins are birds’ (Evans-Pritchard 1936), or when the Kogi say that stones are sentient, ancestral ‘guards’. As Heywood (2012) helpfully notes, arguing for “worlds” (or “natures”) is in itself a problematic philosophical ‘meta-ontological’ idea or logic about how things are like. Accordingly, ontological pluralism ‘positions the anthropologist as the very intellectual that is able to access and move between these incommensurable realities and theorize the insights gained’ (Vigh and Sausdal 2014: 50).

⁴² 2008 Meeting of the *Group for Debates in Anthropological Theory* in Manchester.

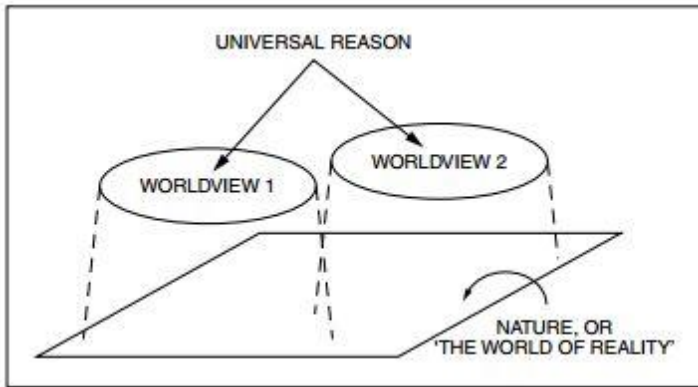


Figure 2.1: ‘From this perspective, anthropology embarks on the comparative study of cultural worldviews, while science investigates the workings of nature’ (Ingold 2000: 15).

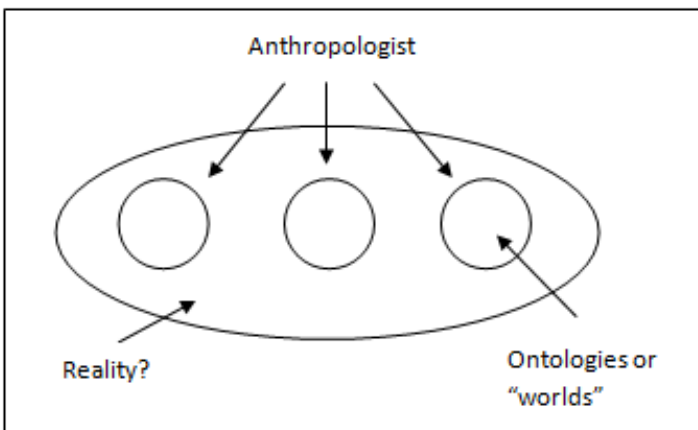


Figure 2.2: Swapping “worldviews” for “worlds” as another meta-ontological assumption about “reality”. By seemingly knowing, travelling, and analytically classifying/comparing these different “worlds”, the anthropologist implicitly continues to have a wider meta-epistemological perspective.

2.3.2. A realist approach

Among the Kogi, I found a strong essentialist and universalist sense of addressing “the real” in thought, statement, and practice. The Mamas expect others to consider their ontological statements as knowledge about predetermined cosmic principles and real orders and forces, as well as about important and shared ecological relations and problems. This is a ‘situation that not only affects us, but everyone in the world, even the English on the far side of the sea’ (Mama Pedro Juan 2009). Kogi leaders seek the understanding of ‘Younger Brother’ precisely on the assumption that their explanations have *universal* relevance, and to find *common* ground in *one* world, of which the Sierra is considered the regulating ‘Heart’ (Introduction). Beyond *speaking* about them, my informants *behaved* towards sacred sites as things that exist for everyone just as a hill or lake does and even sustain life, and not just as ‘thing-concepts’ (Henare et al. 2007). ‘We did not make up our traditions’, they were ‘given to us by the Mother’ to follow as ‘the Law of Origin’, I often heard Kogi say.

To interpret all this mainly as cultural constructions, metaphors, ways to uphold social structure or functionality, expressions of ethnic identity, personality-laden discourse, or as political strategies (Introduction), would reduce and misrepresent the Kogi’s very *raison d’être*. If instead I

encapsulated Kogi ontology as a “world” or parallel realm that is merely true or meaningful *for them*, with a logic limited to its local context, this would relativise their whole lives on the Sierra Nevada. Consequently, I cannot start my intended translation by necessarily assuming that, as a ‘communicative disjuncture’ or ‘equivocation’, what appear as different ways of talking about the same things are actually references to different things and ‘natures’ (Viveiros de Castro 2004: 9). These apparently insurmountable divisions would not allow Kogi leaders to establish commonalities and continuities with Younger Brother, which is their aim, but rather impede *communication* and *translation*. After all, the Mamas engaged me directly without this sense of ontological division to address shared ecological issues for audiences beyond the Sierra. Ontological pluralism could hereby also neglect the potential practical relevance of Kogi ecology for environmental problems. If Kogi ontology refers to something more than ‘just the native, that is, his society or mind: it speaks about the world’ (Viveiros de Castro 2003), could it also know and *affect* the world?

I consequently propose a *realist* stance that transcends both cultural constructivism and ontological pluralism to address the Kogi’s own realist terms. By taking their claims seriously as potentially valid claims to truth, and as Nourse (1996) advocates without a priori interpretive assumptions, my intention is to let the Mamas explain what they mean. While this realist stance does not ignore social and political forces, it does justice to Kogi statements and practices as intended *knowledge*, thereby allowing them explanatory potential about the world. Nadasdy (2007) argues that this may imply considering indigenous claims literally, which is also how the Mamas mean them. To challenge classical interpretations of different reality postulates then, whereby entities like the sun are ‘not *really* a person’ but projections or constructions of ‘external realities’, I could not say that this is mainly ‘because they [are] experienced as such’ in a ‘lifeworld’, as Ingold (2000: 95, 96) suggests. In Kogi realist terms, the sun (Father *Mokuákukui*) simply *is* a person, independently of how they experience and perceive him.

My realist approach requires using the concept of ontology following its traditional, philosophical meaning as the universal study of being or *that which is*, and not as a relativistic multipliable noun (“ontologies”) that indexes bounded micro-worlds. Instead, I favour its quality as an adjective. In this language, talking of ‘the Mamas’ ontological statements’ for example, indexes existential matters, the *onto* itself that they refer to. If I use ontology as a noun, as in ‘Kogi ontology’, I take it to mean a relation to and understanding of the world in the *singular*. In this I follow Ingold (2008: 69), for whom anthropology’s objective is to seek a generous yet critical ‘understanding of human being and knowing in the *one world* we all inhabit’ (my emphasis). This in turn requires that I firmly place the Kogi *in* the world, which is directly known and perceived through a continuous,

dynamic, and immersive engagement with the environment (Ingold 2000). I thus intend to allow a universality that Kogi knowledge can participate in. The Mamas can hereby have a say in what Willerslev (2007: 3) calls ‘a critical dialogue with our theories of knowledge’, and thus in Habermas’ proposition of a universal dialogue about truth that does not reduce claims to their local context, and generates communicative understanding (Myerson 1994). Such universality implies allowing for commensurability, and a possible common frame of reference.

Now some anthropologists might contend that the content of reality postulates and the ensuing questions about truth are contextually irrelevant or not an anthropological concern per se. Yet instead of leaving the field of anthropology, Turner (1994) thinks that by taking this as appropriate anthropological material we can better understand the situation, and get closer to the people and what concerns them most. Similarly, Nadasdy (2007: 37) advocates ‘a willingness to treat extraordinary experiences as data and take them into account in our theory making’. My argument is that the Kogi as humans cannot be understood without the non-human matters they address, especially when seemingly defining all aspects of their lives in great detail, thus inviting an ‘anthropology beyond the human’ (Kohn 2013). To clarify and contextualise Kogi eco-politics then, my analysis should include the principles, agencies, and forces in the world that the Kogi claim to consciously and purposefully know and relate to.

However, beyond specific reality postulates like French witchcraft (Favret-Saada 1980), spirit possession (Nourse 1996), or Irish fairy-lore (Gaffin 2013), I was faced with a ‘multifaceted communicative interrelationship’ with the world along Smith’s (1998: 427) account of Chipewyan ontology. The Mamas’ sessions instantiated an entire Kogi way of being, knowing, and living closely integrated with the Sierra Nevada. As further discussed in Chapter 7 and 8, I consequently need to approach this as a whole. This requires constantly referring to many interlinking aspects, and does not leave much space to elaborate on specific themes. Moreover, the Mamas’ teachings were framed in a more structural *cosmological* framework that needs to be accounted for in my realist stance. This is necessary to understand Kogi ecology and place its emphasis on balance, sustenance, and exchange as part of that wider order.

The realist stance also has implications for my position as anthropologist. Like Favret-Saada (1980) in the case of French witchcraft, during fieldwork I had to immerse myself in Kogi ontology as lived and become a full, active participant in order to understand and take it seriously. As she argues, this required suspending the academic fear of ‘succumbing to subjectivism’ (1980: 25), for it is *because of* this involvement that she could come to know this reality and later obtain a more

analytical, distanced overview. As Goethe once said (Seamon and Zajonc 1998), to learn about things I had to be part of things. Given this interdependent *whole* moreover, my participation was equally multifaceted. It variously involved doing spiritual ‘confessions’ (*aluna ishguashi*), sitting in the cosmic *nuhué*, dancing to ‘Spiritual Fathers’ in village ceremonies, concentrating by chewing coca leaves, learning the landscape’s significance, interpreting dreams and omens, or respecting ‘angry’ weather-changing lakes. Consequently, most of what I experienced was relevant to my research, and illuminated by the Mamas’ teachings.

Rather than being unexpectedly changed by (Goulet and Miller 2007) or involuntarily drawn into this ‘logic’ (Favret-Saada 1980), from the start my immersion was a deliberate strategy to understand Kogi life. Rather than being an inevitable ethnographic dilemma (Goulet and Young 1994), I intentionally faced these reality postulates to openly ask ‘what is actually going on here?’, as Edith Turner (1994: 86) advocates. This was a precondition to clarify the sense of Kogi eco-political statements, especially given the Sierra’s tangible environmental problems at stake. Beyond suspending ‘ethnographic disbelief’, not ‘dismiss[ing] out of hand’ other possible realms of reality entailed being aware of my own ontological assumptions (Nadasdy 2007: 37), and going beyond accepted and safe academic and cultural vantage points (Goulet and Miller 2007).

My experiences were similar to Richard Nelson’s (1983: 239), who was introduced by the Koyukon People in Alaska to dimensions ‘that I, as a Euro-American, had either not learned to perceive or had been explicitly taught do not exist’. This questioned his own fundamental assumptions about ‘the nature of nature’. More than letting native postulates permeate our own being (Stoller 1984), in my case it was the Sierra’s spiritual agencies who, in the Mamas’ sessions, got close to me and “permeated my being”. I consequently build on Nourse (1996), who suggests focusing on what spirits themselves say. Given the Mamas’ sessions lasted almost two years, this ‘extraordinary experience’ in the field (Goulet and Young 1994) became rather a regular, practical relationship that attempted to enact commensurability.

2.4. Adjusting to Kogi ontology is following Kogi epistemology

2.4.1. Knowledge and being

The ontological and experiential conditions of fieldwork discussed above were also epistemologically determining of when, where, and how to learn *shibuldama* (knowledge). In this light, which approach to epistemology and knowledge is most productive for the Kogi-Sierra matrix and corresponds to my

realist stance? What are the implications for my approach to ontology? What is knowledge in Kogi terms?

For much of anthropology's history, issues of radical alterity were variously discussed throughout the so-called 'rationality debate' (Horton 1993, Masolo 1994, Tambiah 1990) as mostly an *epistemological* problem of how people know, think, interpret, perceive and reason "the real". To reframe radical alterity as ontological in character, Holbraad (2009) argues that anthropology's concern should be with what exists instead of what can be known. For him, a hard separation from ontology avoids monopolising epistemology, and falling into the trap that 'truth must be a property of representations [...] about the world' that become falsifiable as unreasonable, symbolic, or constructed (ibid.: 82). Despite Holbraad's (2009) intention to hereby transcend the 'dilemma' of universalism and relativism, his separation rather seems to reinforce time-old dichotomies. Similarly, Viveiros de Castro (2003) wants to dissolve the positivist, epistemological advantage of anthropological discourse over Indigenous People's understanding by 'replac[ing] epistemology with ontology'. This move is what seemingly underlies the ontological pluralism discussed earlier.

Since in Kogi monism there is no real distinction between what they say and how they do things, this also invites suspending the pervasive analytical division between substance (ontology) and form (epistemology) discussed by Ingold (2000), and recreated by these authors. By aiming to be consistent with the *content* or *substance* of *what* the Kogi do and refer to, my realist approach complements the normal anthropological interest in the *form* or logic of what people say, in *how* things are done, negotiated, or expressed.

Furthermore, I argue that Holbraad (2009) and Viveiros de Castro (2003), by apparently taking knowledge out of the equation, do not really confront its potential universal validity and significance. I could not really take seriously and understand Kogi ontological understandings of what exists if I exclude the epistemological questions of what can be known and how the Kogi know (Holbraad 2009). This is crucial in finding possible common frames of reference that allow a translation based on what the Mamas to claim to know about environmental problems. To avoid seeing Kogi epistemology as interpretations and representations of the world therefore, neither separating epistemology from ontology, nor substituting epistemology with ontology, seem workable here. For Toren (2009) by contrast, recognising that ontology and epistemology are aspects of one another as two sides of the same coin is necessary to genuinely credit other people's understandings of the world. Seeing these terms as mutually implicated (Goldman 2011), agrees with how in Kogi terms being and knowledge are inseparable, and requires 'ground[ing] knowing in being', as Ingold

(2008: 83) argues. Also generally in line with Ingold (2000), in this light Kogi epistemology would be a means to access and know the world directly.

In Kogi terms, knowledge (*shibuldama*) derives from being. It is inherent in nature and things, *out there*, contained especially in certain places and formations such as caves, rocks, sacred sites, and mountains. More than having knowledge, these places *are* knowledge, being conscious, teaching entities. Trees, rivers, animals, the wind, the ocean, or the stars all have their 'lessons' for the Kogi, their own *shibuldama*. Consequently, knowledge is also directly learned from things. If obtained from the spiritual realm of Aluna through these places therefore, it is considered true, 'deep', and authentic. Beyond practical learning or skilful experience (Ingold 2000, Pálsson 1994), knowledge is hence partly transmittable directly through mind, apprehended or perhaps cognised, being already there. For this reason, 'having knowledge' (*shibuldama akué*) is also to 'think well' (*aluna hanguté*). Because for the Kogi epistemology is implicit in the ontology, in my discussion in the Core Chapters the content of the Mamas' teachings also discloses how knowledge is handled, learned, and mediated in society (the form). The way the Kogi do things, and their social life, are hence part of the ontology I present.

In Kogi terms, the knowledge I obtained is not only *about*, but comes *from* a conscious Sierra Nevada that defined how I should learn about itself, while the Mamas were knowledgeable mediators and imparters. Similarly, Mama apprentices (*Kuivi*) learn directly from spiritual forces in e.g. caves, and they are guided practically (e.g. dances) by an experienced Mama mentor. While the ontology was my object of analysis, the Sierra Nevada was also a "subject", a field-site (Gupta and Ferguson 1997) that was "living", "thinking", and related to me. According to the Mamas, their terms are the Sierra's terms. Could these learning sessions therefore invite a literal consideration of Ingold's (2008: 83) suggestion that 'the world and its inhabitants, human and non-human [can be] our teachers, mentors, and interlocutors'? In the realist stance, suspending my ontological assumptions as discussed earlier goes together with a partial (epistemological) suspension of rationalist forms of reasoning and analysing information (Ingold 2000).

Contrary to Holbraad's (2012) definition of Cuban Ifá divination as not being about accessing a definite realm of truth but about locally transforming it through processes of becoming, Kogi divination (*iltueld*) does aim to access definite truths in Aluna. To understand Kogi epistemology then, my Kogi friend Alberto usefully explained that *shibuldama* (knowledge) is 'something that since the beginning was constituted as truth and always will be'. His father, Mama Francisco, then explained that *shi* means 'thread', *shibuldzi* means rope, and *ldama* relates to *namak*, meaning 'true'. *Ma* means heat. *Shibuldama* could hence be translated as 'the hot threads of truth'. According to

Kogi cosmology, if knowledge is inherent to being, the epistemology is also framed and defined by transcendent laws and principles. Like everything else, knowledge has an identifiable spiritual origin and is cosmologically structured by the Sierra Nevada. For them, this conscious, predefined knowledge simultaneously constitutes *truth*. *Shibuldama* linguistically captures how the world was intricately 'spun' and 'woven' by the 'Mother' with her 'thought' (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1978f) from one common creational origin through 'threads' that bind everything together in a unitary rope of being and knowledge. Moreover, in creating things (being), the Spiritual Fathers (Her sons) also 'taught' and 'left' knowledge about that being, telling the Kogi how to relate to it ecologically.

Matching a downward creational verticality in the Sierra Nevada (Chapters 3, 4), Kogi epistemology also follows a top-to-bottom order of knowing from *high* cosmological principles down to concrete particulars. This rationale, is simultaneously the *learning-out-of-things* one mentioned above. When narrating or teaching therefore, as they did in my case, the Mamas always start with cosmological origins, with spiritual truths, and then act on, explain or interpret specific, current circumstances according to that. For this reason, Kogi knowledge/traditions are considered stronger and purer the higher in the Sierra people live, being more in touch with cosmologically primordial places. Similarly, Kogi lineages descend from different Spiritual Fathers, learn their knowledge at the corresponding sacred sites, and hereby manage related rituals and natural forces.

2.4.2. Translation and adjusting to Kogi epistemology

My fieldwork embodied these principles. Being in the Sierra-Kogi complex was a precondition for knowing it through the Mamas' sessions, which also implied learning *according to* its parameters. My learning sessions consequently *had* to occur at sacred sites, just as the Kogi hold councils, divinations, apprenticeships, and rituals on them. In this light, I was told that beyond the Mamas' words, I would also learn by mental insight and intuition through this spiritual connection by *being* on the site. Epistemologically speaking, the sessions involved: 1. Asking what to do and how through divination 2. Following and learning ordered topics as defined by spiritual entities in the Mamas' dreams 3. Learning by being at sacred sites which delivered the knowledge and provided dynamic feedback. These epistemological procedures were also experiential practices set by ontological foundations: 1. There is a spiritual realm called 'Aluna' communicating with the Mamas 2. Specific landmarks sustain life, embody conscious spiritual powers, and contain their knowledge 3. The Four Topics taught are natural categories constituting the world (water, earth, trees, foodstuffs) 4. This sequence corresponds to an order of creational primordality.

To understand Kogi ontology, it is therefore necessary to also follow Kogi epistemology in my analysis and narrative, just as adjusting to the ontology allowed me to learn Kogi knowledge. Relating ontology and epistemology in theory and methodology helps me to account for the Kogi interrelationship of being and knowing and, in correspondence, show how the *content* of their knowledge is related to the *form* of Kogi organisation. As indicated above, the Mamas' sessions exemplified this by closely relating *how* they taught me to *what* they transmitted as *one* activity, discussed further in Chapter 7. In this light, following the rationale of Kogi epistemology as cosmologically defined knowledge inherent to the land, is aligned with and informs my non-pluralistic, realist theoretical approach to Kogi ontology.

This epistemological rationale implies reproducing the *top-down* cosmological structuring that proceeds from creational principles and spiritual forces, to nature and the landscape, to Kogi society and life, to the environmental issues. I can then elucidate Kogi cosmology as a lived, knowledgeable ontology that is ecologically oriented. To organise my material according to this order/logic, I have also structured the four Core Chapters according to the Mamas' Four Topics of teaching, which constitute their own framework of natural categories. Rather than accommodating the material to existing theories, I hereby let my subsequent analysis (Chapters 7, 8) emerge from the ethnography, giving it the space to "speak" in its own terms. This lets the coherence emerge that for the Kogi the world already has, in Ingold's words (2008: 74) 'ontologically prior to its analytical decomposition'. While arguing for this coherence or logic does not mean justifying or defending the material (Asad 1986: 159), knowing, experiencing, and presenting things as the Kogi do allows me to better translate/elicit their significance. I can also come to grips more easily with difficult concepts through which they think without hopefully forsaking their original meaning, such as why and how 'harming' equals unknowledgeable behaviour.

2.4.3. Co-theorisation

The nature of Kogi (onto-)epistemology however, creates some tensions when couched into academic terms. I side with Horton (1993), who recognised the difficulties in writing about African philosophy within a Western discourse. According to Moore and Sanders (2014, in 'anthropological epistemology' knowledge is mediated by the conditions of living in a particular human context as a particular subject, and this assumes that anthropologists and its subjects *construct* knowledge in different ways. Following Ingold (2000), this may be part of the wider Western notion that sees cultures as (epistemological) filters between humans and the world. We may also say that 'anthropological epistemology' is normally inductive, proceeding from ethnographic observations

and detailed descriptions on the ground to then build theories or analyses, bring out meaning, and make comparative generalisations. Whereas this would imply that what we see depends on our epistemology (Stoller 1984) and perhaps methodology, I have indicated that in Kogi terms being (ontology) defines how to see and learn (epistemology). By the same token, meaning, “theory”, and knowledge are deduced from given cosmological principles. I thus sometimes heard that ‘in the beginning’ *shibuldama* was perfect and complete, gradually decreasing with each generation, ‘whereas you, Younger Brothers, see knowledge as always growing and improving’.

Kogi Epistemology	Mainstream social science
Knowledge out there (<i>Aluna</i>)	Knowledge in here (human mind)
World is conscious and teaches	Only humans are conscious and learn
Knowledge in things	Knowledge about things
Cosmology defines experience	Experience gives rise to cosmologies
Spiritual realm informs physical plane	Physical world is ground for spiritual beliefs
Top to bottom rationale	Bottom to top rationale
Knowledge learned from world	Knowledge constructed
Deductive	Inductive
Knowledge decreases over time	Knowledge increases over time
Essentialism	Empiricism
Principles	Concepts
Deep and inner truths	High theory and external analysis

Table 1: The generally opposed cosmo-epistemological rationales involved in my thesis. I nevertheless try to articulate these based on the assumption that ‘it is no longer possible to continue talking about two completely incommensurable logics’ (Rappaport and Ramos Pacho 2005: 46).

In adjusting to Kogi onto-epistemology, I consequently build on Moore and Sanders’ (2014: 6) recognition that ‘different kinds of questions require different kinds of data, and different kinds of data require different forms of explanation’. After all, ‘our own categories are only of limited use in understanding other people’s’ (Toren and Pina-Cabral 2009: 10), and effective translation of alien forms of life is ‘not always done best through the representational discourse of ethnography’ (Asad 1986: 159). The need to revise forms of explanation and conventions of representation in social theory, says Stoller (1984: 93), is greatest when we face different reality postulates like shamanism or magic. Yet according to the Nasa indigenous linguist Ramos-Pacho working with Joanne Rappaport (2005: 51) in Southern Colombia, many academics are ‘used to taking indigenous ideas as ethnographic data but not as potential conceptual devices’. Beyond theorising the Kogi then, following the nature of their way of knowing and being is an attempt to see how their own

principles, categories, and procedures may help to understand their society, the Sierra, and the environmental situation.

Consequently, in this thesis I inevitably have to negotiate between two epistemological rationales (Kogi and anthropological) as both being conducive to understand and analyse the material. Rappaport and Ramos-Pacho (2005: 50) call this a 'co-theorization' between Indigenous and Western experts. By 'accepting the commensurability and equality between different [but surmountable] ways of knowing', they advocate openly 'building methodological and conceptual bridges' (2005: 49). For this purpose, these authors point out, underlying cosmological principles are usually the most troublesome aspects. Chapter 7 attempts such a 'co-theorization' in which, based on my proposed conceptual translation, Kogi, anthropological, and also general Western frames of reference are combined in a theoretical framework that helps to elucidate the Kogi material. In this case, building bridges could have practical bearing on common environmental problems. Nevertheless, some Kogi terms may not be commensurable or translatable with/into ours, or only partly. Horton (1993) therefore recommends to watch out for both differences and points of intersection between what he calls 'patterns of thought'. Next to an equal dialogue between forms of knowledge (Willerslev 2007) however, my translation builds on how the Mamas initially seek a more unidirectional understanding of their terms.

While cultural translation always risks distorting something (Sillitoe 1998), the 'co-theorization' proposed above can be a way to minimise subjective filtering on my part as anthropologist. By remaining close to Kogi terms, adjusting to their onto-epistemology, and basing my elucidation on the Mamas' own presentation, I intend to limit the extent to which I systematise, impose coherence on, or extrapolate meaning from the material. Moreover, this elucidation is based on a joint endeavour with the Mamas to clarify Kogi being and knowing, where on-site I was able to process and evaluate my understanding with them. This enhanced my translation, which can thus be part of a theoretical framework that, in Stoller's (1984) words, offers a representation of Kogi onto-epistemology rather than representing it *as* something else. Rather than mostly creating a separate, post-fieldwork interpretation of the material, I hereby intend to more accurately reflect the original, or 'produce' it as Asad (1986: 159) defines it. Analysing the material through anthropological concepts, can therefore be compatible with simultaneously elucidating the Kogi's own terms, especially if allowing possible commensurabilities as suggested earlier.

Rather than a "construction" of knowledge therefore, the sessions with the Mamas may be seen as 'a way of achieving knowledge'. This, Toren and Pina-Cabral (2009: 16) argue, should be

ethnography's task in the anthropological project of understanding human being in the world. Since mamahood is about maintaining things as they are in order and balance, they intended to clarify their cause faithfully and truthfully, especially given the Sierra's environmental problems. If grasping people's intentions is part of anthropological translation (Asad 1986: 145), this would imply striving to adhere to what the Kogi consider *is*. In this sense, the Mamas' statements can also be treated as reality postulates, and not mainly as culturally mediated personal expectations, desires, and assumptions (e.g. Crapanzano 1980).

2.4.4. Interaction during the sessions

A typical session with the Mamas began by letting them choose what to speak about. At certain times my Spanish-speaking Kogi assistant stopped the Mama to translate and explain a given chunk for me, during which I could also briefly discuss the information with him before continuing. The Mama then either provided feedback to my comments as prompted by the translator, or continued the teaching or story. Meanwhile, I noted down further questions and ideas, as well as things that I understood directly in Koggian to check the accuracy of my friend's translation, noting gaps, confusions, or potentially inaccurate Spanish terms. Often this feedback helped the translator realise his shortcomings, explain something better, and gradually improve his work. I always tried to verify my understanding with my informants, but sometimes the difficulty of the material meant that only the next time doubts were clarified. Between sessions, I transcribed hours of audio recordings, pondered on the nature and meaning of what I was told, reflected on my own interventions, and prepared subsequent sessions. To openly consider the material without a priori denunciation or approval (Asad 1986), I continuously asked myself things such as: 'what could this mean in realist terms?'; 'how can I express this in a non-Kogi way without altering it?', 'why does one statement make more sense to me than another?', 'are my own comments understandable to the Kogi?'; 'when are difficulties due to misunderstandings, linguistic issues, the subject matter, or the translation?'

Over time I became more skilful, and related these matters to Kogi life on the Sierra more widely. Initially I relied on various translators, which sometimes affected coherence and continuity, yet also provided comparative insights. Later, Alejo Sauna became my one, stable translator, with whom I developed a more solid, familiar method. By regularly translating for me, he also learned from the Mamas, and in this way we improved the process together. Given the mediation of translators, my access to Mama thought and knowledge was not ideally straightforward and subject to alteration. However, the former's greater familiarity with mainstream society and its concepts than the Mamas, complemented my own growing experience of Kogi being and knowing. These

translators enriched the Mamas’ teachings through contextualisation, explanations and comparisons, and thanks to them I could discuss and clarify uncertainties. Even if I had spoken perfect Koggian, I could have had difficulties in conceptually making sense of the Mamas’ talk on my own. Through this ‘double rapprochement’ (Rappaport and Ramos-Pacho 2005: 46) between the translators and myself, we could productively meet in the middle and form that ‘methodological and conceptual’ bridge (ibid.: 49) between the Mamas and non-Kogi audiences and experts.

Topic	Mama Shibulata (between 40-50 hours)	Mama Manuel and Mama Luntana (between 40-50 hours)
WATER	6 sessions March 2012-July 2012	8 sessions March 2012-June 2012
EARTH/WORLD	9 sessions September 2012-April 2013	7 sessions August 2012-November 2013
TREES (also vegetation generally and stones)	3 sessions April 2013- July 2013	8 sessions February 2013-July 2013
FOODSTUFFS and NOURISHMENT	8 sessions September 2013-October 2013	2 sessions + 1 related on “Fire” September 2013

Table 2: Timetable of my learning sessions with the principal Mamas on the Four Topics.

Mama Bernardo	4 sessions
Mama Julián	4 sessions
Mama Pedro Juan	3 visits of 3 days each
Mama Francisco	3 sessions
Mama Salé	1 session

Table 3: Complementary learning sessions with other Mamas.

Chapter 3

Water



Figure 3.1: ‘First there was the sea. All was dark. There was no sun, no moon, no people, no animals, no plants. Only the sea was everywhere. The sea was the Mother. She was water and water [was] everywhere, and she was river, lake, stream and sea, and thus she was everywhere. Thus, at first, there was only the Mother. [.....] The Mother was not anybody or anything, not anything at all. She was Aluna. She was the spirit of what was going to come, and she was thought and memory. Thus the Mother existed only in Aluna, in the world below, in the ultimate profundity, alone. Then, when the Mother existed thus, the lands, the worlds were formed upwards, up to the top, where our world is today. There were nine worlds, and they were formed as follows: first there was the Mother and the water and the night. It had not yet dawned. [.....] That was the first world, the first place and the first phase’ (taken from Reichel-Dolmatoff 1951d: 9).

3.1. The Origin: darkness, Aluna, and water

I am setting off the Core Chapters with the Kogi account of the beginning of existence to follow their cosmo-epistemological rationale as argued in Chapter 2. The Mamas usually start their narratives, explanations, and discussions ‘from the origin’ (*desde el origen*), which is the first of the Four Pillars⁴³ of Kogi knowledge identified in the Introduction. Among the Kogi, living patterns, thought, learning, rituals, and customs should always be guided by these cosmological origins, which designate primordiality, ancient heritage, spiritual profundity, and ecological importance. According to the Mamas, by remaining close to these roots the Kogi can live in accordance with the ‘Law of Origin’, which regulates life from predetermined cosmological principles.

As the narrative above indicates, cosmogony is here a matter of ‘ultimate profundities’, and Kogi men therefore refer to the Mamas’ creational stories and explanations as ‘deep talk’. This profundity is also a primordial ‘darkness’, an initial nothingness called ‘Sé’ in Koggian, and ‘from Sé arose everything that exists’ (OGT 2009: 9). For this reason, the ‘Law of Origin’ is also called the ‘Law of Sé’ (Seyn Zare = Wiwa term, Shenbuta = Arhuaco). The Kogi consider that from this darkness derives the truth and essence of all elements of creation, which are connected to their origins through unseen ‘threads’. The world unfolded through a diversification of these threads, a plurality which ultimately has one common origin, the Great Mother and her ‘Fabric of Life’ (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1978f). Mamahood is fundamentally about knowing, following, and teaching a myriad of these ‘origins’, and how they manifest in life today. Mama apprentices (*Kuivi*) apparently learn to spiritually connect with these threads (*shi*), a knowledge then applied to *align* society accordingly and regulate the Sierra Nevada ecologically. Knowledge is consequently called *shibuldama*, which in Chapter 2 I translated as the ‘hot threads of truth that form a unitary rope of being’. The Mamas often pronounce this word slowly and with emphasis. This chapter is about the ‘knowledge of water’ (*ñi chi shibuldama*), or as the Kogi would also say, it follows *ñi hiúnguldê*, ‘the path of water’. Knowing threads is also following paths.

The narrative clearly indicates a relation between the beginning of existence and a primary condition of water. This primeval ‘sea’ of ‘thought’, ‘memory’, and ‘spirit’ is identified as ‘Aluna’, which may be defined as the spiritual essence of all things, and the universal consciousness. In this light, the Mother is said to have ‘thought’ (i.e. conceived, defined, organised) the world ‘in Aluna’, to then ‘give birth’ to being according to what is also termed the ‘Law of the Mother’. I observed how

⁴³ Origin, Order, Function, Relationality.

the Kogi relate to Aluna daily as an omnipresent, unseen spiritual reality that imbues the world. This ‘thought’ is what makes the world conscious and alive, an intelligence that continuously drives the cosmos. While the Napo Runa in Ecuador for example talk of a comparable omnipresent field of conscious spirit, the ‘breath or soul substance’ that animates all things called Samai (Uzendoski 2004: 885), the Kogi ‘Law’ makes Aluna a more structured principle.

Aluna also has an all-important ecological role as the force of life and its medium of communication, and water is directly associated to this original spirit. With time I realised that this is why the Mamas made ‘Water’ the first of the Four Topics they divined: for them water is ‘deep talk’, it is something ‘of beginning’ (*de principio*), and so hereby they proceeded in the right cosmological sequence. Mama Manuel and Mama Luntana explicitly commented that ‘to talk of water is to talk of Aluna, of everything. Water is unique’. For the Mamas, the reason why water is fundamental to life as a natural element is because of its prior spiritual significance. José Manuel, the older brother of my main translator Alejo, stated the following during one of Mama Shibulata’s stories:

You Younger Brothers have the knowledge of the physical plane, and can create all sorts of things. But we Kogi, and other Indigenous Peoples, know and are in charge of the primary spiritual realm, which deals with the origin of all those physical things you do).

This statement captures how the Mamas’ sessions always stressed that spirit precedes and animates matter. All physical things in the cosmos (animals, plants, rocks, humans, tools, machines, the planets etc.), are understood to be manifestations of pre-existing ‘thoughts’, among which water is considered the natural element closest to spirit. During one of the first sessions, the Tungeka Mamas (Luntana and Manuel) explained that all the spiritual essences of things are ‘stored’ in specific places of the Sierra Nevada, such as peaks and lakes. These places spiritually sustain and give life to their corresponding physical elements, being like points of connection to Aluna. The Mamas perceive the whole Sierra Nevada as a ‘house’ full of primordial, life-giving spirit-power, stored inside in its inner, dark dimension called Nuhuakalda (see Chapter 4).

Based on the relationship between darkness, spirit, and water, the Mamas specified that the spiritual essence or form of water is called ‘black water’ (*ñibaksθ*), meaning its original Sé-state. Given its greater primordality, this black water is located ‘within’ some of the *highest* peaks of the Sierra Nevada, while other, less primordial things have their essences stored in lower places. The reason for this vertical hierarchy is because while the world is understood to have *spiritually* emerged *upwards* from a profundity (see above), *physically* it was inversely created *downwards*. After many questions, I understood that this descending materialisation of the world follows its antecedent and arising ‘thinking’ in the spiritual realm. This corresponds to the ‘dawn’ mentioned in

the story, when from the Mother’s life-giving darkness emerged *light*, a process associated with the active, organising, masculine powers of the ‘Spiritual Fathers’, who as Reichel-Dolmatoff (1950c, 1951d) described, are Her first sons. While Reichel-Dolmatoff presented this mostly as transcribed myths, in this thesis the Mamas dynamically explain this in conversation with the anthropologist for ecological purposes.

↓	The	Dark	Profundity	Spirit	Night	Female	Essence	Origin	Cold
	Dawn	Light	Emergence	Matter	Day	Male	Movement	Organisation	Warm

Table 4: Principal cosmological complementary dualities. As it dawned, the upper categories progressed into the lower ones. Both continuously recreate each other in the present.

Since among the Kogi blackness equals primordality, spirit, and profundity, something that exhibits these qualities particularly strongly is said to be ‘of beginning’, ‘of Sé’. This can be black animals, black soil, or certain black seeds and stones that I saw Mama Luntana use for his payments. For the Kogi, the engulfing darkness of the night produces a closer relation to Sé, a time when the spiritual world and its forces gain precedence over the light of day. Consequently, night-time is when Kogi men often discuss important community issues, determine necessary rituals, and listen to the elders’ stories and teachings in the *nuhué*, the cosmic-house⁴⁴. By often sharing this space with them, I learned that this ambience connects the men to Aluna, affords less distractions, and enhances concentration. By being trained in caves moreover, Mama apprentices (*Kuivis*) communicate directly with that other-worldly, dark realm of Nuhuakalda inside the mountains.



Figure 3.2: Peaks within which ‘black water’ is held. A Kogi homestead is in the foreground.

⁴⁴ Introduced in Chapter 1.

Figure 3.3: While visiting the peaks with a young Kogi called Sokín, he said that the black colour of this mountain frog makes it an important species 'of origin'. closely related to the darkness Sé.



3.2. The high lakes

3.2.1. The birth of the world

Nestled between the peaks where 'black water' is stored are many small lakes (*mébangokui*). Among the Kogi, the higher ones goes up the Sierra the greater is the sense of purity and sacredness, until reaching the 'land of health and remedies' at the top (de Brettes 1903: 353). The lakes in particular are totally inviolable and cannot be altered in any way, being conscious entities who should not be approached without their 'permission'. Even yelling is said to disturb the lakes, instantly turning a sunny day into a dark, cloudy one.

Mama Luntana and Mama Manuel introduced the lakes early into our sessions on Water, for according to them, they were the first definable *forms* of spirit that the original nothingness or sea of darkness adopted. Consequently, I was told, the highest and hence most primordial lakes have a visibly dark, blackish surface. Yet at this point in the story, water was still Aluna, and the lakes were female *persons*, being more individualised, definable forms of consciousness, we may say. When the world 'dawned', the Mamas continued, these entities/places 'opened up', developed into 'grown women', and 'gave birth' to the world as the first specific 'mothers' of life. Hereby they turned into the physical lakes of today, when liquid water emerged and rivers started flowing, which the lakes 'cry out' as 'eyes' that 'opened'. Through these openings, which may be translated as *cosmic outlets*, the world poured out from the dark sea and, through water, turned from the Mother's 'thought' into Her body. In Kogi terms, the emergence of water was the emergence of *being*.

In parallel, Mama Luntana and Mama Manuel explained that humans also first existed spiritually in a 'closed' state. Our later materialisation equally coincided with the 'opening up' of our bodily holes (e.g. ears, nose, mouth), allowing communication in a physical world. Thus connecting our spiritual inside ('our Aluna') to the outside environment, the lesson seems to be that humans constantly reproduce creation when speaking, seeing, or hearing. Following the lakes' example moreover, the Mamas explained, our thoughts and bodies are likewise formed in and out of water from our human mothers, just as the world formed in and out of the Mother's (cosmic) 'womb'. As said in Chapter 1, 'mothers' (*haba*) and 'fathers' (*hate*) are the Kogi terms for conscious, creational agencies and forces that manifest in important landmarks such as the lakes, mountain peaks, rocks, and other sacred sites. The Great Mother was the first, giving birth to all that is. In Kogi terms, these are not metaphors to "map culture unto nature", as Ingold (2000) critiques such interpretations. For them, it is the other way around: biologically, human parents reproduce and embody the life-giving qualities of preceding spiritual-territorial persons, who engendered the different elements of the world. Creation is motherhood.



Figure 3.4: A primordial, creational lake. Note the dark surface. Apart from 'crying' rivers, these 'eyes' are said to 'reflect' the heavens. Source: <https://helmercoronel.files.wordpress.com/2010/09/sierra2.jpg>.

3.2.2. A generational descent from the top

In line with the conversation in Tungeka, during our first session Mama Shibulata narrated how the lakes are the Mother's 'daughters'. Dumena, the first/eldest daughter, assigned particular aspects of creation to ten 'left' mothers and ten 'right' ones. Nabbøkádziwê for example, gave birth to certain animal species, and Mukuátsiwê is the origin of all human groups. Silvestre used non-Kogi terms to

add that the lakes hereby became the 'primary foundations' of the world and acquired specific 'functions' for the subsequent 'definition of life'. The lakes, he said, are therefore 'like centres, lungs or hearts' from which water and life emanate into the whole world. Mama Shibulata knows the names, origins, characteristics, and functions of all lakes, of which he introduced me to these principal twenty. A Mama has to learn this information about a truly astonishing number of places, events, features, and agencies in the Sierra and the cosmos.

Before the world materialised, Mama Shibulata explained that the spiritual powers that flowed from these high lakes gradually *descended* in different directions of what would later become the Sierra Nevada. This process traced the future courses of current watersheds and mountain valleys, like as a silent, moving 'thought' in the darkness that conceived what was to come. These *forces* we may say, then crystallised in particular places, forming bodies of water like swamps, fountains, lagoons, and mangroves. According to the Mama, these waters became the mothers of further and more specific natural elements at different altitudinal levels. This development was therefore a generational succession that started with the high lakes, each new mother being a daughter or spiritual offspring of the previous, higher one in downward stages. Once this progression reached the Sierra's lower perimeter, the 'Black Line' (see Introduction), it continued expanding *outwards* into the world, forming all other seas, lakes, rivers, and other bodies of water. As in the Sierra, in other regions these waters equally became centres of life.

All global bodies of water are hence understood to have their origin in the Sierra, its high lakes being the Mother's first and principal manifestations. Based on what I call this 'cosmic diversification' through life-giving water, Mama Shibulata emphasised that 'the Mother left everything in its place' and established a geographical order that should be heeded. Following him, all kinds of things in the world depend on these interconnected waters, so that harming them could for example kill animal species. Unfortunately, 'people nowadays make many mistakes like that'. The most important connections, he explained, are between the high lakes above and very important lagoons and river mouths down by the coastline. Hereby the sea and the lakes communicate to form rivers, create rain, and spread it over the whole territory.

Slightly later than water, Mama Shibulata continued, the land also started to be spiritually formed and organised in the darkness before its materialisation in the subsequent 'dawn'. In this equally downward development and then outward global expansion, the generational succession of 'mothers' and 'fathers' was not of bodies of water but of terrestrial sacred sites. Accordingly, the primary places were not the high lakes but the *ezwamas*. Together, these bodies of water and land-sites constituted one common descent along the valleys, where at different altitudinal levels they

became the spiritual centres of the corresponding climatic zones and ecosystems. As introduced in Chapter 1, Kogi *lineages* and their rituals also originate from these *ezwamas* as centres of Kogi learning and tradition, descend from the corresponding Spiritual Fathers, and are ‘family’ with related aspects of nature. The Kogi consider themselves part of these creational descent groups, as do the *ayllus* in the Andes (Bastien 1978). Since etymologically *ezwama* comes from *eizua*, ‘one’, and *ma*, ‘heat’, they could be understood as ‘the first heat’, or ‘main energetic nodes’. Following the Mamas, here the Spiritual Fathers hibernated after organising the world, leaving their creational powers and principles.

3.2.3. The sun and water

As an example of this, Mama Shibulata told me in detail how Hate Mokuákukui⁴⁵, the Spiritual Father of the astral physical sun (*ñiuwî*), carried out his creational jobs. Given that the sun originated ‘down here on Earth’ in Aluna when all was still dark, the Mama asserted, in a place called Cherúa he started a spiritual journey across all *ezwamas*. Mokuákukui prepared their future roles by depositing ‘knowledge’ and ‘thought’ in them, or ‘codes’ as some Kogi translate into Spanish, that would later power natural phenomena. In particular, Mokuákukui prepared the seasons, rainfall periods, and the harvests. He thereby determined the later duties of his son, the physical sun, such as powering the water cycle and making things grow. After all, water (*ñi*) is etymologically related to the sun (*ñiuwî*). Since *Mama* means ‘sun’, and also ‘double heat’ (*ma-ma*), these men work like the sun, caring for water and earth, and are related to *ezwamas* (see above). Through specific ceremonies called *kualdama* discussed in Chapter 6, the Mamas direct the Kogi community towards nourishing water cycles, the seasons, and good harvests, especially in an *ezwama* called *Mamaldwúa* that Mama Shibulata is in charge of. For this purpose, they interpret those ‘codes’ left by Father Sun for them to follow as part of the Mother’s Law. In the creational ‘dawn’, he said, the sun brought light out of the female creational darkness. The interplay of night and day recreates this complementary cosmic duality, expressed in the roles of Mamas and their wives, named after ‘Mother Moon’ (*Saha*).

I had been listening intently to all of this while sitting on my usually uncomfortable stone on our sacred site, when Mama Shibulata suddenly said he had to go. It was time for him to go to the village to collect spiritual ‘confessions’ (*aluna ishguashi*) from people. As explained in Chapter 1, in this practice people discharge their thoughts, feelings, and actions for specific purposes depending on the situation. In this case, people were confessing as part of a period of cultivation. Turning these confessions into ‘payments’, Mama Shibulata would ensure the sun did not smoulder crops and heavy rain did not harm them. It was March, the start of the rainy season, a period called *Nebëshizha*

⁴⁵ Mentioned in Chapter 2.

when the Mamas perform ‘spiritual practices’ (*trabajos espirituales*) to care for water, ensure growth cycles, and also ‘pay for humans’ and all other species’ use of water’. Otherwise, the Mama explained, there can be sickness. Coinciding with the new moon, or ‘the moon’s absence’ like the Kogi say, this is a time of darkness, of Sé, suitable for these practices. In doing so, Kogi Mamas ‘are like Mamawixka’, a male character who watches over the lakes according to Mother Dumena’s guidelines (the first lake).

Hyland (2011: 10, 11) also mentions ‘confessions’ to ‘priests’ in the Peruvian Andes. Contrary to its present active use in the Sierra however, she suggests that there this pre-Columbian practice was widespread centuries ago, and not anymore. Described by a Spanish chronicler (1594) as confessing ‘sins’, this tradition was nevertheless also directed at avoiding illness and misfortune in the community (Hyland 2011).

3.3. The creation of Mother Zaldziwê: the Sea

3.3.1. The interplay of forces generates order

Having reached the foot of the Sierra in the account of creational descent, a couple of weeks later Mama Shibulata continued the topic of water with the sea’s creation. As a body of water it is called *ñibuñi* (*ñi* = water), yet the sea’s spiritual personhood and consciousness is called Zaldziwê. Following the Mama, ‘she’ is a very important ‘mother’ with a creational history and purpose who, like everything else, originated high in the Sierra Nevada. Similar to ‘black water’ (*ñibaksu*), the sea is spiritually contained in the realm of Nuhuakalda in a specific mountain, her ‘house’. The seventh daughter of nine, Zaldziwê’s sisters are related natural elements such as ice (*kaknabbuggulda*), snow (*nuabi*), and salt (*naxku*) among others. Zaldziwê was the last sibling to ‘marry’ and become a ‘full-grown woman’, by which the Kogi refer to the transition from spiritual personhood to physical natural element. When ‘leaving the mountains’ then, Zaldziwê became the sea.

In a very long story, Mama Shibulata narrated how her departure was triggered by mythical characters related to the *ezwamas*. Besides her sisters, these were ‘ancestral’ Mamas, who it seems were an intermediary state between Spiritual Fathers and current, human Mamas. These characters then, ‘did not like Zaldziwê’. Predicting that someday she would bring problems and a loss of customs and knowledge, they wanted her sent far away from the mountains. However, other ancestral Mamas fought to keep her relatively close, recognising her future importance, her potential to be a necessary, vast, rich source of life and weather, including the all-important sea-shells used for the

Kogi men's *poporo*. A complicated process of tensions and negotiations ensued between these opposing or disagreeing forces/parties. As a compromise and resolution, the sea was placed (i.e. created) at the bottom of the Sierra, being *close but still separate*. Had these conflicts not occurred, I was told, Zaldziwê would have either remained in the Sierra Nevada or been too far away, and not therefore become the sea. Somewhat confused by these tensions I asked:

I thought that according to the Kogi the world has had an order since it originated, a Law that defines it. Yet according to this story, there was also disorder, opposing interests and mistakes. Is that not contradictory?

Mama Shibulata remained thoughtful for a moment and then replied that he could answer that later. The Mamas usually do not give straight, instant, and matter-of-fact explanations for their stories, but slowly reveal them. Answers should emerge from the story itself, the essential information is already contained in them, to be deduced, understood, and learned by each listener. Wishing to help me, Alejo (who is Mama Shibulata's son-in-law) reflected that perhaps it is precisely because of the story's conflicts and problems that the world could be organised. After all, mistakes lead to corrections, which lead to lessons. While walking back to the school from the sacred site through trees and past the hut of another son-in-law⁴⁶ of Mama Shibulata, Alejo said that these tensions determined how things should be and should not be, providing the guidelines for life. He thus confirmed my own intuition that, to be functional, the Law first had to be consolidated. The sea is what it is thanks to the necessary *balancing* interplay of different but complementary forces, whereby order is necessarily established in opposition to *disorder*.

Before we parted ways for the day, Alejo added that these stories are kept alive to make the Kogi adhere to what they teach and reveal. Consequently, he conceded that Mama Shibulata had already been telling him about Mother Zaldziwê before I came along. The story should make him reflect on and correct his own recent mistakes and inappropriate behaviours relating to women and the 'Younger Brothers' (who 'come from the sea'). Like the events that stabilised the sea, this led him to seek resolution and conciliation. By opening up to me, Alejo provided insights into the complementarity of cosmology, tradition, and personal life among the Kogi, where the origin, constitution, and functioning of the world is always intertwined with that of society. Creational order then, is also a rationality that establishes *moral* lessons.

⁴⁶ This man is also a Mama, yet a lower one.

3.3.2. The Sea and the Sierra Nevada

In the next session, Mama Shibulata continued with the relation between the sea and the Sierra. He indicated that, having formed with respect to one another, they are mutually constitutive creational spheres to this day. The Kogi, he explained, reproduce this necessary interrelationship by combining the chewing of coca leaves (*hâñú*), a mountain-element, with sea-shells (*nuksuzwa*) turned into lime powder (*nuggi*) when using the *poporo* (or *suggi*). Producing the female sea-shells, the Mama explained, is a capacity that Zaldziwê acquired from her parents, Nukasá and Noxlawiâ. A male character called Shibulataxbé then learned to make powder from the shells by making Zaldziwê ‘confess’ (*aluna ishguashi*), a skill and custom he passed on to the Kogi. Since she achieved this transformation by confessing, this parallels how during human confession the Kogi turn their thoughts and personal essences into payments, as I have indicated. ‘This is why we burn sea-shells in the same way’, said Mama Shibulata, providing an etiological explanation for this practice. Moreover, the shells are a form of contact with Zaldziwê, who is a replication of the initial sea of darkness that was the Mother.

After all, the Tungeka Mamas clarified on another day that when receiving the *poporo*: ‘[male initiates] are told to concentrate, to remain still and focused, which means you are now connected with the Mother, with Aluna. The Mother herself talks to you, doing her spiritual work’. The *poporo* is hence regarded a feminine body/person (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1951d) and a man’s spiritual companion, who stabilises and keeps him ‘well-seated’ (*i té*). Given these also sexual connotations (the stick is male), young men are told to care for the *poporo* ‘like you would a woman’. Like the shells, coca leaves also have a female spiritual agency who can therefore not be ‘eaten’ by women, yet only they can pick them for their husbands. Overall, the *poporo* is used to clear the mind and centre the person, promoting good thoughts and productive conversation.

Figure 3.5: Kogi leader Mariano (left) and Mama Dúkua (right, now deceased) doing the *poporo* at a meeting of Mamas and Kogi authorities.





Figure 3.6: A Kogi woman picking coca leaves (*hañú*) on a Mama's homestead near the village of San Miguel or Samineizhi.

More generally, said Mama Shibulata, the rivers 'nourish the sea' with material and spiritual substances that it needs from the mountains where it originated, while the sea makes returns to the Sierra through clouds, rains, and winds, a cycle enabled by Zaldziwê's spiritual descent. 'Behind her trail', he continued, 'land started forming'. More specifically, she created bodies of water and sacred sites related to the sea by (again) 'confessing' (*aluna ishguashi*) her thoughts there, 'doing important work', and 'leaving messages'. This involved the help of additional male characters, including Mamawixka, who as we saw earlier 'watches over the lakes'. These places, I was told, connect the sea to the Sierra, ensure balance between both spheres, and sustain surrounding plants and animals. 'This is why they are sacred', Mama Shibulata asserted, and these 'messages' tell the Mamas how to perform care-taking spiritual practices there. When reaching the Sierra's base then, Zaldziwê discharged all of her remaining powers to become the motherly, life-giving sea assisted by the impregnation of a Spiritual Father called Sétuke. As I realised, the creation of matter from spirit was in Kogi terms simultaneously a fertilising union of corresponding male and female cosmic forces.

The last set of sacred sites created by Zaldziwê, the Mama explained, are the level 'beyond which the sea should not rise', keeping her close but in check like the *ezwamas* wanted. This boundary is the invisible Black Line along the coast, invoked in Kogi political activism and mentioned in the Introduction. The Black Line therefore maintains the necessary, stabilising separation and simultaneous interdependence of Sea and Sierra as complementary cosmological spheres. In correspondence to the story's tensions between opposing *ezwamas*, I was told that nowadays some

Mamas see Zaldziwê positively and do rituals to sustain the sea, while others see more her problems and focus on protecting the Sierra. The lesson is apparently that a controlled middle-ground between the two opposites is what ensures exchange and balance. If the sea's and the Sierra's forces transgress, all three Mamas warned, they can become problems out of place. The Black Line exists to stop this from happening.

These coastal sacred sites can be little hills, particular rocks, lagoons, estuaries, and river outlets. As 'mothers' and 'fathers', they sustain various forms of life and are perceived as the supporting base or 'feet' of the Sierra. These 'guardians' moreover, control and regulate the inflow and outflow of forces and materials between the sea and the Sierra, stopping negative influences from entering the mountains. The sites are therefore also called *Comisarios* and *Cabos* like the traditional Kogi headmen (see Chapter 1), who equally maintain order but in the human realm. After all, social organisation is said to mirror the Sierra's order and functioning. Mama Shibulata emphasised a particular coastal site called Mother Hukulwa. It is here, he explained, where Zaldziwê and the opposing parties in the story gathered to settle the dispute, define the sea's boundary, and establish the reconciliatory exchange with the mountains. These organising powers are hence 'stored' in Hukulwa, giving it particularly strong spiritual and environmental importance. 'It is like a gate that keeps the sea-level from rising and stops diseases coming from there'.

3.3.3. The Black Line and the Ancestral Territory

According to Mama Shibulata, and also everyday Kogi conversations and public eco-political discourse, the source of harmful changes and current environmental disorder derives from *outside* the Sierra Nevada. These are the future problems coming from the sea foreseen in the story, which can be harmful winds, illnesses, invasive cultural influences, and especially 'Younger Brother's' (Nañi) destructive activities. In Chapter 1, I presented the Kogi story of how Younger Brother was sent away from the Sierra for disobeying the Mother's rules, yet returned five centuries ago to harm Her. Mama Luntana and Mama Manuel, who told me that story, hence described Younger Brother as 'a rebellious child that has not wanted to learn', harming a territory that 'contains the whole world within itself'.

In Koggian, the Black Line is Séshizha, a word deriving from Sé (the darkness), and also from *shi*, which as I have said means 'thread', as in *shibuldama* (knowledge). Delimiting the Sierra's entire perimeter, this 'thread of Sé' is approximately 600km long, and is linked up by more than a hundred sacred sites. The Kogi know particularly well the cosmo-ontology of the northern, coastal stretch of Black Line, being ecologically in charge of it, while the Arhuaco, Wiwa, and Kankuamo relate to the



Figure 3.8: Mamas Salé, Atanasio, Luis, Luntana, and Shibulata getting ready to deposit spiritual payments at this sacred site, Shikaka, by the Ranchería River mouth in the city of Riohacha. Invisible, the Black Line crosses the river at this point.

3.4. Aluna and water

3.4.1. Communication and exchange

Evidently, the Mamas' topic of 'Water' covers many creational issues beyond water as such. Pondering on its close association with Aluna, I asked the Tungeka Mamas (Luntana and Manuel) whether water is a sort of intermediary state between spirit and matter. After Silvestre managed to pose the question in Koggian, they confirmed my idea and added that this is why there are two kinds of water: physical, liquid water and the spiritual, 'black water' (*ñibaksə*) mentioned earlier. Slowly our discussions were leading me to perceive water in an inherently novel way. I looked up at the mountains before us and tried to imagine its pure and transparent waters as indeed *liquid spirit*. 'Is water perhaps something that connects the material and spiritual spheres then?', I asked. Mama Luntana instantly replied *ekí!* ('so!'/ 'like that!'), saying 'yes, of course, water is like a bridge of conversation with the spiritual world [Aluna]'. Moreover, 'since we all come from water and water from the Mother, [an important] way to communicate with Her is through water'. Without it, 'there would be no communication' in the world.

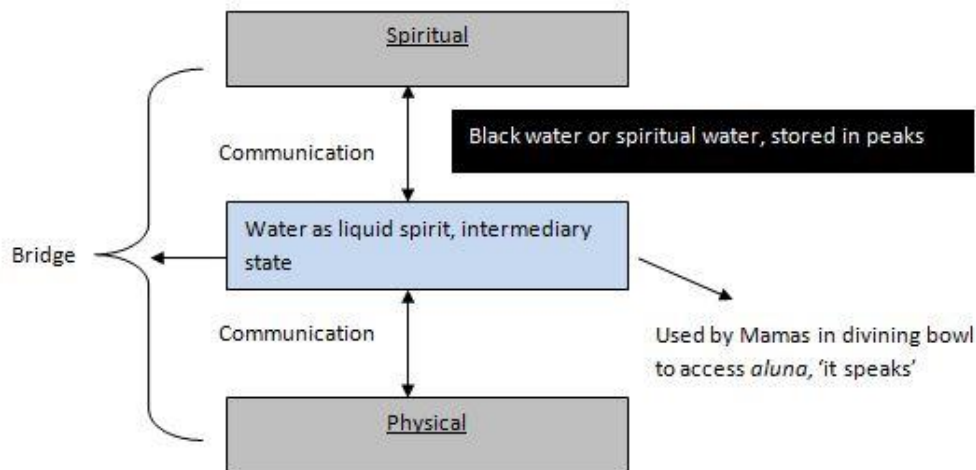


Figure 3.9: Water as an intermediary state between spirit and matter in the Mamas' terms.

My questions prompted the Mamas to tell me how they therefore contact different spiritual entities in Aluna through *water* divination (*iltueld*)⁴⁷. As I also observed, all Mamas (and sometimes other capable Kogi men) carry a small wooden bowl in their *mochila* or *gamá* (woven bag). Whenever a 'spiritual consultation' (divination) is necessary, they pour preferably clean spring water into the bowl and search the bag for small, hollow, tubular, and differently coloured stone-beads called *tuma*⁴⁸. This combination of bowl, water, and *tuma* is called *zhátukua*.

While concentrating and making mental contact, the Mamas think of a question, something they want or need to know across space and time, whether concerning a person, phenomenon, or situation, and carefully drop the stone into the water. The emerging bubbles are a response to the Mamas' questions, messages which they interpret according to the bubbles' size, number, duration, and specific movements on the water surface. The bubbles are produced by the *tumas'* two holes, which are 'mouths' by which the stone 'speaks' through water, 'just as humans speak'. Mama Manuel explained that this reproduces the high lakes as *openings* (Section 2), from whence the world also 'popped up as bubbles' in Aluna, and through which the Mother first 'spoke', putting her thoughts into action. By way of analogy, the Mamas said that they 'read' this text, just 'as Younger Brother reads a book'. Arbeláez-Albornoz (1997: 161) explains that in this 'true oracular language', the 'multiple codes' of the great number of bubble combinations constitute a myriad of possible meanings that non-Mama Kogi say are very hard to decipher. Following Mama Luntana:

When the *zhátukua* speaks, it speaks in water itself. She communicates in the form of Aluna, and those bubbles are the material way to transmit the spiritual. In this way, people also communicate and speak out their thoughts.

⁴⁷ Introduced in Chapter 1.

⁴⁸ I explained how these were also used by the Tairona peoples.

For this reason, the Mamas continued, the bowl resembles the high lakes, who are the original, natural *zhátukuas* (or blueprints). Other lagoons, swamps, fountains, estuaries and mangroves are also conscious, communicating ‘bowls’. As I witnessed, in the presence of the Kogi these waters sometimes start producing bubbles that the Mamas also attentively read as intentional messages. After determining what the site is saying or needs, the Mamas often make corresponding payments to it. At the sacred site the Mamas and I worked, there is a hole in a rock which sometimes fills with rainwater. It is the ‘mother’ mentioned in Chapter 2 that defined our topics, gave me knowledge, and provided feedback to our conversations which the Mamas pick up mentally, in dreams, or through divinations. As Mama Luntana explained, this spiritual connection made us talk ‘like water itself, deeply, of beginning, and not shallowly or dryly’. One time the pond suddenly bubbled a lot. Mama Manuel stood still and watched. Among other things, he said, she was informing us of approaching rain.



Figure 3.10: A primary, cosmic *zhátukua*.



Figure 3.11: A secondary ‘bowl’, a coastal estuary descended from the lakes which bubbled and ‘greeted us’ by raising its level.



Figure 3.12: A tertiary divination bowl. The little pond where the Tungeka Mamas and I worked. It is that mother’s ‘eye’ (shape clearly visible).



Figure 3.13: Mama Salé (left) holding and intently watching a human divining bowl, joined by Mama Manuel (right) and other Kogi. Source: *Aluna the Movie* (<http://www.alunathemovie.com/the-kogi/>)

As the spirit driving reality, for the Kogi communicating with Aluna via the *zhátukua* means accessing truth. For them, this consciousness of the world perceives, communicates, and records everything as it is, contrary to the biased thoughts, interpretations, and perspectives humans have *about* things. According to this logic, the information and knowledge from Aluna is correct, making divination (*iltueld*) a pathfinder to navigate the cosmos and guide human action. Consequently, among the Kogi all significant decisions and courses of action have to be ‘spiritually consulted’ first. This may be interpreting dreams; discovering the causes of disease to rebalance them; finding a problem’s solution; determining where exactly to build a house; knowing when/where to pay sacred sites; defining a Mama apprentice; and even preparing interactions with the Colombian Government. Divination is hence a key practice of the *top-down, out there, and inherent-to-things* rationale of Kogi epistemology, as argued in Chapter 2.

It is up to the Mamas to interpret Aluna’s directions accurately and filter out mistakes, and the Kogi community to implement them. When the Mamas are in disagreement over something or make different interpretations, they normally resolve this in joint ‘consultations’ on sacred sites. Each Mama repeatedly divines with his bowl of water and relates his results to the ongoing verbal discussion, sharing their insights until consensus is reached between human opinions and Aluna’s information, considered the primary authority. In this way, single divinations produce an overall result, each Mama accessing part of the overall truth.



Figure 3.14: A collective divination on a sacred site, necessary for matters of great importance or that affect the whole village or even the Sierra. Mama Luntana (centre-right) is looking down at his *zhátukua* while others speak. Like the *poporo*, the stone seats are key in this meeting.



Figure 3.15: Mama Félix, Mama Manuel’s deceased father, divining alone in his house. Sometimes other men and women visited him to request a divination about a personal issue, after which the Mama advised them and spiritually paid for the matter to rebalance it. These people in turn paid him with food gifts.

By this mediation between the spiritual and material planes through water, divination (*iltueld*) is part of a wider, constant, reciprocal, and purposeful flow of information in the world, like flowing water, which the Kogi grow up to perceive and sense daily. One silent night, when sitting with some older Kogi pupils at the school in Dumingeka, the usual chorus of frogs and insects could be heard in the distance. Following these young men, the frogs’ croaking is a way of ‘singing to the Mother’ and communicating with Her, and more specifically a type of exchange that summons the rain. Mama Manuel later confirmed this by saying that there is a reason for why in swamps, mangroves, and lakes different animals make their sounds. This can be described as an intelligent, vibratory resonance with life.

The Kogi term for ‘it’s raining’ is *ñikâlda zegaté*, meaning something like ‘the base of water is happening’. A more traditional but nowadays neglected⁴⁹ expression, someone in the village told me, is *habakue kuizêldá*, which means ‘the mothers played’. *Kuizi* is the Kogi flute, and *kuizêld* is to play the flute. *Habakue* (‘mothers’) thus refers to each of the falling rain drops, their sound being like ‘playing music’. This struck me as particularly beautiful, pointing to a very sensitive, delicate, and caring environmental perception, where both human and non-human sounds are nourishing ‘music’. In Kogi terms, environmental exchanges are essentially a spiritual affair, a nourishing circulation

⁴⁹ The reason was explained to me as being a loss of tradition. As I say elsewhere, the past is often invoked among the Kogi as a better time and an example of how things should be.

which is also a transmission of information, like the feedback between the sea and the Sierra as manifested in rivers, winds, or connections between sacred sites. Without taking the omnipresence of Aluna into account then, understanding Kogi life would have no meaning and could be misrepresented.

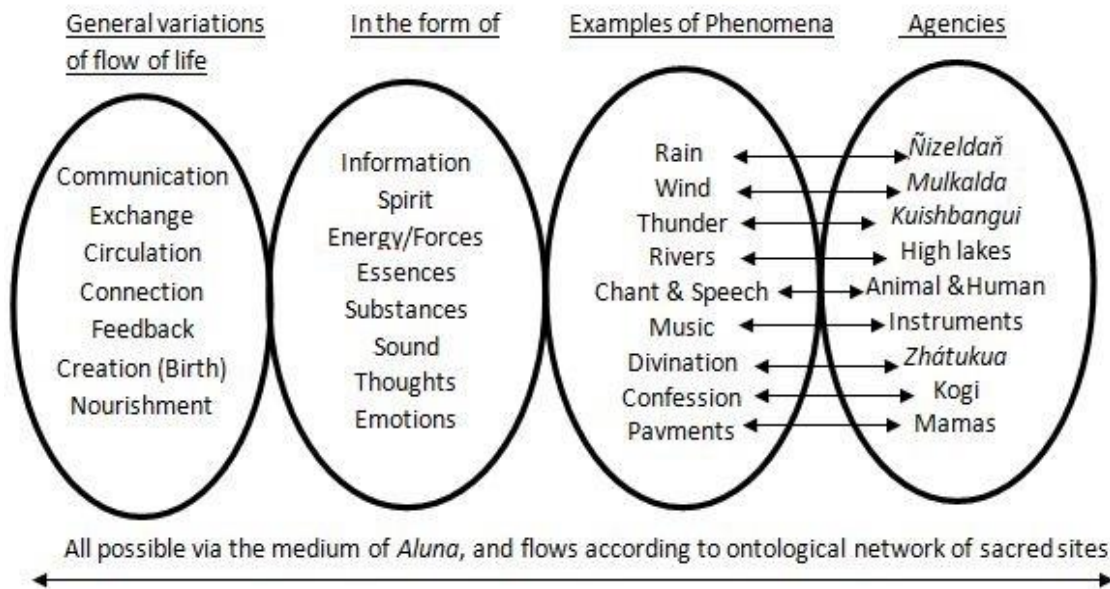


Figure 3.16: Main flows of life, their forms, manifestations, and the conscious agencies communicating them. Ñizeldañ is the Father of Rain, Mulkalda is the ‘base of wind’, and Kuishbangui is ‘Father Thunder’.

3.4.2. The global, spiritual cycle of water

Also elaborating on the sea and the Sierra like Mama Shibulata, the Tungeka Mamas introduced me to how they understand the overall water cycle. In pure and clean form, water initially comes down from the primordial glacier and high lakes. Fed by rainwater that washes the valleys, rivers gradually become ‘dirtier’ and carry down various materials, forces, and spiritual residues from life in the mountains, Zaldziwê’s home, that nourish the sea. This includes the actions, feelings, and thoughts of what humans and animals did in, with, or relating to water, which spiritually ‘cleanses’ the Kogi when bathing. Along the streams at particular spots there are semi-invisible, agentive objects called *yabá* that ensure these processes run smoothly, ‘giving counsel’ to the rivers as they flow down. At this point Mama Manuel asked me: ‘where do the rivers then go so clouds can form?’.

-‘Well, to the sea’ I replied.

-‘But what happens to the water after that?’ he continued.

- ‘The sun evaporates it, it rises in the form of clouds, and then falls as rain again’ I ventured.

-‘No, that’s not what happens. Where does it go first?’ Mama Manuel insisted. ‘They all meet in the sea, yes, but where are they channelled to?’

When I did not know what to say anymore, Mama Manuel argued that by ignoring Kogi traditional knowledge people will assume that ‘rivers go into the sea and that’s it’. In reality, he explained, the coastal ‘guardians’ at river outlets (Section 3) process, purify, and control the substances that flow into the sea. After that, the rivers go to a place far away beyond the sea called Mamaishkagaka where their water is ‘burned’ by a ‘guard’ called Zhántana, as Mama Shibulata also indicated. Yet beyond simple evaporation, Mama Manuel explained, water is spiritually ‘confessed’ (*aluna ishguashi*) and ‘washed’ there. Rivers spiritually ‘unload’ all the materials, essences, and forces from the Sierra to be processed at this place, which ‘heals’ and purifies the water. Meanwhile, the Sierra’s peaks ‘charge up’ again with energy to form clouds. When rain falls once more, it means water has finished confessing and has spiritually returned to the Sierra via the winds. Hereby the sea ‘pays back’ what the Sierra delivered to it. This spiritual cycle of water then, underlies the normal, physical, and observable cycle, and according to Mama Manuel is a *global* matter.

To clarify this, another day I brought a plastic globe from the school as a model. After carefully analysing it by asking me many questions, Mama Manuel pointed to the white bit underneath, Antarctica, and calmly concluded that based on this non-Kogi worldview Mamaishkagaka must be there, ‘where the ice is’. He said that all the Earth’s rivers confess their impurities there. Afterwards, water travels to the Arctic, ‘where its *aluna* is replaced’ and acquires ‘a new mind’, ‘just as when humans bathe, put on new clothes, and start afresh’. Spiritually renewed, the Arctic then sends water back to the ‘Heart of the World’. From the centre of the Sierra Nevada, where a huge, invisible Cosmic-Pillar called *Kalbəsánkua* ‘supports the Earth’⁵⁰, water is finally redistributed out into the whole world to fall as clean, fresh rain and flow down rivers again. Mama Manuel added that while this is a yearly cycle, ‘in the spiritual world it is like a day’. In Kogi terms, the rivers are women who ‘become pregnant’ with the rains and ‘grow’ (two rainy seasons). These women then ‘turn thin’ (two dry seasons) after having discharged the water at the sea and thus ‘given birth’ to new rains, their ‘daughters’, who later return to the high lakes to start anew.

⁵⁰ This pillar is fully discussed in Chapter 4.

3.4.3. *Aluna ishguashi* in Kogi society

'The water's confession (*aluna ishguashi*) is like the one we Kogi do', continued Mama Manuel, which is also a release of 'vapour'. By mentally discharging their thoughts, feelings, emotions, dreams, and past actions at a sacred site and guided by a Mama, the Kogi deposit their own 'spiritual loads' (called *shaldá*), which amount to 'used aluna'. As I gathered, confession is purification, emotional therapy, spiritual alignment, and ecological sustenance all in one. Because the sites receive people's essences as 'food', confessions are thus also ways to 'pay' those mothers and fathers and 'feed' the natural elements they sustain (e.g. fire, animal species, thunder). Through divination (*íltueld*), the Mamas find out which site needs to receive whose confession, when, and how, hereby also curing illnesses from previous imbalances, preventing future ones, and harmonising people and sites. Consequently, both cosmic and human confessions process 'used spirit' and maintain communicative environmental exchanges. During fieldwork, I often had to perform *aluna ishguashi* myself. The reasons included settling my thoughts before starting work with the Mamas, collectively confessing with the Kogi during ceremonies, or processing a dream to prevent its bad omen from taking effect. By conversing at the sacred site moreover, the Mamas and I automatically confessed our thoughts and words. According to Mama Manuel, this mother thereby not only gave me knowledge in exchange, but also helped me get rid of emotional burdens, growing used to my presence and slowly bonding with me.

When visiting Kogi territory, foreigners are also made to confess to spiritually acknowledge the arrival, ask for 'permission' to enter, and show respect. By a rock on a sacred site, one receives a little piece of cotton from the Mama. It is held between two fingers while rehearsing or recalling (mentally and sometimes out loud) everything one did, thought, felt, and dreamt before getting there. One imagines putting it all into the cotton, a material that "soaks up" thought, which is then returned to the Mama. With a far-away gaze, he holds it in his hand while concentrating, perceiving something, and gently shaking it for a minute or so, during which he mentally 'speaks to', 'advises' and 'gives counsel' to one's essences to turn them into positive spirit (*aluna hantshigatsé*). Next, the Mama sends them to an appropriate spiritual power as payment. Finally, the Mama leaves the cotton on a specific spot on the rock, 'tying' the energies to the sacred site. One is then 'in agreement' with the Sierra's powers. If *aluna ishguashi* is skipped, the Kogi earnestly think the person can suffer consequences (i.e. imbalances) later on. When finishing my fieldwork for example, I asked Mama Selakulú the reason for the strong, recurrent digestive problems I had endured. After divining, he said that I had not confessed to pay for my arrival to the Sierra. The illnesses were a spiritual way to 'collect' my 'debt', which he instructed me to settle by confessing my entire fieldwork.



Figure 3.17: The crew of the film *Aluna* (Chapter 2) confessing on the *ezwama* of Seizhua. The camera man (right) is visibly holding the little piece of cotton while concentrating. In the background, Mama Shibulata (with hat) is preparing to receive everyone's cottons.

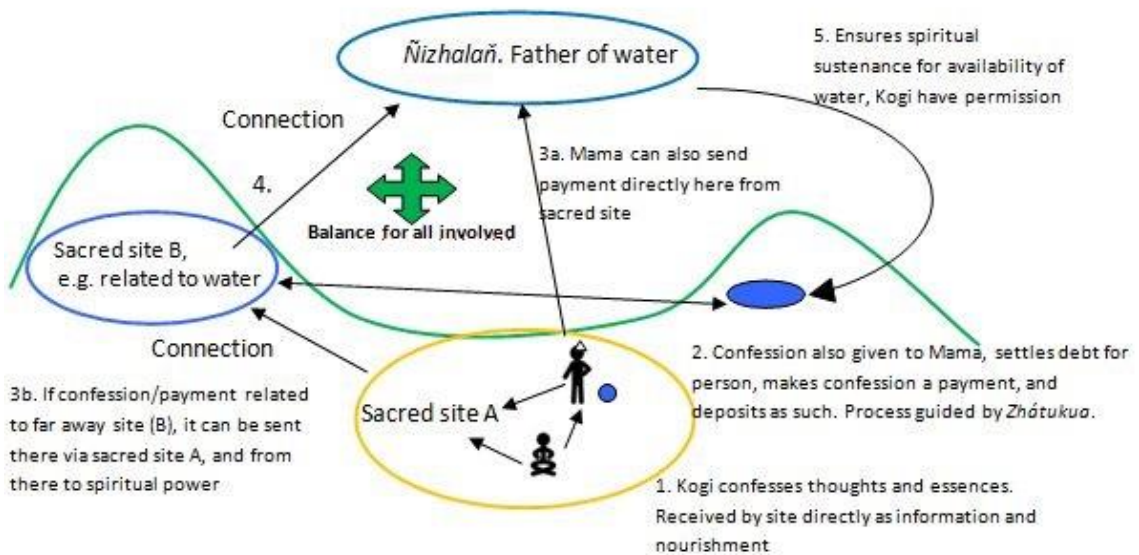


Figure 3.18: Kogi system of confession. Green lines are the mountains, the blue sphere is a lake. The small blue dot is the divining bowl. #5 refers to the Father of water.

3.5. Notes on the ecology of water

3.5.1. A disrupted water cycle

Mamas Shibulata, Luntana, and Manuel concluded the Water Topic by talking more about how it plays out in current environmental problems, being consistent with their aim of clarifying them. Similar to Andean understandings (cf. Bastien 1985, Chapter 7), in Kogi terms the Sierra Nevada is a body with all its parts, a sentient land, the Mother's physical manifestation, after which human bodies were modelled. Damming or diverting rivers, the Mamas in Tungeka asserted, is therefore effectively the equivalent of 'cutting into an arm's vein', or 'tying it up' and blocking the blood/water.

-'How would that feel on you?' I was asked.

-'Really not good' I replied.

-'Well, that is what the Mother feels when we do that to her'.

They explained that this damming/diverting obstructs the proper flow into the sea of all those substances and spiritual elements that come down the Sierra (Sections 3, 4). As Mama Shibulata said, 'only half the amount is reaching Mamaishkagaka to be confessed there', disrupting the water cycle and interrupting the exchange of forces between the sea and the Sierra. This shortage or blockage messes up the global redistribution of rains, regionally increasing or decreasing rainfall, which can dry out rivers. Consequently, a high demand for rain arises in the Sierra which continuously 'calls back' the missing precipitation, generating uncontrolled, abnormally strong rainy seasons. Indeed, I heard other Kogi report that 'clouds are not forming as they used to', and that either droughts or heavy rains, instead of continuous soft rains, are more common now. The Mamas explained that this only exacerbates the problem, since without water rivers cannot carry down what the sea needs. Therefore, even less substances reach Mamaishkagaka, which sends back less rain, forming a vicious counter-cycle of disconnection and disorder. If there is 'no water to burn there', Mama Manuel said, 'the Earth itself can burn' through increased sunshine, hotter weather, and hence more drought. Showing awareness of mainstream ecological concepts, he explained that this is 'what you call global warming', which for the Kogi fundamentally rests on this spiritual imbalance. After all, Mamaishkagaka is related to the sun (*mama*), and the Mamas make payments to it at specific coastal sites connected that place for it to function well.



Figure 3.19 I observed very low river levels, even in the rainy season, their rocky beds exposed.



Figure 3.20: Damning the lower Ranchería River has brought down its level, dried out these trees, damaged local fauna, caused social conflicts and sanitary issues, and left the indigenous Wayúu of the nearby Guajira Desert without water. Source: *El Pílon* (<http://elpilon.com.co>).

Figure 3.21: The Ciénaga Grande de Santa Marta lagoon (4280km²) west of the Sierra was cut off from the sea in the 1950's by a new road between Santa Marta and Barranquilla. Ever since, the lagoon has been shrinking, and mangrove forests like this one have died.



The Tungeka Mamas also complained that Younger Brother continuously extracts water from rivers, lakes, and wells through pipelines, hoses, and other means. This is like 'cutting up' sentient 'bodies' or 'extracting women's veins', which weakens the Mother and likewise disrupts the water's journey to Mamaishkagaka. Since 'everything has its place', water is not to be variously redistributed and abused for commerce, mass consumption, and industry. By contrast, I was told, the Mother instructed the Kogi to use water only to cook, bathe, wash, and drink, and to collect it exclusively in traditional wooden containers. Mama Manuel regretted that now the Mamas see, feel, and divine that due to all the previous factors, plus the contamination that rivers carry there, Mamaishkagaka itself is not functioning well anymore. Through a drawing on a plank of wood (see Chapter 4), he explained how half of its mechanisms are now damaged. Consequently, the Mamas are having their villages collectively confess all their actions related to water and rain to somewhat restore the spiritual shortages in the cycle, and make payments at its origin, the high lakes. 'If we Mamas did not do that', Mama Manuel asserted, 'the vapour from the sea and Mamaishkagaka would not rise and return to the Sierra', which 'would dry out, including the lakes'. Considering themselves a *component* of the water cycle, the Kogi thus try to rebalance/mitigate humanity's use and abuse of water.

3.5.2. Damaging the shoreline

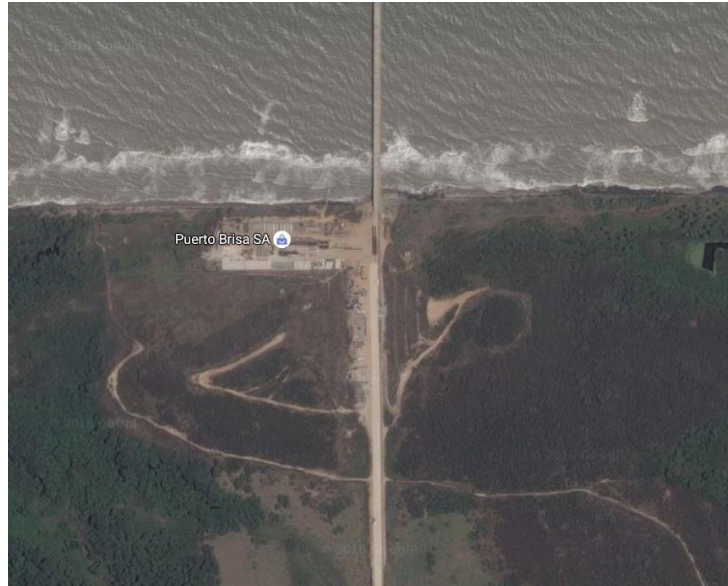
The Mamas are also very worried about the coastal sacred sites themselves being physically destroyed by roads, harbours, industrial developments, and other activities. Machines 'have simply run them over', Mama Luntana said. Damaging the Black Line's 'guardians', 'mothers' and 'fathers', Mama Manuel explained, weakens life in the Sierra. Vegetation dries up, animal numbers decrease, and the land loses strength to grow crops and feed people, 'including Younger Brother'. The sites are hereby also deteriorated as spiritual and environmental control-barriers. This allows diseases⁵¹, tropical storms, and warmer weather to enter the Sierra from the sea, and conversely the Sierra's own forces and currents to pass onto the ocean. According to the Tungeka Mamas, the weakened barriers additionally permit human transgressions, partly explaining why non-Kogi people are increasingly entering, exploiting, and settling around the Sierra, leading to more damage. I was told that the Kogi Organisation (OGT) now partly replaces this spiritual gap as a political checkpoint, for which reason all foreign requests for activities in/related to the Indigenous Reservation have to undergo its approval (like my research project). Since it would be catastrophic 'if people were to build things higher up the Sierra itself or damage [cosmologically primordial] sacred sites there', the Kogi keep these parts out of bounds. 'Younger Brother cannot go to the high lakes'.

⁵¹ He cited measles and yellow fever as examples.

Since the coastal sacred sites normally filter and purify all that flows down the rivers, my informants compared damaging them to 'bursting a pipe' or 'blowing up the contents of a house'. This causes their spillage and further disrupts the water cycle. This, Mariano explained (translating that day), is like 'blood leaking and leaking' from the body, until 'there is no option but to die, to die'. These blocked and un-purified substances accumulate, producing what I understood as 'spiritual waste' (*aluna nusegatsé*), and become negative forces themselves, either by 'rotting' there or by leaving their designated places. Mariano further explained that 'it is the same stagnation as when cutting open a vein and tying it up without any medication'. These 'foul odours' then rise into the Sierra, contaminate it, and 'turn into diseases that we did not use to have', such as 'diarrhoea, chickenpox, or skin problems'. The Mamas' payments cannot always control these diseases anymore, regretted Mama Manuel. Moreover, he said, all this disorder causes multiple aberrations and dysfunctions in animals and plants. 'How can we fix this? It is difficult'. Overwhelmed, Mama Manuel said that 'we indigenous people cannot bear all of that'.

A few years ago, the construction of a new commercial port called Puerto Brisa split in two the small hill that constitutes the coastal sacred site Hukulwa. The Mamas presented this as a particularly grave example of destruction of these sites, aggravated by Hukulwa's vital spiritual-ecological importance in settling the sea's conflict in Mama Shibulata's story. Splitting this hill, he said, effectively broke up its life-sustaining forces, while the corresponding knowledge left there for the Kogi was lost. One of the story's lessons, Mama Shibulata indicated, is that if the hard-won, delicate balance between the sea and the Sierra established there was to be disrupted, the story's conflicts could be recreated. This has now been realised as the disputes between the Kogi (representing the Sierra) and Younger Brother (initially coming from the sea). For Mama Shibulata, the story thus explains why nowadays there are so many economic, political, and environmental issues along the Black Line, especially at Hukulwa. Since the Mamas keep this negative potential of the sites in check, he said, 'we cannot let you keep harming these sites'. Otherwise the original tensions around the sea 'will never end'. Hukulwa is there 'to make people believe that the story of Zaldziwê is true', stated Mama Shibulata. Because of its importance, Mama Manuel added separately, Hukulwa connects to many other places. Consequently, its problems have now spread to Colombia, 'like someone suffering from a loved one's death, even if far away', he compared.

Figure 3.22: Puerto Brisa harbour from the air. The road leading up to the sea split the hill in two. Source: Google Maps.



3.5.3. Spiritual connections and taking care of water

Considering the creational descent discussed in Section 2, in one of the last sessions on Water Mama Manuel and Mama Luntana emphasised that the coastal sites along the Black Line are spiritually connected to sacred sites, peaks, and high lakes on the Sierra. Hukulwa is the ‘daughter’ of, and therefore communicates with, another site of the same name, its ‘mother’. Lying at around 1000m.a.s.l, other Kogi once showed me Hukulwa’s location, which also connects with an extremely important peak, Gonawindúa. The Mamas, it was explained to me, use these spiritual connections to monitor coastal sites from the mountain *ezwamas*, and also to activate and manage the coast’s defence mechanisms through e.g. dances. Damaging the coastal sites then, spiritually disconnects them from the upper ones, inhibits their necessary exchange of forces, and obstructs the Mamas’ in communicating with them and sending their payments. Conversely, negative forces from the sea can then travel up the valleys and affect the sites there. Following Mama Manuel, since the Sierra is the ‘Heart’ this in turn affects the world and generates many health issues currently afflicting humanity. I sometimes heard Kogi people saying that Younger Brother does not really know where these illnesses come from or why they exist. The Mamas by contrast, divine their spiritual causes, are aware of their common origin in a place called Duleshkawa, and foresee their environmental consequences.

Following Mama Shibulata’s analogy, the sites contain spiritual indications or ‘writings’ that deposited there by Spiritual Fathers that power and sustain the Sierra, which the Mamas have to

follow as *knowledge*. They use this information to take care of natural elements, reproducing those creational powers. ‘This is why we use the *zhátukua* to divine’, Mama Luntana similarly told me in Tungeka, ‘to communicate with the Mother and the sites’. As primordial origins of life, the high lakes contain the most information, being the ‘main libraries’ of the world, Mama Manuel then compared to mainstream society. The *ezwamas*, second in importance, are ‘large volumes’ of parts of creation. Other bodies of water and lesser sacred sites are single ‘books’. The *zhátukua* is ‘like a copy of these books’, similar to his earlier statement in Section 4 that these divination bowls resemble the lakes. By reading the water’s messages, Mama Manuel explained, the Mamas consult the whole library or ‘database’ (Silvestre’s translation analogy) to access its knowledge and ‘thought’. Similarly, I was told, he and Mama Luntana contacted higher sacred sites through the little pond at our working site to guide my research.

When posing questions to the *zhátukua* and interpreting the answers, ‘we converse with Spiritual Fathers and Mothers’, Mama Manuel continued. The Mamas can ‘read’ those ‘books’ because they were ‘taught’ to do so as part of their training about the locations, histories, and functions of the Sierra’s myriad sacred sites. Sharply aware of communicative difficulties, Mama Manuel argued that ‘Younger Brother does not comprehend these things, thinking it is a joke, as if we were playing around’. However, ‘we have learned [this knowledge] since the beginning’, which ‘comes from [the darkness] *Sé*’. Assertively directing his explanation, the Mama then asked me: ‘how does the information get from the site to the *zhátukua*?’. ‘Well, it travels through *Aluna*’, he responded. Again using examples from mainstream society, for him ‘the *zhátukua* is like having a mobile phone where you dial different numbers to contact different sites’.

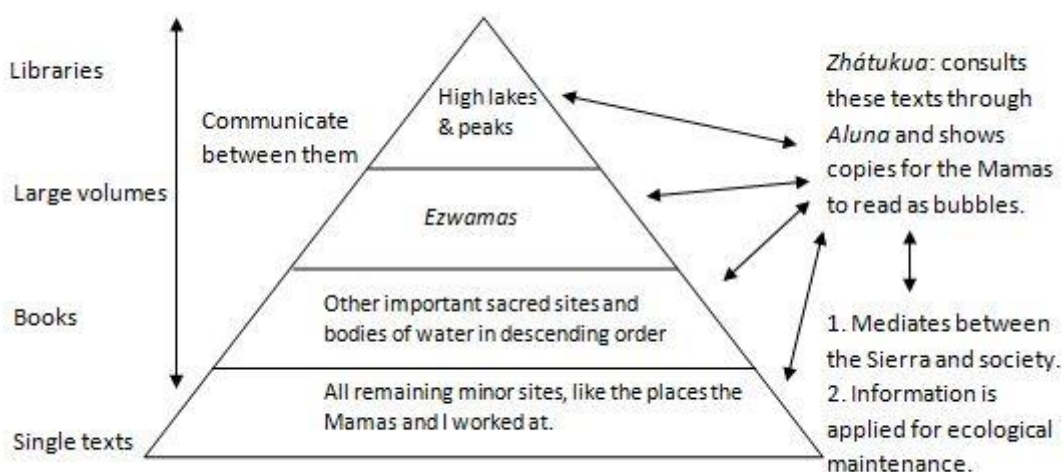


Figure 3.23: The basic cosmological hierarchy of sacred sites.

As I often observed, through divination (*ĩltueld*) the Mamas navigate the cosmo-geographical “grid” of sacred sites to rebalance specific ecological problems like for example harmful winds, which would require paying off any ‘debts’ to the corresponding ‘Mother of Wind’. As Mama Manuel put it, divinations constitute a preparation or ‘draft’, a communication which in the resulting payments becomes ‘like the final document’ or ‘piece of work’. In the case of water, the Mamas communicate with the semi-invisible objects *yabá* mentioned in Section 4 that ‘give counsel’ to rivers, which in turn connect with Aluna as ‘antennas’, the Mama analogised again. If *yabá* are extracted, water in those places begins to dry. ‘The area we are sitting in now for example’, Mama Manuel said, ‘used to be swampy’ before Colombian settlers farmed and deforested the land. Following Mama Luntana, besides monitoring the water cycle the Kogi also use special little white stones called *ñikwitsi* (*ñi* = water). This type of *sewá* object⁵² transmit learning and rituals related to water. For example, since birth and marriage depend on a lake called *Misəbádziwê*, a young couple may be given two *ñikwitsi* to confess (*aluna ishguashi*) their previous lives with. In this way they pay/reciprocate water, settle old imbalances, and have their new married life-stage responsibly aligned with natural forces.

As the Mamas explained, this is possible because specific human body parts can be used to pay back corresponding things in the Sierra. For example, sweat is the equivalent of rain and its evaporation, while the spaces between toes are ‘valleys’ where ‘rivers’ (i.e. sweat) flow, and so paying with these human energies can promote rainfall. Confessions related to water are also performed collectively at the villages if divinations indicate this, said Mama Luntana. Silvestre translated this as mental ‘taxes’ collected by the Mamas that serve as ‘spiritual food’ for the mothers/fathers of the sites. Following Mama Manuel, this is because any mother, human or not, is sustained when knowing about and receiving something from her children (i.e. the Kogi). Contrary to Younger Brother’s money transactions, he argued, this is exchange happens in Aluna. Without these practices ‘of beginning’, there ‘would be drought’, and so ‘we have to maintain this tradition of spiritual knowledge’. While ‘you have technology and tools, we know and use things like *ñikwitsi*’ to return to the Mother what she gives people daily. For the Kogi, this is a very practical necessity to keep society and Sierra ‘in agreement’ (*zhuluka*).

⁵² These objects were introduced in Chapter 1.

Figure 3.24: Kogi women and men returning to Dumingeka after a communal confession in preparation for upcoming yearly dances and festivities.



Figure 3.25: The 'toes' of the mountains. Kogi homestead to the left.

Ending the Water Topic, the Tungeka Mamas wondered: 'how can Younger Brother harmfully alter bodies of water and related sites, contaminate, and indiscriminately extract water, if through water the Mother sustains life?'. Mama Shibulata similarly asked himself: 'how will species survive?', for even 'stones depend on water', and water 'feels' harmful actions as a senseless 'scolding'. For the Tungeka Mamas, Younger Brother (Nañi) is abusing the technology given to him by the Mother to violently damage the very source of being. People act 'as if water was their property' and wilfully manipulate it, 'having no shame in selling it'. Despite Younger Brother 'also having ways to care for things', he 'ignores the spiritual side of things', Mariano translated into Spanish. For example, 'coal is related to cloud formation and the sun', so that 'mining it causes either too much rainfall or draught, warming and intense sunshine'. By contrast, 'we indigenous people protect water because we know its stories and manage it accordingly'. Water, as I was told with vigour, is a 'motherly, thinking

person', has many lessons, and involves much responsibility, care, and respect. Besides not harming water therefore, 'people should also not hamper the Mamas in our responsibility to take care of water and everything else'.

Chapter 4

The Earth and the World

Two months after finishing the Water Topic, Mama Manuel, Mama Luntana and I met again on our sacred site to start the Earth Topic. When we got there, the pond there (Chapter 3) was producing many bubbles out of its own accord. After the Mamas stared intently at the bubbles, reading them, Mama Manuel explained that the pond reacted to our arrival and was ‘talking’ to us. He instructed me to ‘greet’ this ‘mother’, and told me that I was ‘getting closer’ to her. She expressed this by having raised her water level, which he showed with his hand, whereas I was conversely (mentally) going ‘deeper into the pond’, thereby strengthening the relationship. In this way, the Mama said, the mother would gradually reveal more information to me. Drawing on my background to make me understand, he said that ‘like when you write a document, this work can also not be done quickly just like that’. Mama Manuel then informed me about what we would discuss that day, which Mama Luntana confirmed by performing a quick spiritual consultation. This time he used a type of divination called *Kashivítukua*. As Arbeláez-Albornoz (1997) describes, for about a minute the person repeatedly hits both sets of fingers against one another in a particular way while posing a mental question. The answer lies in the exact position of both index fingers when suddenly stopping.

During most of the Earth Topic my translator was Juan, a Kogi teacher at another Western-type school in Tungeka. Juan is particularly familiar with the Mamas’ knowledge, and has the spiritual ‘accreditation’ (*sewá*) to use a *zhátukua* and divine. *Kaggi*, the Kogi word for ‘earth’, can refer to the soil, the ‘territory’, and to the Earth as a whole. Because all three Mamas also included the wider cosmos, of which the Sierra is according to them a complete physical model, this topic is more appropriately called *Earth and World*. While the Water Topic leaned more towards spirit, flows, and essences, this one emphasised more structural factors. Mama Shibulata’s narratives of worldly formation complemented how the Tungeka Mamas rather explained and discussed the world through e.g. models. The word *kaggi* also relates to *Kággaba*, the Kogi’s self-designation, which seemingly means ‘People of the Earth’ and also ‘Initial People’.

4.1. The Sierra as 'Government'

To start, Mama Manuel asked me to summarise the last few sessions on Water to test my learning and pick up from where we had left off. Like the water that travels to Mamaishkagaka (Chapter 3), I was told that this summary was also a necessary 'confession' (*aluna ishguashi*). My words were both information and nourishment for this 'mother' (sacred site), a way to settle with her the process so far. I thus gave her feedback on my learning, which is 'like a document' that she had spiritually authorised. Mama Manuel and Mama Luntana then used the water cycle discussed in the previous chapter to bridge the Water and Earth Topics. Borrowing political terms from Spanish, they explained that the reason why the Sierra Nevada redistributes water to the whole planet, is because 'this territory is like a Government which cares for, sustains, and protects everything'. This 'Government', which contains 'ministries' (e.g. *ezwamas*, important mountains) that manage different worldly affairs, leads all other countries and territories, tending to them and organising things. While Younger Brother inherited 'all those vast lands over there' from the Mother, said Mama Manuel, 'we inherited this little Sierra Nevada', which nevertheless 'governs the whole world'. As I gathered, the Mamas meant this in a cosmological, spiritual, and also ecological sense. For the Kogi, this explains the Sierra's great ecological diversity as a primary model of biodiversity.

I was told that other countries have 'their own centres' of authority and administration, but of a regional and local character that corresponds to 'governorates' and 'mayoralities'. As in human political organisation, Mama Manuel contrasted, these authorities are subordinated to the principal 'Central Government', of which 'there is only one', having a specific location that houses great powers. It communicates with the wider Earth, regulating/organising all necessary forces and thereby maintaining 'the Mother's legacy'. Without the Sierra, the Mamas continued, other places could not function. 'Unlike human governments, the Sierra Nevada is always the same and never changes, it is irreplaceable'. 'Or are there many available?', Mama Manuel tested me. Consequently, 'it must not be harmed!' he stated vigorously. Affecting the Government 'affects everything else', such as through the global water cycle. More specifically, Mama Manuel told me about the most important peak of the Sierra Nevada, and thus according to him of the world, called Gonawindua. This is 'the President' that directs the 'Government' (Sierra Nevada). Accordingly, the Kogi political organisation in Santa Marta is called Organización Gonawindúa Tayrona. *Go* means 'birth' or 'to originate', *na* means 'history', *win* means 'movement', and *dwa* means 'the seed of all'. We may thus translate Gonawindua as 'the seed of existence from which everything germinated and has developed through time'. The OGT (2017) states on its website that:

Gonawindwa, as a territorial space, is the central mountain of the snowy peaks from which other mountains expand. The places of origin, and the placenta (Golako) of humankind, and of all knowledge, are in Gonawindwa: it is the navel of the Universe.

In Chapter 3, I briefly mentioned a pole called Kalbəsánkua that according to the Mamas supports the Earth and powers the global water cycle, redistributing rainfall like a ‘heart’ that ‘pumps’ blood. The Tungeka Mamas now elaborated that Kalbəsánkua is located at or ‘in’ a peak of the same name, at which point this invisible pole traverses the Earth. ‘No one goes up there’, I was told, and on the mountain top itself ‘you would see nothing but rocks anyway’. Following Mama Luntana and Mama Manuel, everything is fastened around Kalbəsánkua and strengthened by it. Being the very centre of the world and core of the ‘Government’, it sustains and holds together the Earth, keeping it from ‘falling apart’ and protecting all life. Seemingly this refers to the ‘axis mundi’ widely reported in different cultures (Eliade 1959b, Korom 1992). In the Kogi version, this Cosmic-Pillar has strong *ecological* connotations. Being connected to everything, the Mamas continued, harming the Earth affects the functioning of this Pillar (e.g. redistribution of rains). For this reason, ‘the Mamas do not want people to mess with it’. When I sometimes did not understand something, Mama Manuel laughed in his usually relaxed manner, asking me: ‘did you know this before?’. I answered that I did not.



Figure 4.1: From about this spot, Alejo once showed me the Kalbəsánkua peak somewhere behind the trees in the centre-left.

Figure 4.2: My representation of the Mamas' concentric and hierarchical understanding of *ontological governance* by analogy to Western political organisation.



4.2. Outwards from the Centre: the formation of the world

4.2.1. Establishing the Centre

While Mama Manuel said that Kalbəsánkua is ‘as old as the world itself’, it was Mama Shibulata who in a parallel session fully traced these origins to explain *why* the Sierra is the ‘Government’ through the Kogi story of the creation and formation of the world. The universe, he began, and later the Earth, were first created *outwards* from a *centre*. Before this place existed however, there were ‘Four Fathers’ who planned the world, ‘and still sustain it to this day’. Seizhankua⁵³, Aldwáñiku, Siókokui, and Kunchabitawêya are the first ‘sons’ of the Mother’s first ‘daughters’.

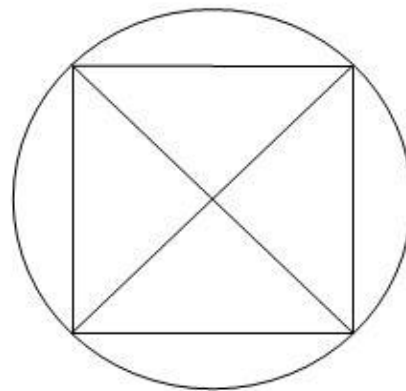
Their very first action was to prepare and ‘clean’ the ground or layout for the world’s subsequent construction in *circular* shape. The Four Fathers measured in straight lines ‘from different points’, who were also persons called Gonawindua, Awimaldué, Goltué, and Mamaldwué, to find the centre of this circular world-to-be, i.e. establish the radius. None of these four points was the right centre, yet there was a fifth (and youngest) of these (also) sons of the Mother, who was the perfect centre: Kalbəsánkua. Having been the first points to be measured, Mama Shibulata explained, these five primordial characters later became the five highest/principal peaks of the Sierra Nevada, and hence the world’s most important mountains. Subsequently, the Four Fathers traced or identified the outline of the future foundations upon which all nine levels of creation would be built.

⁵³ I have already mentioned *Seizhankua* in Chapters 1 and 3.

Mama Shibulata hereby paralleled the initial creation account in Chapter 3⁵⁴, recollected by Reichel-Dolmatoff (1951d), stating that '[...] the lands, the worlds were formed upwards, up to the top, where our world is today. There were nine worlds [...]’.

The support mentioned by the Mama is a cross called Shkuákalda similar to the St. Andrew’s cross (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1978f). This Cosmic Base serves as the stabilising ‘seat’ of Kalbəsánkua, which as the Cosmic-Pillar stands/hovers vertically at the centre of that horizontal “X”. Starting from Shkuákalda upwards in stages and in nine days, ‘which for humans are like nine years’, the Four Fathers then formed the nine levels of the cosmos.

Figure 4.3: Approximate basic layout of the foundations of the cosmos. Kalbəsánkua is in the centre.



4.2.2. A structure that sustains life

I then asked Mama Shibulata through Alejo whether these creational events were happening in the spiritual reality that predated physical being. He confirmed that it was ‘in Aluna’, before tangible earth existed, and therefore in the darkness before the ‘dawn’. To build and assemble the cosmic structure, the story went on, the Four Fathers needed the help of who is now ‘Father Thunder’: Makú. Together, they created a primary, spiritual model of the universe ‘in thought’ that served as template for its later physical formation. Following Mama Shibulata, to this day this ‘cosmological blueprint’ (my translation) is kept inside the Sierra Nevada in the spiritual realm of Nuhuakalda, which contains all creational essences like ‘black water’ (Chapter 3).

The Four Fathers then established that the Earth (Mother Sénenulang) should be the *fifth* of the nine cosmic layers, thus positioned in the middle of the cosmos. From Kalbəsánkua outwards in circular (perhaps *centrifugal*) fashion, they spiritually organised all territories and bodies of water on that fifth, middle level. First came the Sierra Nevada immediately around Kalbəsánkua, and then all other regions followed, including ‘the distant lands of White People’ (Pldañsé). As they thus

⁵⁴ Cited at the very beginning of Chapter 3.

expanded the Earth, the Four Fathers and the Cosmic Base Shkuákalda determined that ‘everything should have its place’. Consequently, they prepared the future ‘houses’ or ‘homes’ of all elements of creation, i.e. the sacred sites, mountains⁵⁵, lakes, and other cosmologically important places, which connect to Nuhuakalda as a source of life-force.

Drawing a correspondence between cosmological principles and Kogi society, Mama Shibulata then illustrated that when building a new village, the Kogi first erect the men’s cosmic gathering house, the *nuhué*, which is the spiritual centre and most important part. *Nuhués*, he said, are therefore like the principal mountains mentioned above, while other houses around them correspond to lesser mountains. A Kogi village is hence an emulation of the Sierra Nevada. This may resemble how other ancient dwellings such as the Tairona Lost City (Giraldo 2010: 27), or even the Aztec and Inca strongholds of Tenochtitlan (Carrasco 2002) and Cuzco (Zuidema 2009), were seemingly planned according to cosmological guidelines. According to Mama Shibulata, this is also an ecological matter, since the Four Fathers carried out this work and preparation ‘so that the world is strong and stable, and the Earth fertile, plentiful, and full of life, avoiding problems and disease’.



Figure 4.4: The ‘mountains’ of a smaller Kogi village. The *nuhué* is the larger construction.

⁵⁵ The peak mentioned earlier where Kalbəsánkua is located for example, is its ‘home’.

4.3. Composition and structure

4.3.1. Making the model

During three later sessions, Mama Manuel and Mama Luntana skilfully and knowingly improvised a model of the structure of the cosmos to help me understand, usefully exemplifying Mama Shibulata's narrative. We discussed it in detail, and tried to relate it to general Western cosmological understandings assisted by illustrations, analogies, and objects. This was a fascinating, conscious attempt to, despite potential incompatibilities, transcend our radically different backgrounds and purposefully seek common ground by referring to *one* shared world, as argued in Chapter 2.



Figure 4.5: Mama Manuel by the pond holding a simple initial model, depicting only Kalbəsánkua and the fifth level that holds the Earth.



Figure 4.6: Mama Manuel (top), Mama Luntana (right), and Juan (left) holding the complete cosmic model.

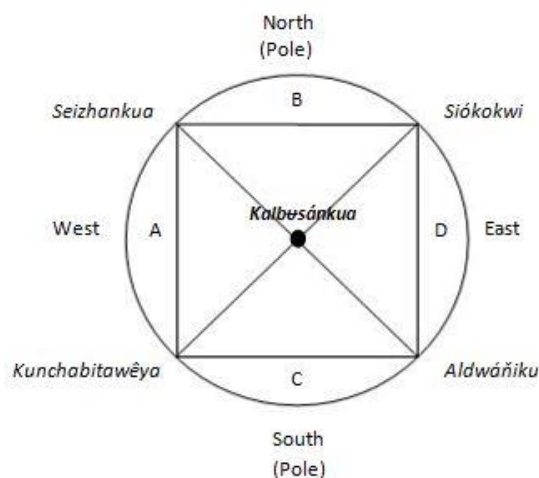
Generally following the order of Mama Shibulata's story, the Tungeka Mamas started by forming a horizontal "X" to represent the Cosmic Base Shkuákalda (bottom of *Figure 4.6*). 'Before Shkuákalda there was nothing', I was told, and it 'hovers' above the primordial sea of darkness (here the pond) from which everything arose (Chapter 3). This cross is framed by four bars that hold it together, and the Cosmic-Pillar Kalbəsánkua is the long stick standing in the centre of that "X". In line with Mama Shibulata's account, the cross is to be conceived *within* an encompassing circumference not shown here. As Reichel-Dolmatoff (1978f: 16) noted, among the Kogi the square

and the circle are involved 'in the structure of the cosmos and in all microcosmic derivations'. The Mamas now showed how Kalbəsánkua is the centre of both.

Following the Mamas, the nine vertical cosmic levels along the pole are like a pile of saucers separated by spaces, each reproducing the Four Fathers' circular measurement. Resembling a symmetrical beehive between Shkuákalda below and the top of Kalbəsánkua, the pile becomes gradually narrower towards both ends. The largest, fifth level in the middle, is represented by the other, higher cross in the model⁵⁶, which has four levels below and four above. This middle cross then, is a copy of Shkuákalda. In fact, all nine saucers have a cross in them. As can be seen, each line of the "X" is formed of two parallel 'beams', one 'male' and one 'female' I was told, whose complementarity ensures structural stability. Generally speaking, the combination of circular space with verticality is also common in Andean cosmological understandings (Ossio 2002).

Mama Manuel explained that the middle cross is 'fastened around' Kalbəsánkua and sustains our physical Earth. All territories 'grew' along, and now 'hold on to', those four 'beams'. The central, strengthening (cosmic) knot in *Figure 4.5*, and where Mama Manuel's left index finger is in *Figure 4.6*, is the Sierra Nevada, to which the Earth is tied and connected. Accordingly, in Mama Shibulata's story the Sierra is the centre from which the world was formed outwards. The Caribbean Sea and Colombia, said Mama Manuel, are therefore right around this knot. 'What is to be found further out?', I asked. After asking me to list a few countries, and roughly sketching the Americas and Europe for him, Mama Manuel said 'thaaat's it!'. He said that the oceans and all other countries are located at gradually more external points along the cross, until reaching the world's circumference. After discussing this, we agreed that the North and South Poles of Western geography would be located at two opposite ends of the cross/circle.

Figure 4.7: The fifth cosmic level and the four cardinal directions. According to Reichel-Dolmatoff (1975c, 1978f), the world's 'four corners' are NE, NW, SE, and SW. A, B, C, & D are the world's four quadrants, where other countries are.



⁵⁶ The model is not totally proportionate.

4.3.2. The four celestial realms

Other Kogi I related to were aware of this basic cosmological structure, its general features identified by Duque Cañas et al. (2004) and Reichel-Dolmatoff (1975c, 1978f, 1987b). In this framework, the Sierra Nevada is the centre of our horizontal earthly plane *and* the vertical cosmos. ‘We are in the middle’, the Mamas said. Kalbəsánkua therefore traverses, sustains, and holds together all nine layers of the universe, both spiritually and physically. Kalbəsánkua’s own source of sustenance, Mama Manuel and Mama Luntana continued, comes from the heavens above the Pillar. This high, invisible realm is constituted by four main ‘places’ or perhaps dimensions which, from what I understood, are also vast omniscient groupings of consciousness and spirit. Here, there is ‘no time’, ‘no night’, and ‘no disease’. They said that what exists and happens ‘down here’, is a reflection of truths, forces, and realities held ‘up there’. These four realms, which seemingly also lie beyond the nine planes, are called Teikú, Ñiuwabake, Héñkalaha and Mulkuaba, and are the primary residence of the Spiritual Fathers and Mothers (the *Kalguasha*).

According to the Mamas, the Cosmic-Pillar was created, erected, and strengthened by these heavenly forces, ‘so that it could always sustain and nourish the world’. Albeit ‘not visible to us’, Ñiuwabake ‘holds’ Kalbəsánkua (his ‘son’) in place from above, and through him the whole cosmos. Mama Manuel showed this by gripping the stick’s top with his fingers. ‘If Ñiuwabake was to let go, the Earth would collapse, including Europeans’. Meanwhile, Mulkuaba is connected with the bottom base-cross Shkuákalda via a cosmic cord passing through all nine layers, ensuring necessary movement and communication between them. It is ‘like a lift going up and down in a tall building with many floors’, compared Mama Manuel, ‘manned by the Kalguasha’. They hereby distribute their powers and ensure life on Earth. The Four Fathers, who originated the four principal Kogi lineages (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1975c), ‘support the world [cross] from its four corners’.

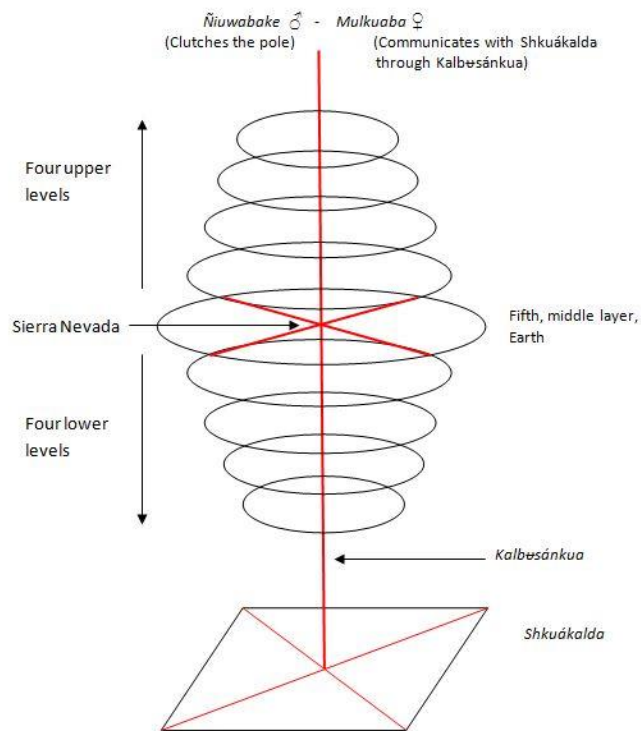
LA SIERRA NEVADA ES EL
CORAZÓN DEL UNIVERSO
(MADRE). NUESTROS PADRES
ESPIRITUALES EN SUS HOMBROS
SOSTIENEN EL EQUILIBRIO DEL
MUNDO.



Figure 4.8: The slogan of the Kogi Organisation: ‘The Sierra Nevada is the Heart of the Universe (Mother). Our Spiritual Fathers on their shoulders sustain the Balance of the World’.

Figure 4.9: The OGT’s logo depicts the Four Fathers sustaining the world/cross from four cardinal directions, with the ‘Heart’ (Sierra) in the middle. Gonawindua is the mountain-President mentioned earlier.

Figure 4.10: The cosmos according to the Mamas. Shkuákalda provides the layout for the upper crosses.



4.3.3. The water cycle and the cosmic structure

In the next session, the Mamas in Tungeka explained the global water cycle according to this cosmic model. Water is ‘born’ at the centre of the upper cross (Figure 4.6) from the Sierra Nevada’s lakes, and flows down as four main rivers along the four junctions where the stick meets the cross, as Mama Manuel pointed. In parallel, Kalbəsánkua spreads water across all regions on the middle cross. When rains and rivers globally flow into the seas, the water spiritually travels ‘under’ this cross and

down the model's four exterior columns through the four lower cosmic layers. Water then reaches Mamaishkagaka to 'confess' there (Chapter 3), which Mama Manuel located towards the model's bottom-left corner. He said that the top-end of this column, held by my translator's right hand in *Figure 4.6*, is roughly the corresponding location of Antarctica on the middle physical level.

After confessing, water spreads across the base-cross (Shkuákalda) to rise up again through Kalbəsánkua and the four columns, reaching the upper four cosmic levels. In the heavenly realm, water is then spiritually renewed with a 'clean aluna' by Ñiuwabake (*ñiuwa* relates to *ñi*, water, and *ñiuwî*, sun, while *bake* roughly means 'all thought'). As the Mamas said in the previous chapter, physically speaking this renovation happens at the Arctic, which they placed on the upper-right end of the column touched by Mama Manuel's right hand (*Figure 4.6*). Since Ñiuwabake is hence diagonally opposite Mamaishkagaka, both complement each other, just like the North and South Poles 'are like spiritual wife and husband', explained the translator Juan. From Ñiuwabake then, said Mama Manuel, water is sent back to Kalbəsánkua in the centre. By 'drinking' this water Kalbəsánkua makes the Earth-Body 'sweat' and 'pee' all over, redistributing it along the middle cross outwards from the Sierra Nevada as physical groundwater and rain.

Always coming back to our sessions' ecological objective, Mama Luntana emphasised that Kalbəsánkua is like the heart and soul in humans' chests that circulate our vital flows (e.g. water, blood, thought), which are connected to the whole mind-body. Kalbəsánkua therefore 'cares for water' (*ñi akué*), 'like a mother washing her baby'. By thus 'pumping' everything through the world's veins, arteries, and pores, the Sierra Nevada 'as Heart' maintains its life, body, and spirit (*aluna*). Likewise, the human body requires circulating *aluna* 'to be able to physically drink water and then pee, sweat, cry, and produce saliva'. I was told that all things undergo such renewal processes, including the moon every month, or the sun every year. Accordingly, in Dumingeka I learned that the Kogi have to be spiritually and physically clean around the new year in December/January, 'when the sun sits in its house'. Because 'all things rest during that time', human work, rituals, and learning 'should also pause'. Consequently, the Mamas and I did not hold sessions in those months. Although Reichel-Dolmatoff (1975c) also described and depicted the Kogi cosmic structure, its strong, practical environmental significance as discussed here is not present in his work.

4.4. Resemblances between the Sierra and the Kogi

4.4.1. Cosmological structure, the Sierra, and architecture

As in the Andes (Bastien 1978, Ossio 2002, Zuidema 2009), in the Sierra cosmology, geography, and society are structurally and functionally very interrelated. For example, the shape and structure of Kogi buildings are direct reproductions of the nine-layered cosmos, including features not shown by the Mamas' simplified model. While indigenous notions of the house as cosmological space have been studied in for example Amazonia (Descola 1994, Seeger 1981), Duque Cañas et al. (2004) have produced a detailed study of Kogi architecture in this respect, building on Reichel-Dolmatoff's earlier (1975c) descriptions. In this chapter, I further expand on and embed this in Kogi society.

Following Alejo's analogy, the Four Fathers were the (world's) first 'architects', setting an example for the Kogi. 'Because this is how the world was formed', Mama Shibulata explained, the Kogi build accordingly. 'We still proceed as the Mother did', the Mama added in his paused, but felt and emphatic manner, always visibly concentrated and absorbed in the stories. After finding an adequate spot on the ground, the Kogi also first use a string to establish a centre and radius for the circular foundations/layout of their houses. This centre is then aligned with the apex of the conical rooftop. In the cosmic-house, *nuhué*, the most elaborate construction, by the centre the Kogi subsequently erect two principal wooden posts that sustain the whole structure, male and female. In between them, invisibly, is the Cosmic-Pillar *Kalbəsánkua*, which following Reichel-Dolmatoff (1978f) is at the sun's midday position on the 21st of June. Two long, parallel, heavy wooden benches in the middle split the space into two equal halves, representing the cosmos' basic duality. Perpendicular to these benches and about two metres above, strong parallel beams further divide the *nuhué* into the world's four quadrants, where the Four Fathers supportively 'stand' at the building's four 'corners' as its outer posts.

The four original Kogi lineages are associated to the four fires lit in those directions, where two Mamas (in one half) and two *Comisarios* (*Húgukui*)⁵⁷ (other half) have their hammocks (*Figures 4.14* and *4.15* below). The lines (and lineages) traced from the *nuhué*'s centre to those four corners seemingly constitute the world-cross. While the benches mentioned above connect the *nuhué*'s two opposite doors, which normally face East and West, the perpendicular beams point to North and South, respectively towards the summits and the sea. According to Mama Manuel, the sun's

⁵⁷ Introduced in Chapter 1.

movement in the sky therefore traces one half of the house's circle during the day and one during the night. Furthermore, Reichel-Dolmatoff (1978f) says that over the whole year the sun would, if it shone into the *nuhué* through the apex, trace the square of the Cosmic Cross according to sunsets and sunrises at the fall and spring equinoxes. With its fertilising rays the Sun thereby 'weaves' the Earth, just like Kogi men weave clothes on the cross-shaped Kogi loom (*ibid.*, *Figure 4.19*). The *nuhué*'s floor (stamped soil) is therefore this loom, the earthly middle and fifth cosmic layer shown by the Mamas. The outer circular wall represents the world's circumference that surrounds the Cosmic Cross.

Looking up from the middle, one can see a complex arrangement of further horizontal, crossing beams and rafters supporting the roof at different levels. They reproduce the main cross and represent the four upper levels of the cosmos⁵⁸, getting smaller until reaching the conical rooftop. The lower four cosmic levels are *below* the *nuhué*'s floor, but in an invisible, dark spiritual version that mirrors or inverts the *nuhué* underground (*Figure 4.13*), thus completing the nine levels. This forms two inversed cones that correspond to the opposing complementarities of darkness and light, below and above, female and male, and also more fundamentally spirit and matter (Chapter 3). After all, I was told, 'in the spiritual realm things are the contrary to our physical one'.

'This is the world! Everything is here, everything!', an elderly Mama once told Reichel-Dolmatoff (1975c: 209) while standing in the middle of a *nuhué* and looking up with outstretched arms. The *nuhué* therefore constantly reminds Kogi men of what the integrated, whole cosmos is like, each detail representing something. This makes it an appropriate space for telling creation stories, learning, concentrating, organising communal activities, and performing the male initiation ritual. Here men are inside 'the Mother's womb', communicating with Her while they use the *poporo*, feeling 'well-seated' (*i teee!*). In this light, the cosmos is also perceived as an 'egg' (*Figure 4.14*). For Kogi men, this structure houses Aluna and its truths, and is a space that reproduces the original darkness of creation, Sé. Being here at night hence promotes 'deep thought', 'deep talk', knowledge, and good behaviour the next day.

⁵⁸ Not seen in the Mamas' model.

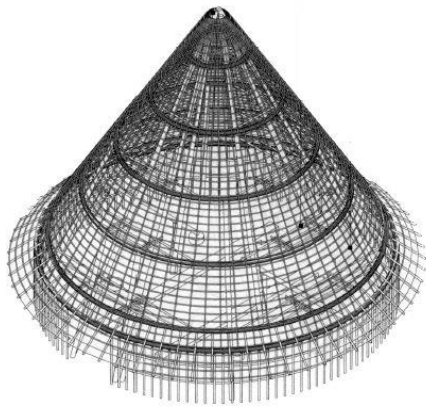


Figure 4.11: The Kogi *nuhué* with its cosmic layers. The world-axis comes out of the apex (Duque Cañas et al. 2004: 62)



Figure 4.12: Building a new *nuhué* in Dumingeka. The two sticks at the top are male and female. Men and women made confessions to be spiritually in accord with the event. Since I helped, this include me: ‘vamos aluna ishguakald!’, a Kogi told me merrily (‘let’s go confess!’).

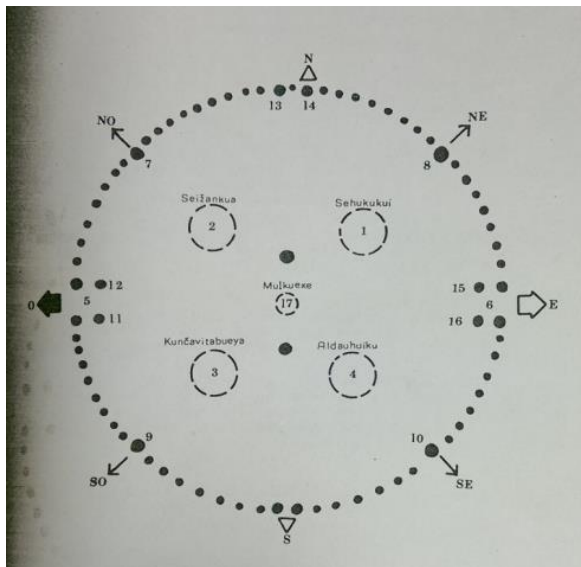


Figure 4.13: The *nuhué*'s four hearths, occupied by the Four Fathers, lords of the world's four corners. In the middle is Mukueke, a fifth Father related to the sun who ensures the Mother's Law is followed (from Reichel-Dolmatoff 1975c: 236).

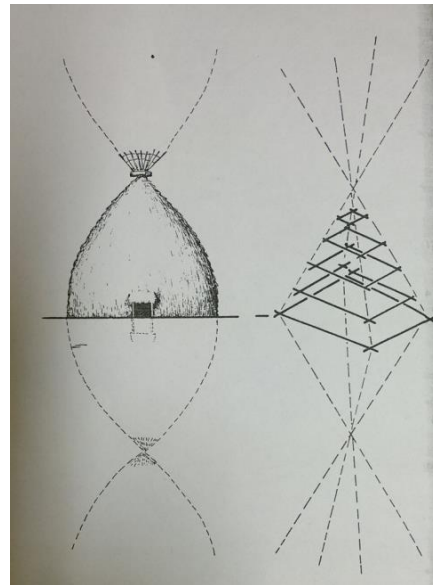


Figure 4.14: Reichel-Dolmatoff's (1975c: 236) rendering of the invisible lower four cosmic layers of the *nuhué*. Following the horizontal crosses, this egg-shaped universe (left) can also be depicted as two inverted pyramids (right).

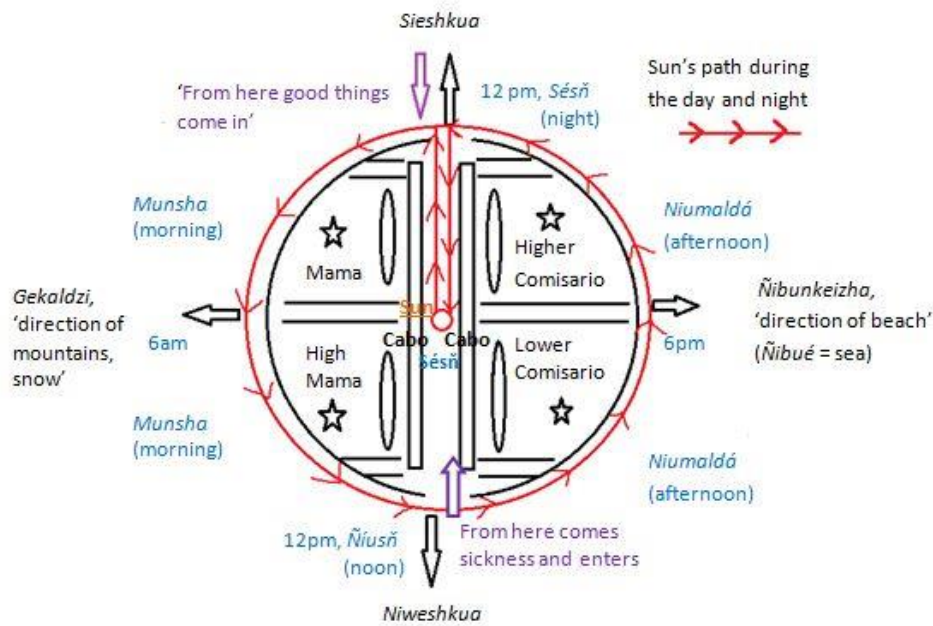


Figure 4.15: My drawing of Mama Manuel's description of the *nuhué*'s interior in relation to the sun's movements, following his precise indications. The stars are the four hearths, the oval shapes are the Mamas' and *Comisarios*' hammocks. The *Cabos* sit more in the centre, and other Kogi men sit on the benches or around the fires. We then made another drawing of the inverted, spiritual *nuhué*.



Figures 4.16 and 4.17: When finished, the new *nuhué* in Dumingeka was spiritually 'strengthened' and 'baptised' (see Section 7). Since Mama Bernardo (leg by the door) is very old, his son Juan (not a Mama) helped him to align it with the four cardinal directions by taking ashes from the first fires to these directions as payment.

Besides the cosmos, I learned that the *nuhué* also reproduces the Sierra Nevada. The thatched, conical roof and the walls of dried mud are its physical surface, while the dark, cosmic interior is the equivalent of the *inside* of the Sierra. This is the otherworld or spiritual realm within the mountains called Nuhuakalda, repository of the darkness Sé (Chapter 3), and template of the cosmos in Mama Shibulata's story (Section 2). The Sierra is consequently understood as a primary *nuhué* that holds the cosmic structure within itself, physically and spiritually, just like each single mountain does. Entering the *nuhué* is hence for Kogi men like entering Nuhuakalda and its stored 'thought'. This may be seen as a reduced version of Mama apprenticeship in caves, whereby *Kuivis* literally enter the Mother's body and learn directly from Nuhuakalda. In turn, all Kogi are somewhat in touch with this by living in houses that more simply resemble the *nuhué*. *Nuk* means 'everything-all', while *kalda* means 'leg' or 'support'. *Nuhuakalda* therefore, means 'the support of everything that exists', my Kogi friend Alberto once explained in my flat in Santa Marta. This linguistically relates to *nuhué*, and throws light on *Nulkuhaluwa*, Mama Pedro Juan's word for the Sierra Nevada in his complex statement presented in Chapter 2.

Figure 4.18: Especially these exposed, rocky mountain sides, are considered to be doors into Nuhuakalda, which 'Mamas of old could open and enter'.



4.4.2. The worldly body and the Fabric of Life

I often sat barefoot with the Kogi at night in different *nuhués*, watching the flickering fires cast a dim, orangey light on white figures rubbing their sticks against their *poporos*, silently listening to someone speak. The Kogi cosmos around and above me literally provided a tangible framework for the Mamas' teachings. Even when in the *nuhué*, Kogi men regularly wear two woven bags hung across the chest from each shoulder, forming an "X". For them, this resembles the cosmic cross Shkuákalda,

and the Kogi loom mentioned earlier. The centre of the cross on their chests, is hence the Sierra's position, where also the core of humans' *aluna* resides. Since the human body is 'ordered like the territory', tracing lines diagonally between the body's hips and collarbones is also said to form the cosmic cross (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1978f).

The bags (*sugamé*) themselves are knitted by women, which is the spiritual and social equivalent of men doing the poporo (*suggi*). Performed constantly, even while traversing steep and rocky paths with a baby on their backs, knitting is understood to focus the mind in synchrony with the Mother's rhythmic motions when she 'wove' the world, recreating Her 'thought'. In fact, on another level the cosmos is also seen as a bag. It is equally knitted from an origin-centre, the position of the Cosmic Pillar, in a gradually expanding circle which at one point starts rising to form the container, i.e. the cosmic levels. A bag *recreates* the Mother's life-giving cosmic 'womb' that *carries* the world in it, a force also contained in women (the word for bag also relates to one for the female reproductive organ). The yarn to make bags and clothes replicates what I call the Kogi 'Thread of Life and Truth', *Shi*, introduced in Chapter 2. Following the Kogi's analogical thinking, this weave imbues and connects all things (throughout the bag), and has one common origin in *Sé* (the bag's centre). While the designs of bags in Isluga, Chile embody ordered cosmo-natural principles and categories reminiscent of Kogi dualisms and structures, and which according to Cereceda (2009) indicate fundamental, universal forms of representation, Kogi bags *are* the cosmos itself.

Consequently, the world is said to have been 'spun' around Kalbəsánkua, and in equal fashion Kogi women use the spindle, which resembles the tiered-cosmos (*Figure 4.23*), to create the yarn. Similarly, the Earth was 'woven' on the cosmic cross Shkuákalda, just like Kogi men weave clothes (*zhakwá*) on the Shkuákalda-shaped wooden 'Loom of Life', as Reichel-Dolmatoff (1978f) calls it. Following Mama Shibulata, 'unlike Younger Brother, who simply makes clothing in factories, we still do this'. As said in Chapter 2, the cosmic thread *Shi* also constitutes the knowledge of things, *shibuldama*, which the Kogi strive to follow in all they do. What I learned is in this sense being 'tied to' and 'woven into' this text. In this 'Fabric of Life' or 'spiritual clothing' (*aluna zhakwá*), the Kogi see themselves as weaving their personal existence (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1978f), interlaced with social relationships, the *network* of sacred sites, and the *web* of 'thought' and knowledge. Creating a cloth is therefore a description of life, for as Reichel-Dolmatoff (1978f: 13) was told, 'thoughts make a textile'.



Figure 4.19: A now ex-Comisario from Dumingeka at the school, with the two bags hung across his chest (the white one is barely visible).

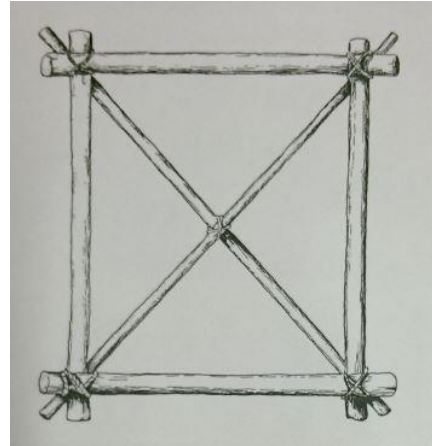


Figure 4.20: The Kogi loom, *zhakwánkaldá* (word resembles *Shkuákaldá*). From Reichel-Dolmatoff (1975: 240)

Figure 4.21: According to Reichel-Dolmatoff (1975c), the cosmic cross maps the five main Kogi *ezwamas* or 'ceremonial centres'. Mama Manuel confirmed this, but named different *ezwamas*.

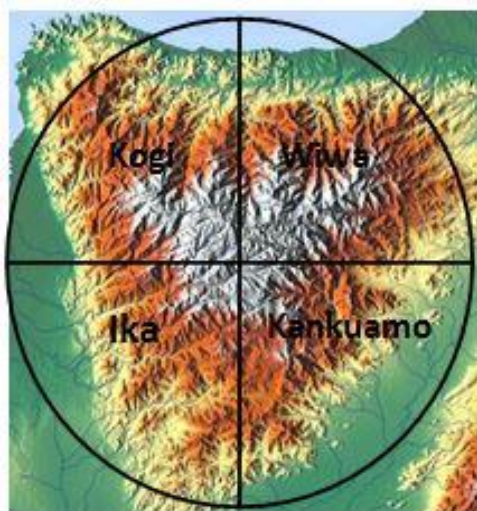
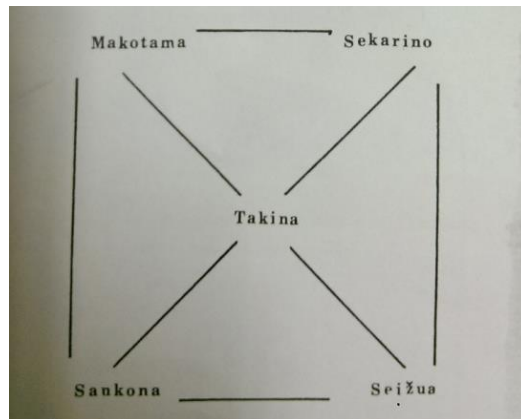


Figure 4.22: The cross-pattern is for the Kogi also a map of the mountain range, where many cosmic forces associated with different areas of the cross have their equivalents in the Sierra's landmarks (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1978f). The four quadrants also correspond (roughly) to the Four Peoples' territories. Map: Wikimedia Commons.

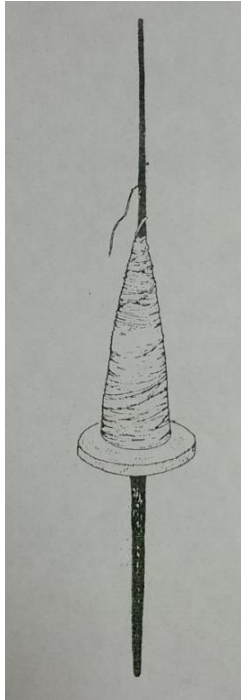


Figure 4.23: The Kogi spindle (*sukalda*) as another cosmic model. The yarn is 'spun' around the rod (world-axis) in a cone (light, upper four layers). The rod is male and penetrates the female whorl (fifth layer). Similar to the inverted *nuhué*, below the whorl is an invisible, spiritual cone of black thread (dark, lower four layers). From Reichel-Dolmatoff (1978f: 7).



Figure 4.24: Women start knitting bags in the bottom centre, expanding circularly and then 'rising' (like the cosmos). The cosmic structure could be placed inside, *Kalbəsánkua* standing where the Fabric of Life starts.

Figure 4.25: The 'deep' origin of the cosmos. The horizontal lines can represent the nine levels.



4.5. 'The missing roof and mud': How Seizhankua covered the Earth

4.5.1. Black earth, territorial organisation, and the sacred sites

I now return to Mama Shibulata's account, which after a break of some days proceeded from the wider Cosmos to the Earth's formation specifically, the fifth plane. Given the foreign nature of space and time in Kogi stories, I asked the Mama whether creational events had not yet become physical. 'Yes', he replied, 'we are still in Aluna, and before the dawn'. Seizhankua, Aldwáñiku, Siókokui, and Kunchabitawêya had already constructed the spiritual cosmos, but that 'blueprint' in Nuhuakalda was still to be materialised into 'a physical nuhué', by which he meant the Sierra Nevada. Consequently, narrated the Mama, 'one very important element was still missing': the 'thatching' to cover the 'roof' and the 'mud' to fill the 'walls' of the 'House', which I realised refers to the world's soil. To find out how to obtain this earth, the Four Fathers 'divined'. Meanwhile, a Spiritual Mother called Séneka also saw the need for soil besides 'just rock'. In order, she therefore gave birth to eight of the 'nine types of earth' that exist, 'her daughters', such as sand, white earth, clay, red earth, etc.

The Four Fathers however, realised that these substances were not fertile, and went to seek the missing, life-giving, ninth, and last one: black earth. This 'woman', 'originating deep in creation', was very hard to get. She was 'nine times more valuable' than the other earths/women and 'hidden behind nine doors' guarded by her father, who was reluctant to release her. Having the necessary capacities, Seizhankua was the male character assigned to receive the female earths and acquire the black one, for 'without her nothing would grow'. He sought help nine times in nine different places, learning that he had to sing and disguise himself to deceive and get past her father, which to me sounded like Seizhankua had to momentarily transform his personality. Seizhankua is hence the Spiritual Father of Earth, and also of Seizhua, the *ezwama* where the lineage Zalabata and its Mamas do earth-related rituals.

Once he finally obtained the black earth, continued Mama Shibulata, Seizhankua turned these nine spiritual characters into physical earth. This transformation or materialisation was also a maturation of 'undeveloped girls' into 'grown women', similar to how Zaldziwê turned into the sea, and the 'first daughters' became lakes in Chapter 3. The Kogi thus consider both water and earth to be *creative* female entities who become procreating *mothers*, passing this force to human women. This required Seizhankua's fertilising male forces, which as the story shows are rather *organising*, *fatherly* powers. The translator at this point, José Manuel, explained that 'for life you need two, a company of male and female, just as you need day and night'. The gendered, dualistic

complementarity of cosmo-ecological forces is common in the Andes (Gelles 1995), and discussed for other contexts too (Channa 2013).

Mama Shibulata then narrated that to organise the territory, Seizhankua spiritually took black earth to what are now the sacred sites, including the *ezwamas*, from where the land formed by radiating outwards from those sites. In this lengthy and arduous process, Seizhankua travelled through the dark realm of Nuhuakalda ‘with his mind’ to prepare each site or ‘mother’ for their specific future roles in sustaining life. In doing so, he spread the earth across the Sierra accordingly, covering its ‘roof’ or last remaining layer. *Seizhankua* started from the most important peaks mentioned earlier (Gonawindúa, Kalbəsánkua, Awimaldué, Goltué, Mamaldwué), and then gradually descended the mountains to the Black Line, from where outwards he continued covering the world with earth. This agrees with the story’s previously established cosmic circularity and the Tungeka Mamas’ model, and also corresponds to Mama Shibulata’s generational descent and subsequent global expansion of water in Chapter 3. Following Mama Shibulata, Seizhankua then assisted the spiritual powers of other regions, such as Kakshibake⁵⁹, to form the world’s territories according to their peculiarities and preferences for rockiness, fertility, flatness, or mountains. Seizhankua did all of this in stages of nine years, ‘which for immortals like him are nine days’. While the Sierra required two stages of nine days/years (eighteen) to prepare, the whole Earth took forty stages of nine (three hundred and sixty days/years). Only after finishing this materialisation, would the world ‘dawn’ out of darkness and ‘life be organised’.

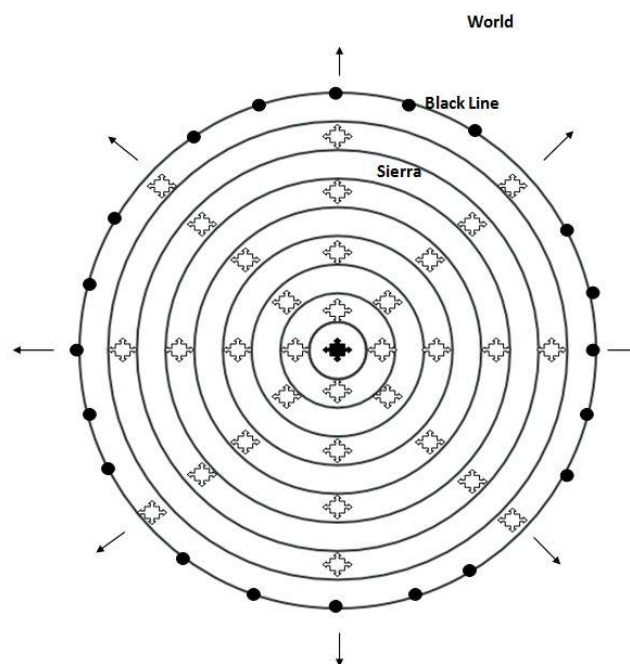


Figure 4.26: Generational descent of sacred sites (white squares) and the nine earths’ formation around them, down the Sierra’s nine cosmic levels, and expanding into the world. The black dots are sacred sites along the Black Line.

⁵⁹ *Kak* is related to *kaggi*, earth, *shi* is thread, and *bake* seemingly means ‘all thought’. Mama Shibulata also said that Kakshibake is the Spiritual Father of non-Indigenous people.

4.5.2. Damage, order, and behaviour

Lasting about two sessions, Mama Shibulata continued the 'path of earth' (*kaggi hiúnguldê*) with a lengthy and detailed narrative. In summary, another male spiritual character called Zhántana thought that Seizhankua had committed an offence by 'stealing' those nine women/earths. Believing himself to be acting correctly, and during nine days/years 'in Aluna', Zhántana chased Seizhankua along the sacred sites he was organising, trying to catch, punish, and supposedly prevent the latter from doing further harm. Yet despite this restless pursuit, at every site Zhántana nearly missed Seizhankua, never catching him, and was intentionally given wrong directions by these mothers, who were helping Seizhankua to finish his job. After all, said Mama Shibulata, 'Seizhankua had stolen the nine earths for a good and important cause': to form the land, ensure future living conditions, and support the territory in balance. While narrating this, Mama Shibulata named about seventy sacred sites among the many others he identifies, remembering the characteristics and functions of each one. To test my understanding, I asked him if by travelling through all the sacred sites Seizhankua also created spiritual connections between them. Mama Shibulata nodded, answering that in a particular order Seizhankua traced those 'lines', which the Mamas use to communicate and send payments between different sites. Collectively, the Mamas know a vast *network* of sacred sites scattered throughout the Sierra.

While chasing Seizhankua, carried on Mama Shibulata, Zhántana gradually became obstinate and destructive, harming agencies and landmarks, such as mistreating 'female' rivers. He even transformed certain plants and objects into poison and illness to attack Seizhankua, thereby creating the first diseases, and becoming their Father. Ultimately, Zhántana's helpers turned against him, and after many struggles at many sacred sites, he was finally defeated and sent far away across the ocean to Mamaishkagaka (the confession place) to keep him from causing trouble. Mulkueke (*Figure 4.13*), an almost omniscient, wise, and neutral Spiritual Father that appears in many Kogi stories, nevertheless realised that Zhántana could be of future use, making him confess (*aluna ishguashi*) his wrongdoings at Mamaishkagaka. 'He did this in nine days'. From then onwards Zhántana became the 'guard' or cleansing force that 'burns' and confesses the waters that reach Mamaishkagaka. This renewal process corrected Zhántana's behaviour, and indeed among the Kogi confession is often about re-balancing wrongdoings, turning them into positive dispositions.

Consequently, I was told, since then Zhántana is there to prevent humans from repeating his mistakes and harm nature. However, Younger Brother is indeed recreating Zhántana's early destructive behaviour, 'being influenced by that [negative] spirit' when diverting and damming rivers or excavating the earth. Zhántana therefore 'charges' people by sending his diseases and destructive

weather patterns. Initially confusing for me, after some questions I understood that through these phenomena Zhántana forcefully ‘claims back’ and ‘demands payment’ for what humans also forcefully rip away by damaging things. For the Mamas then, Zhántana’s conscious reactions are cosmological forces underlying the water cycle as an environmental phenomenon. Moreover, this relates to how the Kogi perceive the sea as an origin of troubles and disease, as foreseen in Zaldziwê’s story.

Later when back at the school, I reflected that, like with the Sea, the Earth’s story also presents tensions and opposing forces as a creational necessity. The cosmological differentiations of the positive from the negative, growth from destruction, right from wrong, balance from imbalance, and order from disorder, set an example for human behaviour. Zhántana’s actions furthered Seizhankua’s efforts in a problem-solving manner. Since for the Kogi everything has an origin, place, and function, this logic includes mistakes, disease, and problems. I openly discussed and confirmed these insights with Mama Shibulata and José Manuel in a subsequent conversation. They added that current conflicts over land around the Sierra Nevada between Elder Brother and Younger Brother, ultimately derive from this confrontation over the earth between Seizhankua and Zhántana. It is why, the Mama claimed, land issues have been such a persistent historical problem for humanity generally, including unfortunate recent territorial disputes between the Four Peoples. However, for him the solutions equally lie in the stories’ lessons and truths, and for this reason the Mamas retell them to their villages, and now to younger brothers. Similarly, Zaldziwê’s story set a background for today’s conflicts between the inside and outside of the Black Line, connecting the cosmological past to present environmental circumstances.

4.6. ‘Naming’ as being and knowing

The third and last part of the story of the world’s formation, translated by Alejo again, was the final one in darkness before it ‘dawned’ (yet things had already materialised). At this point, told Mama Shibulata, the Four Fathers (Seizhankua, Kunchabitawêya, Aldwáñiku, and Siókokui) ‘saw that there were still many things left to do’, especially ‘naming’ the sacred sites, mountains, and other territorial features. The world was not yet ‘baptised’, and the Spiritual Father assigned to this task was Siókokui. Following the indications of a major Spiritual Mother called Sénekañ, ‘he named everything that exists’ in a specific order and fashion according to importance, location, and function, and also by gradually descending the Sierra Nevada. He named things by performing confessions (*aluna ishguashi*) in all sacred sites, including the *ezwamas*, a practice learned from Mother Sénekañ.

Siókokui thereby gave these places their ‘values’, Alejo translated, leaving *shibuldama* (knowledge) there, which included depositing certain gold figures (*ñiuba*) in the ground at sacred sites.

Only based on my observations of Kogi life in Dumingeka, could I elucidate that ‘naming’, or also ‘baptising’⁶⁰, refers to the spiritual establishment and initiation of things into full being. Beyond indexing, naming is to define something, to initiate its role in life. Furthermore, every time something or someone is named again, its constitution is reaffirmed, for which reason the Mamas often thoughtfully and slowly repeat an important principle or agency. For similar reasons, Lopes da Silva (1989) argues that naming practices among the Amazonian Akwe-Xavante are *ontological* acts. It therefore seems that Kogi confession, like naming, is also understood as such. If humans deposit their thoughts, feelings, and past actions, what the *Kalguasha* (Spiritual Fathers/Mothers) ‘confessed’ is their life-giving, creational ‘thought’ and powers. Perhaps for this reason human confession is said to equally ‘nourish’ the sites where it is performed and thereby sustain natural elements. By naming, baptising, and confessing, Siókokui defined the *way of being* of aspects of creation, dependent on those sites. The corresponding *knowledge* he deposited there, was part of that definition of being. The practice of ‘naming’ therefore, exemplifies how Kogi ontological and epistemological processes are inseparable, and framed by a common cosmology, as argued in Chapter 2. By being trained at sacred sites, the Mamas learn to perceive and deduce this cosmologically defined knowledge inherent to being.

This *shibuldama*, explained Mama Shibulata and Alejo, is consequently like ‘norms and codes’ that tell the Mamas what a given site *is*, and also ‘how to take care of it’. Additionally, these ‘teachings’ are there for the Kogi ‘to follow the ways of our ancestors’ and guide living patterns; ‘we still continue doing this’. When building a new house, or giving birth to a baby, I observed how the Kogi ‘name and baptise’ them through specific rituals, songs, and dances. The point is to align and ‘tie’ them to this new existence from their previous one in ‘thought’ or ‘in Aluna’, equally imbuing them with ‘value’ and ‘knowledge’. Afterwards, relatives have to confess at a matching sacred site, like Siókokui did, to pay the spiritual world for the materials used and the persons born. This shows how the interdependence of being and knowing, coalesces in an *ecological* purpose, managed through *social* relations.

Following Siókokui’s actions above, these ‘values’ and ‘codes’ in the sacred sites (*gaka*) are tied to gold figures (*ñiuba*), largely missed by Reichel-Dolmatoff. This is strongly evocative of Andean *huacas*⁶¹ or *wak’as* (Bray 2015, MacCormack 1991, Nuñez del Prado 1995). As in the Sierra, deities,

⁶⁰This is a translation derived from terms introduced by missionary priests, as indicated in Chapter 1.

⁶¹ Briefly mentioned in Chapter 1.

spirits, celestial bodies, and cosmic forces manifest in various landmarks and also certain objects like these gold figures, in turn associated to lineages, living patterns, and rituals (Bastien 1978, Castro and Aldunate 2003, Leoni 2005). In contrast to the Andes (e.g. Salomon and Urioste 1991), among the Kogi this tradition is completely alive. Invaluably, Mama Manuel and Mama Luntana explained the objects to me. Gold figures (*ñiuba*, related to the sun, *ñiuwî*), translated by Juan as ‘antennas’, transmit the sacred sites’ communication with life-sustaining forces in Aluna and with one another. Deposited there by Spiritual Fathers (*Kalguasha*), *ñiuba* hold their knowledge, and are usually located in buried ceramic pots, between stones, or in caves. They resemble the natural element that the sacred site sustains, being specific personifications of the *Kalguasha*. For example, at the ‘Mother of Jaguars’ the gold is shaped like a jaguar. These figures therefore power the sites, the Mamas said, without which they would lose their strength. Trusting me, Mama Shibulata once showed me a carefully hidden bird-man at our working site.

4.7. Interrelating Cosmos and Earth

4.7.1. Mapping a planetary scheme unto cosmic layers

Resembling Mama Shibulata’s sessions, the Mamas in Tungeka also progressed from the Cosmos to the Earth itself. Before that however, we continued trying to establish some agreed and mutually satisfying integration of Kogi and non-Kogi cosmological frameworks to discuss current ecological problems. Notwithstanding linguistic and conceptual misunderstandings and difficulties, this ‘co-theorization’ and search for ‘commensurability’ (Rappaport and Ramos-Pacho 2005) also graphically aided the translation and elucidation process of Kogi terms. A main issue for me had been how to potentially relate a spherical Earth to the Kogi’s horizontal fifth cosmic layer, which I explained by using a plastic globe. Mama Manuel then asked me some questions to situate this spherical view, including whether people live at the poles, ‘what is found beyond them’, or the locations, distances, and climates of other places. He attentively digested this until saying ‘right, I understand’. Together with Juan he explained that the flat middle layer would lie horizontally in the globe, as if the equator was its perimeter. ‘Is that good?’, the Mama asked me. ‘Yes’ I replied, not seeking to judge his statement but merely to see whether both views could be superimposed. The following day, Mama Manuel spontaneously brought a drawing he had engraved into a plank of wood as a second, illustrative model:



Figure 4.27: Mama Manuel's second model, integrating flat and spherical views of the Earth, with a simple version of the water cycle.



Figure 4.28: Mama Manuel explaining the object while Mama Luntana intently processes the situation.

Based on our previous sessions, Mama Manuel initially tested whether I, by myself, could explain this model, but since I only partially succeeded, he explained it. The plank represents the Earth, the Mamas' fifth, middle, flat cosmic layer, depicting its cross and circumference. This large outer circle however, the Mama said, simultaneously represents the three-dimensional globe with all landmasses and oceans. Inside it then, the cross holds the Earth together. The Cosmic Pole *Kalbəsánkua* is the metal stick inserted in the centre. The small, innermost circle, is the Black Line surrounding the Sierra Nevada, and the four, short lines inside it symbolise its four main rivers. Colombia is the only slightly wider circle. The irregular and winding semi-circular line is the path of the Sierra's rivers across the oceans towards *Mamaishkagaka* to confess, located at the upper-right corner.

When later joining the session, Mama Luntana was updated on this model, listening intently to Mama Manuel's explanations (*Figure 4.28*). *Moze ki ekí axbeñá, hantshibé?* ('Yesterday I told him [me] so, good?'). *Hantshibé* ('good') replied Mama Luntana, approving this depiction. 'Yet if the Earth is also a globe', I asked, 'where could we place *Kalbəsánkua*?'. Always creative and spontaneous, Mama Manuel quickly brought an empty plastic bottle. He pierced it in the middle with the stick to illustrate that *Kalbəsánkua* would traverse the globe at the point where the Sierra is, emerging into the sky there. Between the North and South Poles, which he placed at the bottle's ends, the Earth is traversed by another, perpendicular axis, which correspondingly connects the celestial realm of *Ñiuwabake* and *Mamaishkagaka*. Both axes form another cross and communicate with each other. 'Is this right?' he asked Mama Luntana. 'It is good', the latter replied. 'Similar to Younger Brother's

maps', Juan claimed, 'the Mamas possess a mental representation of the world, only revealed in the right situations to whoever earns this right'.

Proceeding unto astronomical considerations, by rotating the wooden plank Mama Manuel described the Earth's movements in terms of night and day and the times of the year. According to him, the sun powers this rotation through and around the axis *Kalbəsánkua*. The sun in turn, is spiritually guided from *Ñiuwabake*, the celestial realm/power. Both Mamas then added that the sun is 'like an ever-present eye who watches everything that happens down here', continually making things work. At night, the moon and the stars complement his life-sustaining functions.

During the next session, this led us into discussing the nine planets of the Solar System, which for the Mamas correspond to the nine cosmic layers. Based on an astronomical textbook I brought along from the school, they accepted Younger Brother's scientific model, but claimed that theirs represents the primary, spiritual version of things in *Aluna*. According to this understanding, the physical planets are also fastened around, nourished, and rotated around the sun by the cosmic pole *Kalbəsánkua*, 'like a cord through a necklace',⁶² said Juan. Following the Mamas, in *both* versions the Earth is the most important of the nine units. As the middle, fifth level, it sustains and nourishes the four levels above and below, and as a planet it sustains the other eight. For this reason, they explained, this fifth, middle layer is the only physical plane of the nine. Harming the Sierra, which is the centre of this plane, therefore not only affects the Earth, but all other cosmic layers and planets, all being sentient 'bodies'.



Figure 4.29: Mama Manuel and Mama Luntana with the globe, the plastic bottle, and the textbook.

⁶² The translator Juan and I drew this on a notebook.

4.7.2. A network of life

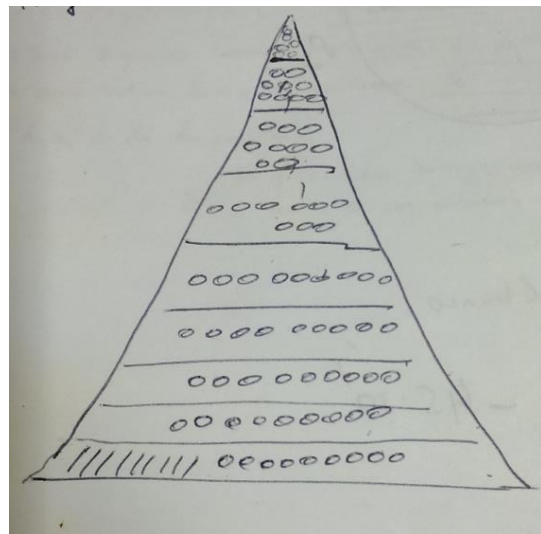
One morning in his father's hut when sheltering from the strong sun, Mama Manuel added that while each layer or planet has its own defining essence or quality, it simultaneously contains the essences of the other eight. Each of these 'bodies' consists of nine layers, and each layer corresponds to one of the other 'bodies', thus reproducing the nine-layered cosmic structure within themselves. Hereby they interrelate and communicate, so that damage in one can affect the others. By scratching parallel lines into a wooden stool, Mama Manuel said that consequently the Earth is split (physically and spiritually) into nine layers or earths that correspond to the nine planets. At this point, I realised that Mama Shibulata's story of the nine female earths of nine different colours provided the creational background to Mama Manuel's explanations. The latter thus contextualised the black earth ('nine times more valuable', Section 5) as being the life-giving element of this fifth, middle plane. Since 'the other planets/levels don't have black earth', our Earth 'distributes life to them'. These issues were difficult to convey in Spanish for the translator Juan, which required drawings we made. Eventually however, Mama Manuel said: 'now you got it well!'.

A month later, Mama Luntana returned and the translator was Silvestre again. Both Mamas specified that, like the Earth, the Sierra Nevada is also divided into nine vertical levels and has nine earths. For them, these levels correspond to the mountain's environmental and climatic altitudinal zones, revealing an intricate order that, as in the Andes (Ossio 2002), closely interrelates cosmological and ecological verticality. The sacred sites are part of this nine-fold vertical arrangement, yet also fulfil a more *horizontal* relationality across the *four-fold* territorial organisation described earlier (the middle cross). In this light, the Mamas said, the gold figures have specific locations in, and associations with, different earth layers and altitudinal levels according to their sacred sites and bodies of water. Overall then, the planets, the sites, gold figures, landscape features, cosmic levels, and earths form what can be called a complex, interrelated *network*. During the ceremonial building of the cosmologically structured *nuhué* in Dumingeka (Section 4), people danced to 'nine songs' that reproduced the Sierra's nine levels 'from the beach to the peaks'.

According to Mama Luntana and Mama Manuel, the human soul also has 'nine types of thought and feeling' that correspond to the nine levels and earths, just like the human body is modelled after the Sierra's. These 'nine alunas' influence people's behaviour, serve different mental processes, and are used for different activities. When someone is angry, or when Younger Brother harms the environment, he uses only the mind's lower, 'negative levels'. Taking care of the Mother by contrast, is using the upper, 'positive ones'. Overall, the numbers *four* and *nine* are of great

cosmological, ecological, and social importance, also being present in learning processes, natural cycles, and growth principles.

Figure 4.30: A simple drawing Silvestre and I made. Each of the Sierra's nine levels has nine earths and corresponding gold figures.



4.8. Alterations to Earth and Cosmos

4.8.1. Destabilising the Government

Over time, the Mamas sessions consistently showed how cosmological creation, structure, and functioning, whether transcendent or detailed, always has an ecological significance. They were hereby contextualising the Sierra Nevada's perceived importance, and its current environmental problems. 'Is this important?', Mama Manuel asked me, 'I told you big words!'.

By reference to their cosmological model, Mama Luntana and Mama Manuel complained that besides water, other elements such as coal, oil, and gas are being either polluted, displaced, or extracted. Pointing at different spots on the middle cross, our earthly plane, they said that each country or territory has its own order, its own distribution of natural elements. However, 'people everywhere are harming this', and there are places towards the outer circle (surrounding the cross) 'where life is already significantly diminished'. Continuously intensifying his actions and 'looking for more', from those places Younger Brother is slowly but surely 'encroaching in on the Sierra from the outside'. For the Mamas, 'it is like people from other countries want to exploit and finish' the very 'Government' that organises life, 'leaving them like beggars'. Since 'this little piece of land is the centre' (Sierra Nevada), they said, damage here amounts to stripping away life itself, for instance potentially 'finishing off water and crops everywhere'. I was then asked: 'So what do we do? Will they keep killing our land, pushing forward? Or will it recover?'.

Mama Manuel and Mama Luntana explained that when altering the land itself, the Cosmic Base Shkuákalda shrugs and causes earthquakes. Since the sacred sites along the Black Line are the 'feet' of the Sierra (Chapter 3), current constructions, mining activities, extraction of oil and gas, and alteration of rivers weaken the sites' firmness and stability to support the mountains, causing landslides for example. This equals to 'shaking the foundations of this 'house', diminishing its life. Following Mama Luntana, 'the Mother' established that removing and displacing the Earth's components is not allowed. Because people are doing this however, She reacts by causing disease, violence, and natural disasters. If we sicken Her, we also become sick, the Mamas conveyed.

Moreover, the Mamas continued, all of this harms, sickens, and weakens the life-power of the Cosmic Pillar, Kalbəsánkua. Damaging the land disrupts his ability to 'drink' and 'sweat' mentioned earlier, and thus distribute water to sustain and 'wash' the world-body. Kalbəsánkua is hereby cut off from other places on the Mamas' model, which is 'like not being able to contact and care for your children when being mistreated'. Mama Manuel hypothesised that if for example a cable-car or road was built up to Kalbəsánkua's mountain, or to Gonawindua, 'that would be the end of the world, and all this talk would be futile'. If people continue destabilising and destroying the Earth, Mama Luntana added, Kalbəsánkua may not be able to nourish and hold it in place anymore. Consequently, the Earth could 'fall apart'. To show this scenario, Mama Luntana thoughtfully grabbed the metal stick holding the wooden plank-model (Section 7) and let the plank fall to the ground: 'we would be left without our very foundations'. The Cosmic Pillar itself however, 'will always remain standing, no matter what we do'.

4.8.2. Hurting a person

'Despite all the Mother gave us', said Mama Manuel, 'Younger Brother still abuses Her and does not behave like She determined, changing everything'. For the Mamas, Younger Brother does this 'because you do not see and appreciate the Earth as a person'. Instead, 'people take out, relocate, and damage the Earth's insides/organs' (e.g. water, coal, trees). I was therefore asked: 'Can She walk like that?'. The Earth 'feels' when people 'chop off its body parts', which diminishes natural elements. Younger Brother is 'breaking out its bones, slicing its veins, and sucking out its blood'. As an example of an inconceivable assault on the Mother's body, the Mamas referred to El Cerrejón, one of the largest open-pit mines in the world, where coal is extracted between the Sierra and the Guajira Desert. 'Would you like it if someone drilled a hole in your arm?', Mama Manuel asked me, an image from fieldwork still vivid in my mind. Besides, 'She cannot think well anymore and feels ill';

this 'takes her mind itself, her aluna'. Pressing on, Mama Luntana said that when being messed with, a human body experiences the same; 'one just cannot think and function well'.

Figure 4.31: El Cerrejón, with the Sierra's eastern foothills in the background. Source: <https://ecavelier.wordpress.com>



Oil, the Mamas claimed, is the Earth's blood, containing the 'memory' and the 'instructions' for the body to function. 'If humans lose blood, we become weak and dizzy', which alters our water-household and the ability to sweat (i.e. rain). Consequently, pumping oil causes plants dry up and not grow well, and the sun's heat intensifies. For this reason, they argued that extracting oil also dries out water, even if for Younger Brother this appears unrelated. 'What we see as coal' moreover, is the equivalent of teeth, said Mama Manuel. If pulled out, others can fall out too, the tongue's movements and the production of saliva are hampered, and eating and drinking water becomes painful. Conversely, he added, mistreating water affects the earth, for 'a body without water cannot be, you simply are in a bad state and can't move'. Overall, 'we are affected as a whole, everything is connected'.

4.8.3. Disarranging earths, sites and objects

Following Mama Shibulata's story, the Tungeka Mamas emphasised that Seizhankua laid out the nine earths and layers in order for a reason. Consequently, they should remain underground and in their place, 'like the pages of a book'. However, 'Younger Brother does not understand why he has to leave the subsoil as it is and cannot dig'. By contrast, 'the Mamas are taught which layers cannot be moved and where, and also to nourish them through spiritual practices and payments' (*z#biel*). Since these earths are related to the nine planets, I was told, thus managing the territory is also

managing the forces of the universe. Mama Manuel therefore explained that the underground layers of earth, like the lower dark cosmic levels, have forces (deposited by Spiritual Fathers) different to those of life on the surface, and respectively to the middle cosmic level. When these earths are dug up, displaced, or turned around, their forces are messed up and released. Once out of place where they do not belong, these forces turn into negative and harmful ones, spreading illness to people and the environment. 'It hurts us when you do that', Mama Luntana said. 'Are the Younger Brothers performing correctly or not then?'. At a burial for example, Reichel-Dolmatoff (1974b) observed, the Kogi carefully place the removed soil back in its place, as part of the deceased's 'return to the mother's womb'.

Likewise, the Mamas said that the gold figures described earlier equally have to remain underground, just as their sacred sites should not be damaged. Otherwise, their life-forces can also cause sickness and imbalance, or storms, earthquakes, and altered seasons. Yet 'many mothers of this Government' are already damaged. Following Mama Manuel's analogy, removing the gold figures also leaves the sites 'like faulty mobile phones you cannot call with', since damage blocks their connections to Aluna, removing the 'thought' of the sacred sites. When I asked why this is so, Mama Manuel explained that it is like 'beating a person, [which] also causes illness, weakness, and malfunctioning, and finally breaks her mind'. This in turn inhibits the Mamas' communication with the sites, for 'even though we still make our payments, with damaged sites and absent objects our messages are no longer transmitted well'. 'What are these messages about?', I asked. 'They send back to Spiritual Fathers and Mothers what they give to us every day to live'. Ever since Spanish conquistadors raided these gold objects in the 'El Dorado' craze, the Mamas have greatly lamented their continued extraction by explorers, poor peasants (*guaqueros*), and archaeologists.

Since the Sierra Nevada 'is like a house covered with many sites', destroying them could end up 'demolishing this house'. Similarly, Mama Shibulata explained that because the sites along the Black Line connect 'with the rest of the world', damaging them affects global stability. In Kogi terms then, altering the Earth also affects Aluna, and a disturbed Aluna in turn weakens the land and disconnects animals and plants from their spiritual sustenance. Consequently, for the Mamas physically damaging the land is the most direct way to destabilise the Sierra Nevada. Through their elaborate cosmological accounts, the Mamas made a systematic effort to contextualise, explain, and convey how, according to them, this damage is part of a structured and multifaceted order of things that they perceive and relate to.

Chapter 5

Trees and Forests

5.1. One trunk, many branches

As with the Water and Earth/World Topics, the two sets of Mamas covered Trees in somewhat different ways. Mama Shibulata focused more on the cosmological origin and establishment of trees, providing an explanatory framework for how the Mamas in Tungeka additionally taught me about the ontological characteristics of trees and their ecological importance. Both forms of teaching contextualised Kogi dispositions and practices towards trees. Just as the Tungeka Mamas started Earth by relating it to Water, Mama Manuel equally began by relating Trees to Earth.

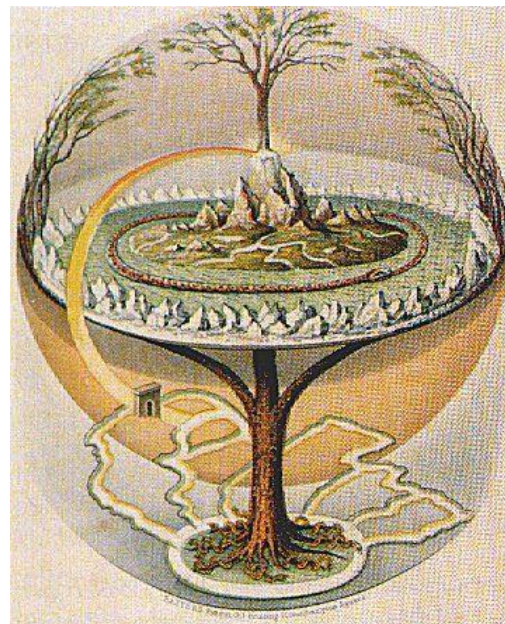
5.1.1. The World Tree or Tree of Life

The Cosmic Pillar or axis mundi Kalbəsánkua was now presented by Mama Manuel as also a Cosmic *Tree*. According to him, this is *the* first tree, the *one*, Father of all other trees, whose extending branches hold the nine cosmic levels around its trunk. While its main central branches correspond to the cross that supports our middle, fifth level in the Mamas' model, Kalbəsánkua's roots form the Cosmic Base-cross Shkuákalda (the loom's frame). Mama Manuel referred to all things on Earth as this Tree's 'flowers and leaves', because 'everything is attached to it!'. He also explained that being a tree is part of the reason why Kalbəsánkua powers and regulates the global water cycle. After all, Mama Luntana later added, trees are key to the circulation of water. Linguistically, the root *kal* is the same in Kalbəsánkua and in the Kogi word for tree, *kaldzi*.

Both Mamas then explained that this Tree was 'planted' by the same Four Fathers of creation that also built the Cosmos and the Earth: Seizhankua, Aldwáñiku, Siókokwi, and Kunchabitawêya. In this way, Kalbəsánkua also *grew* upwards to form the nine cosmic levels and support the world, and then diversified *outwards* into all current life forms along its branches and twigs. The Four Fathers thereby 'sowed the seeds' for the development of life, said Mama Manuel. While sitting there by the pond at our sacred site imagining this, I wondered whether this was similar to the all-embracing 'World Tree' or 'Tree of Life' mentioned in other cultures and cosmologies around the world. I briefly explained this to Juan in Spanish, who translated my query to Mama Manuel in Koggian. The Mama nodded and affirmed that this discussion concerned the same thing; 'that's it, good'.

In this light, Eliade (1958, 1961: 44) describes how in many traditions ‘the most widely distributed variant of the symbolism of the Centre is the Cosmic Tree, situated in the middle of the Universe, and upholding the [...] worlds as upon one axis’. Based on the Popol Vuh (Tedlock 1985) for example, Freidel, Schele and Parker (1993) discuss how it was an elaborate motif in ancient Maya cosmology. Eliade (1961) reports that in some places, like Vedic India or ancient China, the World Tree holds three main cosmic levels, its branches reaching the heavens and the roots descending into the underworld. In other traditions he says, such as Central and North Asiatic mythologies, the World-Tree holds seven or even *nine* worlds (ibid.), as in Kogi cosmology. The Nordic version as described in the Icelandic Prose Edda (Sturluson and Anderson 2015), called Yggdrasil, also holds nine levels and is aligned with the four cardinal directions. However, it has three roots and not four, as the Kogi base-cross Shkuákalda suggests. In various contexts, such as among the Semang of the Malay Peninsula, the trunk of the World Tree is moreover the centre of the ‘Cosmic Mountain’, whose summit is the World’s Centre (Eliade 1961). This coincides with how in Chapter 4 the Sierra Nevada as Cosmic Mountain was said to have a particular peak that is the ‘home’ of Kalbēsánkua as Cosmic-Pillar.

Figure 5.1: Yggdrasil (Oluf Olufsen Bagge, 1847). In Norse cosmology, the middle level of nine is also the Earth and circular, called Miðgarðr. The Tree also emerges from a Central Mountain.



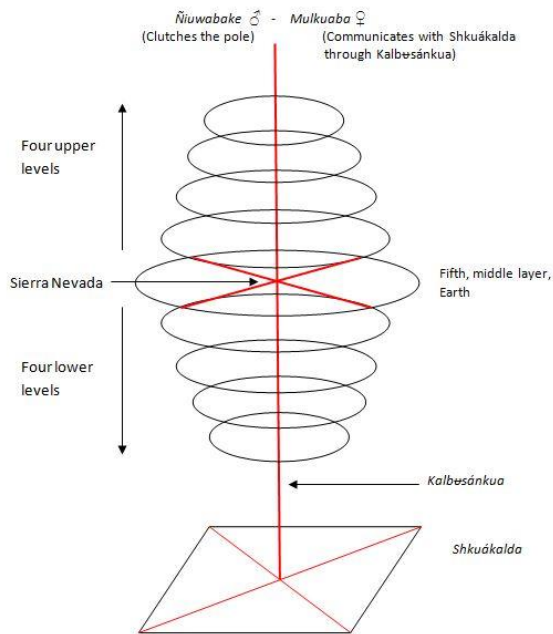


Figure 5.2: The cosmos and the Cosmic Pillar Kalbəsánkua as described in Chapter 4.

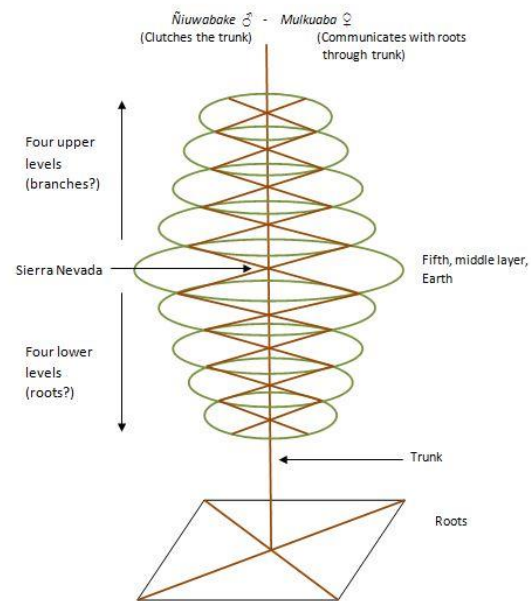


Figure 5.3: Kalbəsánkua as World-Tree. The axis-mundi is the trunk, the horizontal crosses its main branches, and the cosmic base Shkuákaldá forms the roots. Alternatively, the four lower crosses can be seen as the roots, forming the ‘dark’ levels underneath the *nuhué* (Chapter 4), and the upper branches as the light-worlds.

5.1.2. Threads and branches

In Chapter 4, I discussed the Kogi Fabric of Life that binds all elements of creation together through innumerable ‘threads’ (*shi*) that developed from a common origin, and which is integrated with cosmological structure through Kogi bags, the loom, and the spindle. By listening to the Mamas, I understood that Kalbəsánkua as World Tree equally refers to this diversification. The cosmic *threads* are also the tree’s many *branches* and *twigs*, ramifying in complex derivations and patterns yet forming part of an overall cosmological structure. Like the weave that grows from the centre of the bag, this arrangement of things goes back to a common origin, the trunk of the Tree. Likewise, the trunk corresponds to the rod of the spindle, around which the yarn (threads) is fastened.

As explained in Chapter 2, *shi* is also the stem of *shibuldama*, the knowledge in and of things constituting ‘the hot threads of truth’, coming from Aluna. These threads of being and knowing are also ‘paths’, by which the Mamas referred to our Four Topics: ‘the path(s)’ of Water, Earth, Trees and

Foodstuffs. During fieldwork, I picked up that generally the Kogi additionally use *shibuldama* to designate what we term “culture”. In this sense, *shibuldama* refers to a people’s knowledgeable way or *path of being* in the world as a cosmologically designated *shi* that informs their role in the wider Fabric of Life through ecological relations. For example, my informants would say *Kaggaba chi shibuldama* (‘the knowledge of the Kogi’) or *Pldañsé chi shibuldama* (‘the knowledge of Europeans’). In Kogi terms, culture *is* knowledge. As Mama Manuel said explicitly: ‘In the beginning, the Mother gave each group of people their own *shibuldama*, customs, language, dress, and place to live and look after’. Because the many expanding branches of the World Tree constitute the development of all things (‘its leaves and flowers’), Mama Manuel indicated that this includes the diversification of human ways of being and knowing (*shibuldama*). In my experience, the Kogi understand human cultural and geographical variation as part of wider cosmic unity and diversity.

For this reason, Mama Manuel said, all peoples and their knowledge are ‘children of the same Mother’, and therefore ramifications of the same trunk, sharing a common origin. He seemingly sees each branch and knowledge thread as a unique reproduction, aspect, or variation of the whole tree or weave in a fractal manner along a principle of self-similarity (see Chapter 7). I also heard other Kogi talk of *shibuldama* as ultimately one and the same, merely taking different forms in different places and peoples. Kogi *lineages* then, are seen as part of the Sierra Nevada’s diversification of threads/branches, being organised according to cosmological principles and natural elements. Since this mountain range is considered the origin of the Fabric of Life, the trunk of the World Tree, the Mamas maintain that all human groups equally originated there, in specific sacred sites. From there the Mother distributed them around the world to specific places and gave them particular ways of life in line with the *centrifugal* development of everything else. This corresponds to how the Four Peoples say they share the same ‘thought’, deriving from the Mother. In this light, Eliade (1961: 43) mentions that in the ‘symbolism of the centre’, ‘the creation of man, a replica of the cosmogony, took place similarly from [...] the Centre of the World’, such as in the Mesopotamian tradition.

Taking the discussion further, Mama Manuel explained that just as the Kalbəsánkua Tree was ‘planted’ by the Four Fathers to support the world, *shibuldama* (knowledge) was ‘sown’ by them for humans to use to care for that world, including trees. Since everyone has ‘the same Aluna’, he argued, ‘we are all in charge of this’, especially Indigenous Peoples, yet ‘many are not fulfilling it anymore’. Mama Manuel specified that each group performs this shared duty in their own way and looks after its own place or branch according to its *shibuldama* or ‘path’, contributing to the Tree’s overall maintenance. According to him, since the Kogi (Four Peoples) are the Elder Brothers and the Mother’s first children, they are in charge of the *trunk*, i.e. the Sierra Nevada, on which the Tree’s

stability depends. With this greater responsibility, also comes ‘deeper’, wider, and more serious knowledge, a *shibuldama* closer to the Tree’s roots (or the weave’s origin). ‘Why is your knowledge deeper?’, I asked Alejo, who was now translating again. ‘Because the Mother gave us the Sierra to look after’, he responded, ‘and the Sierra is the Heart of the World that contains everything’.

Overall, in Kogi terms cosmological structure and diversification manifest as an integrated ontological and epistemological arrangement which constitutes a unity of ecological relationships. In this sense, the Kogi seem to merge the notion of ‘World Tree’ with its related variations as ‘Tree of Life’ (Giovino 2007) and ‘Tree of Knowledge’ (Fernandez 1998) into one understanding. Furthermore, ‘planting’ the World Tree and ‘sowing’ (the threads of) knowledge seem to be aspects of a creational correlation between, growth, order, and diversity with common ‘roots’. After all, according to some Kogi stories the Thread of Life (and perhaps Tree) can also be seen as the Mother’s life-giving, nourishing umbilical cord. In related fashion, Rival (1993) discusses how through the characteristics of trees in the Amazonian forest, the Huaorani understand, express, and relate to general principles of growth and well-being that apply to the social and natural domains. However, this is not embedded in the kind of wider, explanatory cosmological framework provided by the Mamas. In their terms, the reason trees embody patterns of growth and knowledge is because they are reproductions of *Kalb̄esánkua*, the World Tree, as a primordial prototype.

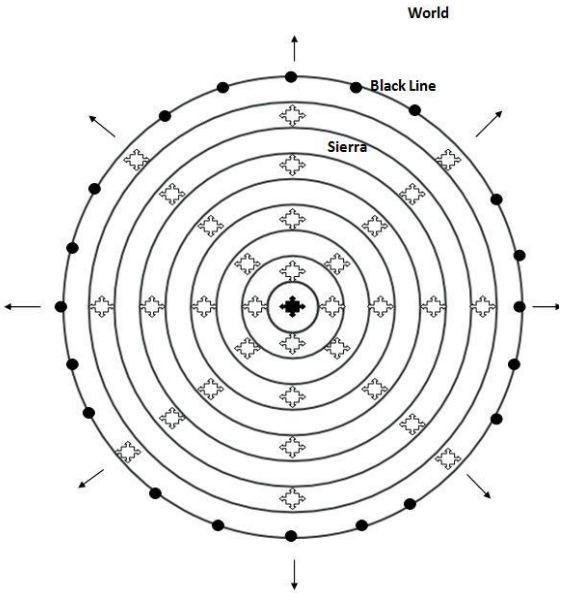


Figure 5.4: The world’s descent and expansion through sacred sites as depicted in Chapter 4.

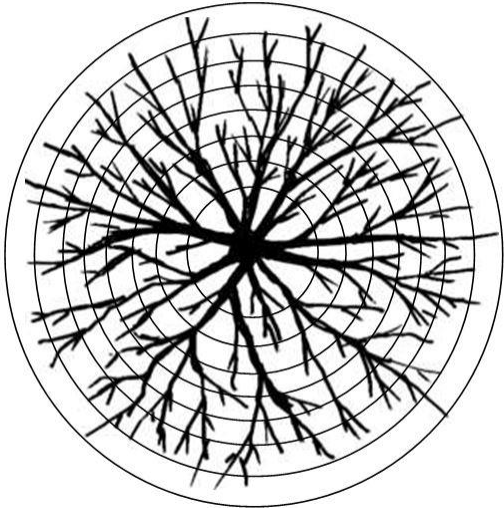


Figure 5.5: The expanding concentricity of Kogi cosmology understood as a ramifying World-Tree standing in the Sierra Nevada as centre.



Figure 5.6: Inside of Kogi Cosmic Bag as Fabric of Life, whose threads are also branches.

Mama Manuel then took the matter further by stating that this ‘planting’ and ‘sowing’ was for everyone ‘to live well’. *Shibuldama* is there ‘for us to *value* this existence’ (my emphasis), and thereby ‘think and feel like humans’. For the Kogi, *shibuldama* is hence also a *moral* matter related to proper conduct (see Chapter 9/Conclusion). Following this knowledge daily makes a good, nourishing life that promotes the growth of trees, crops, and everything else. In light of these ‘threads’, Reichel-Dolmatoff (1978f) was similarly told that weaving a finished textile is an act of discipline and good thinking, and therefore of a well-led life. More than being an ‘emotional fusion’ of being and textile (Cereceda 2009: 163), the Fabric of Life is a ‘web of knowledge made of [good] thoughts, [...] life’s wisdom envelops us like a cloth’ (1978f: 13). While Reichel-Dolmatoff (1975c, 1978f) explores this fabric-model in detail, he was seemingly not aware of its correlation with the Tree of Life presented by my Mama informants. This figure emphasises more clearly the *ecological* dimension of Kogi ontology, complementing the moral aspect drawn out by Reichel-Dolmatoff. By implication, he also did not clearly relate the Fabric to the cosmo-geographical (downward and outward) diversification of water, sacred sites, and earth.

5.2. Planting a bare Sierra

5.2.1. Offering trees

Mama Shibulata’s sessions on trees began about two months after having started them in Tungeka. Because of his many commitments, Mama Shibulata’s story of the origin and creation of trees took a long time to complete, which follows chronologically that of the Earth/World. After the Four Fathers formed the world, Seizhankua laid out the earth and organised the sacred sites, and Siókokwi ‘named’ all things, the land was still empty and barren, its surface devoid of growth. ‘Something was missing’, said Mama Shibulata, and that was trees and vegetation. Like water and earth, the creation of trees started at the top of the Sierra. More specifically, this happened in a place called Dumena,

where the Father and Mother of Trees, Hate Kaldakshé and Haba Kaldāwiā, were ‘born’. Dumena was one of the first ‘daughters’ of Mother Sé (the darkness), the same place where the high lakes originated in Chapter 3. From Dumena downwards, Kaldakshé and Kaldāwiā prepared the future ‘sowing of trees’. They went from one *ezwama* to the next to ‘offer their trees’ in spiritual form, who at the time ‘were like persons, women’, to see which *ezwamas* needed or wanted them for the future. Somewhat confused, I asked whether the trees were offered to people there, or to the *ezwamas as places*. Mama Shibulata replied that back then, in each *ezwama* lived a form of ‘ancestral’ Kogi, but it was not clear what exactly this meant.

The Mama continued narrating carefully how this offering of trees happened in a specific succession of *ezwamas* by importance and thus hierarchical order, describing what happened in each place in great detail. In summary, the first *ezwamas* to be visited were Suxdzibake and Magutama, yet they ‘did not like these trees/persons’, and either rejected them or ‘bought’ only a few. Other equally unwilling *ezwamas* were Alwaka, Zâldaka, Hubiskuo, Kuamaka⁶³, Giumaldaka, and Sekandzhi. The first *ezwama* to ‘buy’ or ‘receive’ a somewhat greater number of trees was Seizhua, followed by other partial acceptances like Abbleizhi and Indshizhaka. Foreseeing that if this (partial) rejection continued the Earth would remain bare, the wise, neutral and arbitrational Spiritual Father called Mulkueke, who settled the dispute between Seizhankua and Zhántana in the Earth’s story, then instructed the remaining *ezwamas* to receive many trees. Consequently, Hukumeizhi, Numingeka, Nûbbûguizhi, Nuabaka, Mamarongo, and Sûguldu are places that realised the future significance of trees for humans and the world. ‘If not for those *ezwamas* that accepted trees’, Alejo added, ‘there would not be any in the world today’. At this point I realised that, similar to how the earth was materialised and spread outwards from the *ezwamas* in Chapter 4, the offering and later implementation of trees equally originated in and radiated outwards from *ezwamas*.

Part of this story was also told by the Mamas in Tungeka. They clarified that the main reason for not receiving trees, was that back then people living at *ezwamas* were powerful enough to simply ‘make appear whatever they needed, such as wood and fire for cooking’. They obtained the goods directly from the spiritual storehouse of all that exists inside the Sierra, Nuhuakalda. However, these characters failed to see that in a future world like today, things would be different, people would lose those powers, and trees would be important, being required for all sorts of things in life. This is why Father Kaldakshé and Mother Kaldāwiā were offering their ‘children’. As with the Sea and the Earth, apparently conflictive or diverging forces played their role in an overall creational order, in this case creating a balanced distribution of trees.

⁶³ Located at the head of the same valley system to which my base village Dumingeka belongs.

<u>Ezwama</u>	<u>Reaction</u>	<u>Notes</u>
<i>Suxdzibake</i>	Did not like/want trees	
<i>Magutama</i>	A little bit	
<i>Alduaka</i>	Nothing, not needed	
<i>Zâldaka</i>	Not needed	
<i>Hubiskuo</i>	A little bit, not more	
<i>Sekandzhi</i>	Did not like, just a couple	
<i>Seizhua</i>	More or less	
<i>Hukumeizhi</i>	Accepted many trees	Here Mulkueke instructed ezwamas to receive trees. Place where trees were later 'baptised'.
<i>Nabbeguizhi</i>	Bought many trees	
<i>Nuabaka</i>	Also accepted trees	Previous three ezwamas agreed to buy many trees
<i>Kuamaka</i>	Just a bit	
<i>Giimaldaka</i>	Not much	
<i>Abbleizhi</i>	A little bit	
<i>Indshizhaka</i>	A little bit	
<i>Súguldu</i>	A lot	
<i>Mamaldwúa</i>	Bought many trees	Agreed to do so together with Hukumeizhi

Table 5: The *ezwamas'* different reactions to the offering of trees, in approximate order.

5.2.2. Sowing the seeds

Once the trees-to-be were offered at all *ezwamas*, Mama Shibulata continued on another day, they still needed to be 'baptised'⁶⁴ and turned into actual trees as today. This involved their initiation or establishment from the spiritual realm in the physical plane. The process occurred in a place near the *ezwama* of Hukumeizhi called Kaxsɛma, a 'mother' who provided the 'seeds' for trees to grow, and where trees were first sowed and planted into the world. As with the lakes as 'daughters' (Chapter 3), or the nine 'female earths' (Chapter 4), this involved the 'maturation of girls into full-grown women', which transformed the spiritual trees-persons into physical trees. This initiation was therefore also described as (spiritually) 'sowing' and 'planting' the trees.

In parallel, Mama Manuel and Mama Luntana filled in Mama Shibulata's story by explaining that to be transformed, the trees had to undergo a learning process of 'nine stages' in the celestial realm Ñiuwabake. They specified that the male character to initiate (and fertilise) the trees was Dibændshizha, whom Mama Shibulata had not mentioned. Mama Manuel also explained that to provide the seeds, Kaxsɛma had to first obtain them from the realm of Nuhuakalda, which holds the *cosmic blueprint* of things. She then 'extracted the seeds from within herself, [...] like nowadays women also produce seeds for giving birth to children'. After the spiritual tree-people were named,

⁶⁴ In Chapter 4 I explained this practice, related to 'naming'.

baptised, and materialised, trees could then be sowed, planted, and distributed around the Sierra Nevada as they are found nowadays, and according to the coverage patterns defined by the *ezwamas'* preferences.

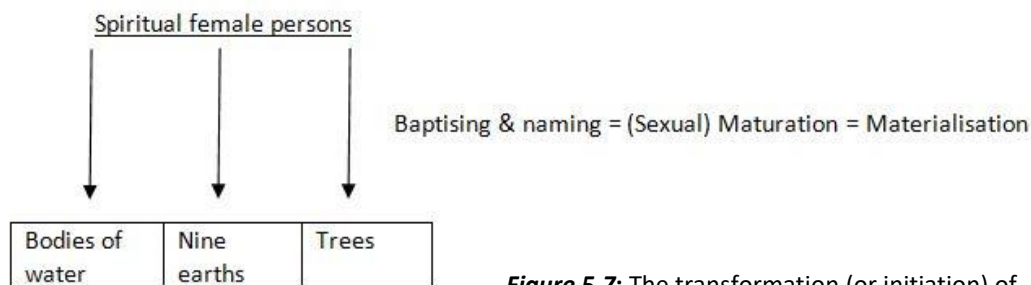


Figure 5.7: The transformation (or initiation) of spiritual people into natural elements in the Mamas' stories in Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

5.3. Trees, order, and life

5.3.1. Distribution of trees

From Alejo's translation, it was not entirely clear which male character carried out this distribution of trees, but it was seemingly Seizhadzhíñmako. After Mother Kaxsəma gave him the seeds, the Tungeka Mamas narrated, Seizhadzhíñmako started planting the trees outwards from the Sierra's centre, the World Tree Kalbəsánkua, down to the Black Line. From there, he continued 'until the end of the world', in line with the distribution of bodies of water, sacred sites, and the nine earths. As with *ezwamas* on the Sierra, in other regions trees had to be 'offered' to sacred sites too. There, trees were also variously rejected or (partially) accepted, which according to Mama Manuel explains the extent of forests there. Showing awareness of global geography, he said: 'perhaps in the Sahara none were wanted!'. Seizhadzhíñmako not only spread trees, bushes, and plants across different landscapes, but like Siókokui in Chapter 4 also 'named' their particular future functions and significances in those places according to species and type. 'My children, what will you be good for?', the seed-giving Mother Kaxsəma had previously asked all tree-persons, each of whom replied 'I will do such and such'.

According to Mama Manuel, this definition of roles was part of the conversion from people into trees, and so different sacred sites around the world became specific 'fathers' and 'mothers' of individual tree species in their respective habitats. At these sites therefore, Mama Luntana and

Mama Manuel explained, Seizhadzhíñmako also deposited ‘teachings’ related to trees. Besides planting them, he thereby ‘sowed’ their corresponding *shibuldama*. In Kogi terms, the establishment of trees (and plants) was also a set of ‘lessons’, which among other things tell humans how to use and behave towards these trees/plants. Creation was educational, constituting a joint ontological and epistemological affair, variously captured in principles like ‘naming’, distribution, or transformation. The being of different trees is also their knowledge, both aspects stemming from a common cosmological origin and spiritual source through their ‘threads’, *shi*. Sacred sites then, are understood as points of contact for these spiritual threads. The principles of ‘sowing’ and ‘planting’ moreover, capture particularly well how the order and functionality of things is also an ecological matter, ‘to live well’. In this respect, the Tungeka Mamas said that all trees in the world communicate with Kalbəsánkua in the Centre, being ‘like his children, spread all around him’. This implies a vast, complex *ramification* of tree species, habitats, and sacred sites converging at Kalbəsánkua as the trunk.

According to Mama Luntana and Mama Manuel, since ‘trees used to be persons like us’, their ordered distribution corresponds to that of humans. Just as ‘the [Great] Mother told humans where to live, so did she order everything else to be in its place’. Trees in the Sierra Nevada then, are divided into ‘Kogi trees’ and ‘non-Kogi trees’. The former, like the Kogi among humans, were ‘first to be born’, thus being located in higher parts of the Sierra (above approx. 1000mts) and of a smaller size. The other type are like the ‘Younger Brothers’ of trees, found at lower levels, and usually large trees. Since Elder Brothers and Younger Brothers ‘should not mix and live in each other’s territories’, Mama Manuel said, so should trees. For example, ‘planting non-Kogi trees higher up and Kogi trees further down [transgressing their borders], can kill them’. The two Mamas then discussed the names and traits of these different tree types between themselves, giving various examples as they came to mind in a confident, taken-for-granted manner, saying that they identify them when walking the Sierra. This further exemplifies how Kogi collective identity and their relationship to Younger Brother is embedded in “mythical” narratives, cosmological organisation, and geographical conditions.

‘Do other peoples outside the Sierra Nevada also have corresponding trees then, say German Trees?’, I felt compelled to ask. They replied that this is not the case, and confirmed the same, basic duality. Alejo clarified that ‘Kogi-trees’ is a way for the Mamas to refer to ‘Indigenous trees’ in general, since ‘Indigenous Peoples are only one’, distinguished from non-indigenous people and their trees⁶⁵. Nevertheless, I was told, all trees have the same origin, the same parents, Kaldakshé and Kaldāwiā. Mama Manuel then specified that only to the Kogi (as Elder Brothers) were the seeds of

⁶⁵ See Introduction for general description of how the Kogi classify humanity.

trees ‘given’, ‘so that we could plant them around the world’, speaking of Seizhadzhíńmako as if he was a Kogi ancestor. ‘Other Indigenous Peoples around the world’, such as in the Amazon, ‘are only in charge of caring for trees, but we also planted them’. One night by the library at the school in Dumingeka, a Kogi teacher named Juan Manuel told me that the Kogi *are* human seeds, ‘which is why we are Elder Brothers’, and for things to grow ‘[seeds] cannot be replaced’.

Table 6 Examples of Kogi and non-Kogi trees.

<u>Kogi trees</u>	<u>Non-Kogi trees</u>
<i>Geizhá</i>	<i>Mikuédzi</i>
<i>Kinakina</i>	<i>Mitábi</i>
<i>Kokuizhá</i>	<i>Misø</i>
<i>Kandzhí</i>	<i>Shiná</i>
<i>Tuldá</i>	<i>Taduá</i>
<i>Taizhi</i>	<i>Ikaldá</i>
<i>Gaxálda</i>	<i>Mouúlda</i>
<i>Nabí</i>	
<i>Saxíndla</i>	
<i>Tamshé</i>	



Figure 5.8: A forest of tall, ‘non-Kogi trees’ at about 300mts above sea level.



Figure 5.9: A Kogi homestead at about 2.400mts above sea level surrounded by small ‘Kogi trees’.

5.3.2. A balance of trees

The last part of the creation of trees was narrated in most detail by Mama Shibulata, but complemented and culminated by Mama Luntana and Mama Manuel, and so I now integrate their accounts. Once trees were planted, the world was not only already physical, but it had also ‘dawned’ out of the darkness. Since initially the world was mainly covered with vast forests, a character called

Mandáouldo realised that these were not good conditions for the development of life. Firstly, trees were so tall that they reached up to the clouds, which could have inappropriately allowed humans to climb up to the sky. Secondly, the atmosphere in these extensive, dense forests under a thick canopy was very dark and inhospitable, encouraging dangerous and giant animals to thrive, like huge horned toads or the anaconda. This also facilitated the presence of man-eating spirit-beings called Ubatashi (the 'green-eyed'). Furthermore, with so many trees it was very hard for foodstuffs and crops (*gakue*) to grow and flourish. For all these reasons, Mandáouldo cut down much of these forests, 'so that we could all live well'. Following the story above, he thus (re-)adjusted the tree-cover according to what the *ezwamas* in the Sierra and sacred sites around the world had previously determined.

The Mamas in Tungeka concluded that given these antecedents, Kogi Mamas not only make spiritual payments (*z#biel*) to sustain and protect trees, but *also* for the world not to be so full of trees again. I then reflected out loud whether the story's lesson is that both logging forests and too many trees are unfeasible extremes of a balanced middle-ground in the tree-cover. 'While we always talk about preserving the world', came the answer, 'because these initial conditions were detrimental Mandáouldo had to reduce the forests'. Nevertheless, 'when the world was finally fully organised and humans started living there, he told them to sustain and keep renewing the important, necessary tree-cover as he left it'.

5.4. Kaxsouggi: Kogi relations to trees

5.4.1. Sacred sites and sacred trees

Most of the sacred sites I visited that serve as ritual and gathering places for the Kogi are marked by trees (*kaldzi*), which either stand out from others, or contrast to the tree-less surrounding area. Particular stones and rocks (*haggi*), or clusters of them, are *always* present at Kogi sacred sites. They greatly vary in size and some have very peculiar shapes and positions. If a place has *both* particular stones and trees, it most definitely is a sacred site. When talking, teaching, paying, or divining there, Mamas always take the most central spot on the site, usually on a rock and/or by a tree, as they did in our sessions. In this light, Mama Shibulata provided a creational account about the origin of stones and some of their relations to trees, for which there is unfortunately no space here.

Nevertheless, the Mama prepared his continuation of the Trees Topic by contextualising that after having reduced the tree-cover, Mandáouldo left behind certain types of tree called *Kaxsouggi*. Located at key places on the landscape, these are particularly sentient, old, and important trees that the Kogi identify, being considerably fewer in number than the rest. Alejo explained that even if out

of eyesight, when walking the Sierra the Kogi will sense when there is a *Kaxsouggi* in a nearby grove. These sacred trees stand guard over the trees and woods around them, being like centres of sustenance. For these reasons, and because *Kaxsouggi* are considered to effectively still be ‘people’, it is absolutely prohibited to cut them down, Besides harming all dependent trees, this would have consequences for the perpetrator. The Tungeka Mamas explained in parallel that around their base, *Kaxsouggi* usually have different kinds of large stones, such as the type *haxsunkalda*.



Figure 5.10: A sacred site marked by trees and stones above the village of Luaka.



Figure 5.11: A *Kaxsouggi* tree on a sacred site. A group of Mamas are divining together. The houses of Tungeka can be seen to the right.

5.4.2. The Kogi and the *Kaxsouggi*

Normally, Mama Shibulata's lessons took place at the usual, secluded sacred site between various trees and bushes near his home, where his family members sometimes stopped to talk to him during our sessions. On this day however, Mama unexpectedly chose another sacred site. This space is much more exposed, and visible to various people walking past, such as pupils, other Kogi, and non-Kogi Colombians that bring passengers and goods up to the school on motorcycles. Nevertheless, he lived the story as fully as he always did.

After trees were 'baptised' and the world 'dawned', Mama Shibulata began, the Father and Mother of Trees, Kaldakshé and Kaldāwiā, emerged out of Nuhuakalda unto this plane of existence. It is in this otherworld inside the mountains, the Mama explained, that they had spiritually conceived their trees. Kaldakshé and Kaldāwiā then gave birth to a community of people called *Kaxsouggi* in a place called Tashízhua. 'Did they look like us?' I corroborated. 'Yes they did'. These equally 'indigenous' (*indígena*) people lived contemporaneously with the first Kogi but in separate societies, and back then humans 'did not yet use trees for building, cooking, and so on'. While the *Kaxsouggi* were authoritative, knowledgeable, and powerful people, they did not use these faculties for the good. Their leaders tended to mistreat the Kogi, deceiving and then 'eating' them. According to Mama Shibulata, they did this in retaliation for the wrong that humans had done to the spiritual trees-to-be by regularly rejecting them when offered to the *ezwamas* (Section 2). By often seeing them as 'unnecessary', as well as 'hairy', and 'ugly', the Kogi had insulted them. However, the revengeful behaviour of the *Kaxsouggi* was equally mean and further intensified the problem. While narrating, Mama Shibulata had his usually unfixed gaze, as if mentally going to another place and time.

He then described in detail the way in which the *Kaxsouggi* deceived and ate the Kogi. This basically involved *Kaxsouggi* headmen or *Comisarios* sending their *Cabos* to intercept individual Kogi men along the path while walking up to the *ezwamas* to confess (*aluna ishguashi*) with the Mamas. The *Kaxsouggi* offered the Kogi the apparent opportunity to discharge their thoughts, experiences, and actions there and then, yet in reality this was a cunning trick. While the Kogi bowed to confess, the *Kaxsouggi* 'opened' their heads at the top point 'where all our body is tied-up, like a bag', and keeps 'the contents' inside, explained Alejo. Having thus 'untied' people's heads, the *Kaxsouggi* Chiefs extracted everything inside the body. Since the Kogi were food/nourishment for them, the *Kaxsouggi* used their powers to turn these contents into crops (e.g. plantain, cassava, potatoes). The Kogi's bodies therefore remained as nothing but an empty shell, a lifeless piece of skin that nevertheless retained the same appearance. By putting that shell on to impersonate the Kogi, and

knowing their lives by having heard them confess, the *Kaxsouggi* Chiefs then went to the men's villages and deceived their wives and everyone else. When people were asleep, the *Kaxsouggi* got out of the shell, filled it with ash, and left the apparently resting body there. Already knowing the story, Alejo explained that current Kogi *Comisarios* also demand payment (equivalent to the food) from village members who have performed inappropriately or not followed their instructions (the equivalent of rejecting trees in the story).

Effectively living the story, and animatedly reproducing the sounds, dialogues and gestures of its characters, Mama Shibulata continued on another day. The next part was about how Kogi Mamas and headmen defended themselves from the *Kaxsouggi*, and got into a series of fights with them to see who was 'better', get rid of the other, and thus 'win'. Following Alejo, this is comparable to when nowadays there is competition between two Mamas from the same community for status and/or influence. In the story, the struggle involved exceptional powers and abilities, such as disappearing at will, clairvoyance, or golden staffs (*aldu*) that could kill by transforming things into fire or stone. After the first Kogi authority to fight (Shungeimaku) was defeated, a Mama called Shibulataxbé⁶⁶ asked a very powerful and wise character, Sintana, to continue defending their now growingly indignant people. Sintana was clever enough to always foresee the *Kaxsouggi*'s attempts to variously intercept, trick and deceive him, assuming an equally cunning attitude to not let himself be fooled and 'eaten'. He was determined to finish the *Kaxsouggi* for what they had done to the Kogi. In doing so, Sintana did many trips between the *ezwama* of Seizhua and the higher *ezwama* of Suxdzibake in cycles of seven days. At Suxdzibake he confessed to the Mamas there what was happening, who also gave him spiritual protection against being converted into food. In this way he managed to kill seven *Kaxsouggi Cabos* on each trip, who always tried to capture him.

Slowly becoming afraid of Sintana, the *Kaxsouggi Cabos* started to let him pass. This made the *Kaxsouggi Comisario* himself then try to deceive Sintana with apparently conciliatory offers to grant passage if the latter confessed. However, both characters were powerful and cunning, each one knowing about the other's intentions and refusing to give in. Mama Shibulata vividly mimicked how they were 'fighting with words' in a series of tricky questions and answers to get each other to confess first. It was finally Sintana who managed to have the *Kaxsouggi* confess his daily routine and 'look away'. As previously done to the Kogi, Sintana then quickly 'untied' his head, emptied the body's contents as food, put on the skin, impersonated the *Kaxsouggi Comisario*, deceived people in his own village, and filled the skin with ashes. After they realised what happened, another *Kaxsouggi Comisario* continued trying to catch Kogi people, and also got into a fight-game with Sintana.

⁶⁶ I was told that Mama *Shibulata* is named after *Shibulataxbé* because the former has also been given the task of defending his people, now against Younger Brother. Both come from the *ezwama* of Seizhua.

However, because of the *Kaxsouggi Comisario*'s malevolence, his *zhátukua* or divining bowl did not tell him the truth about Sintana's actions, rather deceiving him; truth only works with good intentions. Consequently, Sintana won again and repeated the same acts, making the *Kaxsouggi* village think that their *Comisario* had actually defeated Sintana.

The story ended with Sintana gradually diminishing the *Kaxsouggi* people as a whole, by taking away their *sewá* objects of power and spiritual sustenance. Thus losing their strength, the *Kaxsouggi* disappeared one by one; 'bad people never end up winning', Alejo added. At this point, the *Kaxsouggi* became trees and wood as they are now. When I sought to place these events chronologically, Alejo explained that the conversion of *Kaxsouggi* into trees happened more or less in parallel to the birth of trees generally. In an etiological explanation, Mama Shibulata then said that because the *Kaxsouggi* abused and harmed the Kogi, humans nowadays (have the right to) cut trees and use their wood. Also drawing on this story, the Mamas in Tungeka emphasised that this should nevertheless be done in measured ways. People should respect the number and place of trees, ask for permission to fell and use them, and perform spiritual payments to the parents of trees.

However, said Mama Shibulata, humans are now repeating the *Kaxsouggi*'s behaviour, abusing trees and felling them in great numbers without any respect. Instead of learning from these past events, people are engaged in a vicious cycle where, since the initial rejection of trees, one mistreatment has led to the next. 'If we continue doing this', Mama Manuel and Mama Luntana added, 'one day trees will become people again, and return all the harm we do to them'. In Kogi terms then, if ecological relations do not follow cosmological parameters, established balance and reciprocity can turn into imbalance and retribution.

5.4.3. The Kogi, trees, and nourishment

The story made me think of how Kogi confessions (*Aauna ishguashi*) of one's thoughts, feelings, and actions are said to be 'food' or nourishment for sacred sites, related natural elements, and the Mother in general. Since Kogi stories are meant to make listeners learn by reflection, I decided to confirm my intuition by communicating my ideas to Alejo:

-Falk: Please ask Mama Shibulata if the reason the Kogi's confessions are a form of nourishment is because the *Kaxsouggi* turned people into food, if it is related to the events in the story.

-Alejo: *Ekí naguak* (he tells me so). *Translates.*

-Mama Shibulata: *Aguná* (indeed), that is why when we confess spiritually (*aluna ishguá*) with words (*muldzigabba*) we are sending a payment (*z#bbi*) there, to the home of the Father and Mother of Trees (*kaldzi chi a hate nugadzi, kaldzi chi a haba nugadzi*). In Aluna, they see this as food (*gakue*).

-Alejo: That is why we confess and pay to all things (not just trees), because that is their food.

-Falk: And we humans feed from crops.

-Alejo: Crops, in this world.

-Falk: But when we die, we stay in the ground, and from there crops emerge again.

-Alejo: In the ground, crops.

-Falk: So when dying we also turn into food?

-Alejo: Into food. That is to say, we are the flesh of Mother Earth.

-Falk: So, what She can produce again when we die; does that return from the spiritual world?

-Alejo: *Brief silence*. Yes, because many Mamas say that when we die, when we are buried, we become food, of the Mother. And then things are reproduced and born again.

-Falk: Is that why the *Kaxsouggi* could transform people into food? We are food. They found food inside people's bodies.

-Alejo: Food. That's true.

The Kogi understand themselves to be fundamentally part of a natural cycle of nourishment where, in spiritual terms, 'paying' (*z#bbi*) and 'confessing' (*aluna ishguashi*) express almost the same as 'nourishing' and 'food' (*gakue*). In other words, consumed physical food turns into the very spiritual essences that the Kogi then confess and pay to produce more physical food. Upon death, the human body itself becomes food for the same earth which had grown those trees, plants and crops, as nourished by the Kogi's confessions and payments. In a way, in this cycle the Kogi sustain themselves. In terms of the *Kaxsouggi*, just as they used to turn the Kogi into food, the Kogi now make confessions and payments to (the Father and Mother of) trees, which constitute 'food' for them. Following the Tungeka Mamas, this is simultaneously 'asking for permission to fell and use trees'. The Kogi thus continue to be food for trees, who are still persons in the spiritual realm, just as these provide the Kogi with materials. Because the *Kaxsouggi* were also convertible into food, trees and plants now nourish humans. The necessary interdependent balance and reciprocity between humans and trees shown in the story, rests fundamentally on how both are people, sharing a

spiritual essence. In this way, Mama Shibulata's story about trees formed a bridge to the last topic of Food and Nourishment in Chapter 6.

5.5. Ontological correspondences

5.5.1. Trees, *ezwamas*, and lineages

'One may sometimes wonder why certain areas of the Sierra have less trees than others, or drier conditions', Alejo said at one point, as prompted by Mama Shibulata. Following them, the Mamas explain to their communities that the current distribution of trees corresponds to the preferences of the *ezwamas* in ancestral times. I was told that the slopes and valley around *ezwamas* that received either or very few trees are scarcely forested. In areas where trees were partly accepted, wooded areas are found only on some mountain tops and river sheds, such as Seizhua (my visit fits this description). Finally, the valleys belonging to *ezwamas* that 'bought' many trees are generally more densely covered by trees. In Kogi terms, *ezwamas* as spiritual-ecological centres have so-called 'jurisdictions' on the Sierra over which their cosmologically organising forces extend. Mamaldwúa for example, Mama Shibulata's *ezwama*, accepted many trees, and so its vertical section of Sierra down to the coast is more jungle-like.

For the Mamas, creational events and forces in the stories manifest in the landscape and also in Kogi society to the very last detail, forming what I call "ontological correspondences". Human hairs for example, correspond to the Sierra-body's trees. In this light, Mama Luntana and Mama Manuel claimed that different Kogi populations also have more or less hair depending on which tree-accepting or rejecting *ezwama* they belong to, and thus how forested the home valley of their lineage is. According to Mama Manuel, this even applies to human groups beyond the Sierra and how their ancestors/sacred sites treated trees. Personally, I rarely saw Kogi men with facial hair, which according to this logic is because the *ezwamas* above Dumingeka, where I usually stayed, received little trees. While 'you will not find anyone with facial hair around these parts', explained Alejo, 'some men from the forested Hukumeizhi valley grow beards, moustaches, or goatees'. One such Kogi from the Hukumeizhi lineage is Mama Salé, with whom I had a learning session during a summit of Mamas, *Comisarios*, and OGT leaders to elect a new Kogi Council Governor. His beard clearly marked him off from most other Kogi at the meeting, as did the colourful geometrical patterns on his bag, which are different than the simple, horizontal lines on most Kogi bags. The design of these bags indicates lineage membership.



Figure 5.12: Seizhua, the *ezwama* where Mama Shibulata learned, is an example of partial acceptance (mountain in the background). Before the *nuhué*, stands a sacred coca-leaf tree. Photo: Bernabé Zarabata.



Figure 5.13: Mama Salé, his beard, and his special bag.



Figure 5.14 (left): The *ezwama* of Kuamaka (roof-tops visible on the small plateau) received no trees. Photo: Bernabé Zarabata.

Figure 5.15 (right): Mama Bernardo, from Kuamaka, has no facial hair.



In Chapter 1, I explained that each Kogi lineage (*tuhke* and *dahke*) has various cosmological and natural associations that derive from the creations of the Spiritual Fathers and Mothers who initiated the lineages, and left their powers at the corresponding *ezwamas*. These associations include topographical features, weather phenomena, animals, stones, astronomical aspects, colours, cardinal directions, or trees. Mama Shibulata's lineage, Zalabata, is rooted in Seizhua and descended from Seizhankua, the Father of Earth. Alejo described himself as a 'family member' of Aldwáñiku, who as main ancestor initiated his lineage Sauna, from Kuamaka, and relates to hooved, four-legged animals. In terms of trees, Mama Manuel explained to Alejo that his lineage relates to the guava tree, the fruit of which cows therefore like to eat, 'given' to them by their father, Aldwáñiku, as nourishment. *Nubbuguizhi* for example, is associated to pineapple and the papaya and lemon trees, which the jaguar⁶⁷ (*nubbi*), associated to this *ezwama*, likes to eat.

These Spiritual Fathers and Mothers also assigned matching ritual practices and objects, types of knowledge, and ecological responsibilities to the different lineages, In Magutama for example, which holds the powers of fire (*guxsé*), the Mamas specialise in fire and lead its people in making all the confessions, payments, dances, and ceremonies related to fire to ensure its availability and control it. In the forested Hukumeizhi, the same happens with trees and its parents, Father Kaldakshé and Mother Kaldāwiā. The main Mama of Kuamaka, the old Mama Bernardo (*Figure 4.15*), told me that he ensures the stability of water and rain. These arrangements also affect personal affairs. When Alejo has to do spiritual work, like 'baptising' his baby, he needs to do this in alignment with his lineage's associations.

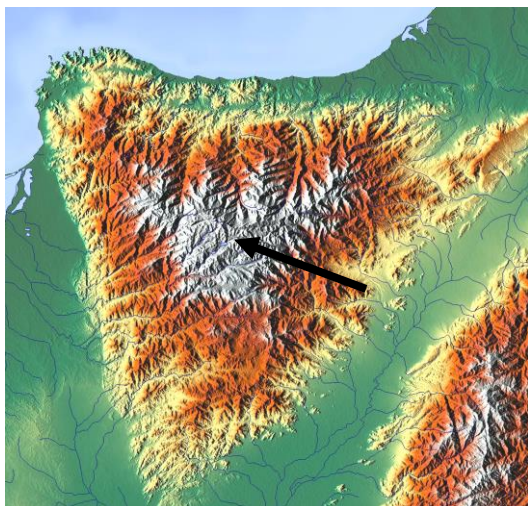


Figure 5.16: River valleys and their corresponding human lineages are seen as ramifying branches of the World Tree Kalbəsánkua (arrow indicates position), in the Sierra's centre. Map: Wikimedia Commons.

⁶⁷ There is a myth that is about the relation between the jaguar and the pineapple.

I was told in Tungeka that everything in this world is related to each other, and ‘we humans are family with all things’. ‘Is that because we all have the same origin?’ I asked. ‘The same origin, mhm’, replied Alejo, ‘we all live on the same Mother, and all foodstuffs that nourish us also come from her’. According to Mama Manuel, all human groups initially had their lineages, which are also related to things in the world. As examples he listed the other Sierra Peoples, the neighbouring Wayúu and Chimila, and Amazonian Peoples. ‘Do the Younger Brothers also have those associations?’, I enquired. Mama Manuel nodded and said ‘everything, the same’ (*todo, ekígak*). The problem, he said, is that most people have forgotten about their original lineages, which are now muddled.

Reichel-Dolmatoff (1950c) describes how in Kogi cosmogony the diversification of life is also compared to a ‘giant squash plant’ as another analogy, which includes the lineages and their marriage rules. He gives a sense of the great degree of responsibility and pressure that the Kogi feel in fulfilling their lineages’ obligations, as a serious, inescapable necessity of maintaining equilibrium between humans and nature (1976d). Marital tensions, family misfortunes, infant mortality, and agricultural failures are often attributed to inobservance of these rules, constituting what he calls ‘severe supernatural punishments’ (1950c: 182). From my experience, these punishments are rather the expression of ecological imbalances caused by social disregard for cosmic rules. The Kogi say they are ‘charged’ for these failures by spiritual forces in the form of such problems as a way to resettle the ‘debt’.

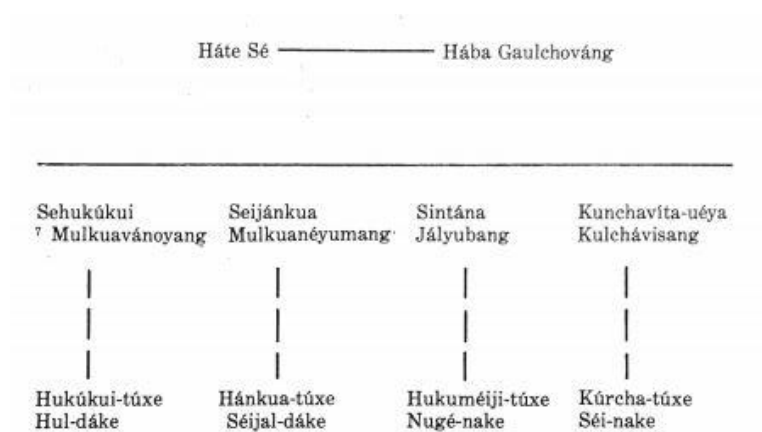


Figure 5.17: The four main Kogi male and female lineages according to Reichel-Dolmatoff (1950c: 190), descended from four main couples of Spiritual Fathers and Mothers, offspring of Father Sé and the ‘Universal Mother’. The Fathers correspond to the ones mentioned by Mama Shibulata, except Aldwáñiku, in whose place is Sintana here.

5.5.2. Trees, hair, and thatched roofs

Mama Luntana was absent during some of the sessions on trees. When joining us again, Mama Manuel asked me to summarise the topic so far to update Mama Luntana. The latter listened carefully and approved, after which Mama Manuel updated him more in Koggian. To find out what we should talk about that day, Mama Luntana then performed two quick divinations with his fingers (Kashivítukua technique)⁶⁸, and based on this information he began the session. From then onwards, Mama Manuel continuously verified whatever he said with Mama Luntana, who nodded and agreed. Alejo's fluid translation and motivated attitude indicated that the Mamas were working well together. Later, when leaving, Alejo said he was satisfied with the Mamas' cooperation, whose words matched those of his father-in-law (*huésgwi*), Mama Shibulata: 'we are doing well'.

Mama Luntana started by taking further the correlations between trees, the human body, and the Sierra. He clarified that the plantation and distribution of trees in the story, was a process of covering a hitherto 'bald' (*subá*) Earth with 'its hair' (*saññ*), a necessity realised by the all-seeing Father Mulkueke. Like the Earth when still in darkness, the Mama explained, humans were initially also mostly bald. During the Earth's materialisation, first came hard features such as rock and sand, then came the soil, and finally vegetation. Similarly, because humans were first bones (rock), the Four Fathers that built the world in Chapter 4 realised that veins were needed, yet veins could not be held without flesh, which could not be contained without skin, and this in turn required hair to protect it. In parallel to the expansion of trees from the *ezwamas* therefore, humans equally underwent a process of capillary coverage, which also happened while turning from spiritual persons to physical beings during the 'dawn'. As trees were planted, said Mama Luntana, humans' hair grew. In Kogi terms, resembling the world also means developing and functioning like it.

Becoming more detailed, Mama Manuel added that human armpits are like valleys, for which reason they also tend to be 'wooded' and produce 'rivers' (sweat). Even each animal species, he said, reproduces aspects of the world in its own way. For example, the different 'body-covers' that an animal can have, be it hair, fur, scales, shell, or just skin, correspond to different types of surface on the Earth. Ecologically speaking, Mama Manuel explained that unnecessarily cutting or plucking out one's hair, is like unduly felling trees and forests without permission or spiritual preparation. The Mamas also spoke about more straightforward environmental roles of trees, such as producing fresh air, regulating water, providing food, being homes for many animals, serving as wood, or their medicinal properties. Based on that, I decided to push things further to try and elucidate a cosmological response about the function of trees in Kogi terms. I therefore asked: 'OK, so you have

⁶⁸ Explained in Chapter 4.

told me many things about the significance of trees, but why do trees exist in the first place? What is their function?'. At first Alejo did not understand what I meant, repeating the trees-hair analogy. Realising that perhaps I needed to phrase my question more in Kogi terms, I said: 'Why did the Mother give hair to the Earth? Of what use is it?'. Alejo then understood and translated my questions.

Besides our human bodies, Mama Luntana responded, the tree-cover on hills and mountains corresponds to the straw used to thatch Kogi houses and the *nuhué*. Similar to how the straw protects the inside of a house, the tree-cover of a hill or a mountain also protects what is inside, namely the realm of Nuhuakalda. As I have explained, the *nuhué* imitates the cosmos and the space inside corresponds to the Sierra's spiritual interior. In this light, Mama Luntana explained that there are spiritual people (*aluna kaggaba*) living in that otherworld of Nuhuakalda, for which reason 'the mountains are their *nuhués*'⁶⁹. Consequently, felling the trees on top is like destroying the roof of their homes, making them 'feel unwell' and wonder: 'why are you removing our thatching?'. Interestingly, some Icelanders claim that elves are similarly distraught when people alter the hills in which they live as houses (Hafstein 2000).

Building on how in previous chapters Nuhuakalda was said to be the blueprint of existence that holds the spiritual essences of things, Mama Luntana continued his response by saying that special wooded areas help to contain those forces within the mountains. Since 'all knowledge and ways of being' come from Nuhuakalda, he explained, especially certain mountains are full of *shibuldama* (knowledge), which is also why 'mist, rain, and air form on hills'. Consequently, 'if we cut these trees down', or worse, 'if we mine or chop off the hill itself', its 'shibuldama spills out or evaporates'. For these reasons, '[Nuhuakalda] is where the life and wisdom that the Mother gives us comes from, her teachings'. It is because the *ezwamas* in the story knew that trees were spiritually available in Nuhuakalda, Mama Luntana explained, that some of them did not see the need to accept trees when offered to them. Overall, the Mama concluded that everything that covers the Mother's surface and which She sustains, and not just trees, can be described as Her 'hair'. 'We all live on top of the Mother'.

Further translating Mama Luntana's words, Alejo then explained that the role (or function) of trees is therefore also to be a *connection* between the inside of mountains, Nuhuakalda, and physical nature outside. While trees' roots are a link *into* Mother Earth's body and the *shibuldama* inside, their branches and leaves communicate with the air, the sun, and the celestial realm of Ñiuwabake. In this way, trees emulate the role of Kalbəsánkua, the World Tree, in connecting the nine layers of

⁶⁹ By sitting in the *nuhué*, Kogi men thus seem to emulate these spiritual people.

the cosmos along its trunk, from the base-cross Shkuákalda to Ñiuwabake at the top (see Mamas' model, Chapter 4). Using a modern analogy, Alejo translated that trees 'are like antennas that transmit everything' in both ways. While grabbing his ponytail, Alejo asserted that 'this is why we humans have hair': it is equally like a channel of communication between our soul and mind, 'our Aluna', and the environment. Moreover, just as Nuhuakalda sustains the Sierra and makes it a conscious body, the aluna of humans is also the basic source of their nourishment, vitality, and thought. Because 'we are like the hills and mountains', Mama Manuel intervened, the *shibuldama* stored inside us is 'what we think with'. In this light, 'through the air we breathe', significantly produced by trees, 'we learn from them and receive the *shibuldama* that they transmit out from Nuhuakalda, and this is in order to live well'. For the Kogi then, not only humans' bodies resemble the Sierra, but also their spiritual inside is like the mountains' soul, forming one integrated organismic correspondence.

5.6. Watering Kalbəsánkua

'If trees give us wisdom, why do we cut them down so much?', then asked Mama Luntana. Given all the reasons above, I was told that the Mamas continually make payments to the hills and mountains for storing the energy that nourishes us. Similarly, the Mamas pay trees, both in general and specifically to the *Kaxsouggi* at sacred sites, for them to keep growing, not dry out, and to continue being of use to humans. These care-taking activities, Mama Luntana said, follow the stories' knowledge about the spiritual background and importance of trees, their *shibuldama*. By paying at sacred sites, the Mamas communicate with the Father and Mother of Trees, *Hate Kaldakshé and Haba Kaldāwiā*, who are 'up there' in the sky. Given their significance, Mama Manuel concluded, it is better not to talk about trees in isolation, but in conjunction with the previous topics of Water and Earth, for together they sustain life.

5.6.1. The axe and the chainsaw

Heat, intense tropical sunshine, high humidity, uncomfortable places to sit, and buzzing and biting mosquitoes were all factors that I regularly endured to receive the Mamas' teachings out on sacred sites. On another day, Alejo, Mama Manuel and I were sitting in between the bushes with no place to hide from the scorching noon sun, and were all visibly sweating. Despite feeling I was in an oven, I managed to listen to Mama Manuel's unexpected moral lesson.

Following him, learning *shibuldama* is like mentally trying to cut down a very large tree with an axe. Since this knowledge is about the origins and ways of being of everything, progress is slow

and 'one advances hack by hack', so that at times the person 'may become tired or disheartened'. But 'you have to be strong Falk, always continuing in spite of the hardness of the tree and the great amount of work'. However, Mama Manuel said, since this Tree of Knowledge was planted by the Four Fathers of creation, 'it will never really be cut down, since no one will ever manage to know all of shibældama'. People can only access parts of this Tree, including the Mamas and their apprentices, who in this respect are 'like axes'. Instead of trying to bring down a trunk that is too thick anyway, the idea is to keep learning, listening, and striving to emulate Seizhankua and the other Fathers by continually working at their Tree. 'These sessions are a start', Mama Manuel said, adding that 'with the wood that you [Falk] cut from this giant Tree', you should 'build a house for the shibældama that you are learning'. In this mental home, the knowledge can be kept and nurtured, just like the *nuhué* holds Kogi men's thoughts and discussions, or how Nuhuakalda holds the Mother's knowledge.

More generally, I observed how the Kogi emphasise storage, exemplified in the figure of the Kogi bag as cosmic 'womb', but also as a personal container 'for one's thoughts and knowledge'. Since these have to be continually 'tied' or 'fastened' to be firm, one should always be 'collecting one's aluna' and personal experiences, instead of leaving them 'scattered around' here and there.

Mama Manuel then explained that the figure of 'the axe' corresponds to the Kogi way of doing things and learning, which involves patience, effort, and perseverance. The process (of cutting) is more important than the end goal (of felling). By contrast, the Younger Brothers behave 'like chainsaws', wanting to cut everything down quickly and easily, which leaves little space for lessons and experience. Moreover, the chainsaw is 'disrespectful', cutting and harming here and there without stopping to value and recognise the knowledge inherent in things. According to Mama Manuel, many people nowadays behave like mindless machines that merely seek to loot and abuse resources, later simply discarding what they cut⁷⁰. As I learned, Mama Manuel's metaphor relates to the wider Kogi designation for mainstream Colombians or *mestizos*, the Zhaldzhi. During a meeting of Mamas and Kogi authorities, the Kogi Council Governor told me that *Zhaldzhi* means something like 'the ones that eat everything' (to eat is *zald*).

⁷⁰For Mama Manuel, even writing is machine-like, which assumes that knowledge can be simply noted down and contained in books. Consequently, he thinks that Kogi pupils who attend Western-style schools (like in Dumingeka) should be careful about how they use that tool.

5.6.2. To think and act well is to know and care

By acting like a chainsaw that damages the Mother's body, Mama Manuel continued, we harm Kalbəsánkua itself, the World Tree. He perceives everything that people do, 'seeing and feeling how we peel his branches, cut his twigs, pull out his flowers, and dry out his leaves'. If it supports the world we live on and is 'the only one', then 'why do we harm it?', Mama Manuel asked. People not only damage Kalbəsánkua through activities such as mining, damming, polluting, displacing, and excessive logging. According to him, Kalbəsánkua is even harmed when people have a disposition that does not value, respect, and learn from things. He meant to say that damage can also be exerted spiritually, through destabilising thoughts and behaviours, and by disregarding *shibuldama*. This includes social disorder, violence, fighting, bad words, and negative feelings. All of these things affect Kalbəsánkua 'as they would affect any person', making Him wonder: 'what's wrong with people?'. Consequently, people are continually 'chopping' at this Tree (*Kalbəsánkua meŋgwi*). Since this is also a Tree of Knowledge, the Mama explained, anything we do against it is un-thinking and un-knowledgeable behaviour. It is by this attitude that people fell more and more trees (*kaldzi meŋgwi*), 'which are persons that feel what we do to them'.

Valuing, respecting, learning, and caring for things by contrast, is according to Mama Manuel the equivalent of 'watering Kalbəsánkua', the duty of the Elder Brothers. Just as trees need to be watered and cared for if they are to grow when planted, so do our positive actions, emotions, and thoughts create the conditions for Kalbəsánkua 'to flourish and blossom', and 'the world to heal'. Thinking and acting well he said, and based on *shibuldama*, is a way of 'planting trees in Aluna'. By thus sustaining life, 'things can get better'. For Mama Manuel, having fewer problems among humans, including the Kogi themselves, is indispensable to stop harming the environment. For the Kogi, good ecological relations start with the stability and well-being of their society, guided by a knowledgeable way of being. In their terms, thinking and acting well *is* knowledge, and being knowledgeable *is* behaving ecologically. By contrast, social disorder generates ecological imbalance. As discussed in Chapter 9, this is ultimately a moral matter.

Chapter 6

Food and Nourishment

Initially I associated the Mamas' fourth topic principally with physical foodstuffs, called *gakue*. *Ga* comes from the verb 'to eat', *gald*, and *kue* is a suffix denoting plurality. However, *gakue* is usually not simply translated into Spanish with *comida* (food), but with *alimento*, which is a broad concept comprising the definitions of 'food', 'foodstuffs', and 'nutriment', as well as 'nourishment' and 'sustenance' in general. Over time I appreciated that the Kogi use this translation because it generally corresponds to their own wider understanding of 'food'. In their terms, foodstuffs, cultivation, and land fertility are particular physical manifestations of wider cosmic structures and cycles of nourishing forces that are central to Kogi ontology, completely define their lives, and are fundamentally directed towards ecological sustenance. Nourishment is therefore a matter that is closely intertwined with aspects such as knowledge, truth, strength, balance, communication, and reciprocity.

Given this all-pervading ontology of nourishment and exchange, I generally follow Weiner (1980) in going beyond simplifying approaches⁷¹ that mainly see reciprocity and exchange as 'discrete [linear] acts of giving and receiving' (ibid.: 71) in dyadic relationships between people. In her words, this chapter aims to bring out 'much deeper complexities' (ibid.) and a range of phenomena often overlooked. As Weiner (1980) argues, for the Kogi case it is necessary to understand reciprocity as part of a larger, long-term, regenerative system where humans, social relationships, cosmological phenomena, ancestors, the land, and material objects are integrated into the analytical framework. While this holistic reproduction or recreation of people and things stressed by Weiner also applies to Kogi principles of nourishment and exchange, in their terms nourishing serves to *maintain* things as they are (or were created).

⁷¹ Weiner mentions theories to do with for example 'balanced reciprocity', 'gifts', and 'generosity'.



Figure 6.1: A Kogi homestead in the lower parts.



Figure 6.2: A homestead in the mid-range.



Figure 6.3: A family compound in the higher parts.



Figure 6.4: A traditional bowl and spoon.

6.1. The origin of food: taking care of the world

6.1.1. 'Human origins are the origins of food'

A couple of months had passed since finishing the Trees Topic. When Mama Luntana, Alejo and I met again at the sacred site with the pond, the place was densely overgrown with vegetation due to the rainy season. Because Mama Luntana led us to sit under the adjacent mango tree instead, I wondered whether this distance from the pond would not have a spiritual effect on our work. *Eñi ga haba nukaté* ('is the mother listening there?'), I asked. Mama Luntana nodded, indicating it was fine, and so we began the first session on *gakue*.

'In the beginning', Mama Luntana told, when the original darkness of creation was Mother Sé and Father Sé, 'we humans were like thought'. We were created by, and in the likeness of, 'our parents', the spiritual powers Kalgusha, 'who were persons like us'. Humans therefore had the

shape we have now, but did not yet exist as physical bodies. The world itself had already been ‘born’, materialised and organised as it is today, but it was still ‘in darkness’. Since our being was in Aluna, we existed only in the realm of Nuhuakalda, the spiritual otherworld within the mountains. Being in spiritual form, the Mama continued, ‘we did not walk normally like we do now, but had the capacity to instantly travel everywhere we wanted. For ‘can you see thunder with your eyes?’. People were invisible, ‘just like the thunder that we hear but cannot see and which also lives in Nuhuakalda’. Moreover, we fed or nourished ourselves ‘only through spirit’ from Mother Sé. Humans ate what is called ‘black food’ (*gakue abaksu*), and drank ‘black water’ (*ñibaksu*), now stored in Nuhuakalda as spiritual nourishment. Like everything else then, food was initially spiritual (*aluna gakue*). In Chapter 3 I introduced ‘black water’ as the spiritual, primordial form of water from the darkness Sé, and black things generally as being associated to cosmological origins.

Alejo then explained that back then, ‘eating was like me sitting here and simply thinking I’m being fed’ potatoes, maize, or plantains; ‘that was spiritual food’. It is because of this, he translated, that the people and beings that still live in Nuhuakalda continue to feed that way and nourish themselves with our human spirit. Consequently, ‘when we (Kogi) confess through words (or pay), it is (spiritual) food for the people of Nuhuakalda’. This reminded me of how in the Trees Topic the Kogi were also ‘food’ for the *Kaxsouggi*, and how conversely the Kogi initially obtained wood spiritually from Nuhuakalda (Chapter 5). However, Mama Luntana continued, the Mother realised that if humans were not turned into physical form and always remained as spiritual beings, they would not be controllable. After all, back then ‘no one could stop us, no one could catch us’. More importantly, She asked herself ‘who will be in charge of taking care of the world and everything that exists in it?’ Seeing this need, the Mother ‘made us physical persons’, and from then onwards ‘we have stayed here with the responsibility of caring for the world’. But at that point, the Mama said, ‘humans did not yet know how to prepare food, how to eat, and food did not yet exist as we know it today, but rather in liquid form’. At that stage, ‘all nourishment consisted merely of water’.

6.1.2. Nourishment as knowledgeable ecological behaviour

Mama Luntana carried on by saying that once the Kogi were living in this world, ‘the Mother explained to us that from then onwards we as people or persons would have to ask for permission to obtain food, something that we still always do’. For this purpose, She summoned a Spiritual Father called Húgukui (like the Kogi headmen)⁷², who is ‘the owner of all foods that exist in the world’, and

⁷²The role of Kogi *Húgukui* or *Comisarios* thus appears to emulate these cosmological ‘owners’ (Chapter 1).

keeps and manages ‘the spiritual seeds of all that we humans consume’. The Mother ‘named [i.e. established] and left him there so that through the power of the Mamas we can ask him for permission’, Alejo translated. He explained that ‘when crops are ready to be consumed, we cannot simply go there, cut them, and eat, we have to ask permission [and pay] again’. As I gathered, asking for ‘permission’ to sow, plant, and cultivate involves making payments (*z#biel*) or confessions (*aluna ishguashi*). Consequently, permission is obtained by giving back what is taken, which simultaneously ensures the continued growth of foodstuffs. Following Chapter 5, to be nourished by things the Kogi also have to nourish them.

More specifically, Mama Luntana said, the Mother determined that the Kogi would have to perform a ceremony to Húgukui called *kualdama* related to the nourishment, growth and life of things (described in Section 5). This responsibility, he elaborated, is also a matter of knowledge, of *shib#ldama*. It is a ‘teaching that She gave us to protect (and sustain) all the things that exist in the world’. ‘We are in charge of planting and caring for everything, so (all beings) can live well’. I therefore commented: ‘So you also care for the food of all species’. Alejo replied that ‘yes, of everything, of all species. That is why the Mother left us in charge’. Through food moreover, Mama Luntana specified, ‘we humans not only live well but can also think well’, and have knowledge. Food gives us ‘the strength to be and to think about what we do’. This sustenance allows us to ‘extend (*más allá*) our thinking and knowing, to learn *shib#ldama*’. After all, ‘why did the Mother create *gakue?*’, I was asked rhetorically. ‘Because She foresaw that without it we wouldn’t think, and without thinking we would be useless. She created food to allow us to think about looking after things and do our work. That is where we come from [...] food was born with us; we were created and foodstuffs were created for our consumption’.

To conclude this session, Mama Luntana added that ‘even to Younger Brother (Nañi) did the Mother give this teaching in Aluna’, that of knowing how to care for and grow foodstuffs. ‘This is why Nañi has so many things, their fields, their cattle. They live well. Why? Because you also come from those spiritual origins, you are part of the process’. To all humans the Mother assigned ways to protect the world and make it produce. However, the Mama explained that ‘Younger Brother works more through their studies’ (i.e. science), discovering and developing techniques, ‘that is how the Mother left them’. *Hantshibenga?*, Mama Luntana then asked (‘is it good?’). ‘Yes, I’m understanding well’. After that, the Mama indicated that we should wait for Mama Manuel to continue, given that both of them should be present to conclude our sessions. Meanwhile, Alejo asked Mama Luntana for a divination about personal issues, which they actively discussed as spiritual answers were coming in.

6.1.3. Nourishment and Aluna

The 'thinking well' mentioned in the story is related to how food was first spiritual (*aluna gakue*). In Kogi terms, the cycle of nourishment originates in and depends on Aluna and its forces, presented as the life-spirit that makes crops, plants, trees, animals and everything else flourish. The Ecuadorian Napo Runa similarly consider that the 'breath or soul substance' that animates all things is key to the 'shared flow things' and their transformation and reproduction (Uzendoski 2004: 894). This *cosmic flow of nourishment* we may say, is consequently a conscious and agentic process. Among the Kogi however, life 'grew' from the Mother's creational 'thinking' in defined ways, which is simultaneously the quality of nourishment as an inherently *motherly* and *caring* force. It is by communicating with and affecting this conscious field that the Mamas' practices are meant to reverberate in the physical world and nourish things.

In this light, the conscious circulation and exchange of forces as nourishment are also a communicative transmission of *information*. Kogi confession for example, is called *aluna ishguashi* because it involves giving information about oneself such as thoughts, experiences, memories, ideas, or dreams. Following Mama Luntana, it is like 'telling the mothers (sacred sites) how one is doing, which comforts and sustains them, like any mother when hearing about her children'. Human spiritual essences thus become 'food' for sacred sites and spiritual powers. When confessing, I was hence often told to visualise that I was giving these agencies plantain, meat, beans or whatever, which ensured I continued receiving the sacred sites' knowledge in exchange. To nourish these Spiritual Fathers and Mothers moreover, the Mamas monitor their needs and imbalances to make corresponding payments to them, who in turn thereby continue giving life to their 'children', i.e. different things in the world. The Nayaka in India for example, also perceive the environment as a 'parent' providing food for its 'children' through individual spirits (Bird-David 1990). In this case, the parent is the whole cosmos, having individual parents for all its components.

The nourishment cycle then, fundamentally relies on a constant, sustaining interaction between the spiritual and the material domains. In related fashion, Espirito Santo and Tassi (2013) argue that reciprocal, dynamic interactions and transformations between these two realms are a fundamental aspect across cultural settings in different continents. In Bolivia, this is seemingly also related to the Earth's fertility (Tassi 2012). More widely, as with the Kogi the Amazonian Napo Runa recognise the 'essence of life' itself as defined 'through the complementary opposites of [...] this world and the otherworld in a constant, mutually transformative relationship' (Uzendoski 2004: 886). Like in Chapter 3, the primordial, creational element 'water' was again presented as an intermediary

state, whereby after being spiritual, food first turned liquid before becoming physical.

6.2. Creating foodstuffs: studying, making, and implementing

While spending the night at Mama Manuel's house to continue the sessions the next day, Alejo and I conversed by the fire with our poporos. When Mama Luntana arrived after dawn, the Mamas unexpectedly decided to stay there to work. I therefore asked: 'should we not work by the mother at the sacred site?'. They said that strong sunshine was coming, but reassured me that the smoke coming from Mama Manuel's burning of *frailejón*⁷³ would 'carry our words' to the sacred site, which they would later spiritually 'deposit' there anyway. However, Mama Manuel's children and chickens were distracting and interfered with my recording, and so we went to a new nearby sacred site about 40mts away sheltered by a tree.

Figure 6.5: Alejo and both Mamas sitting at the alternative sacred site we used that day.



6.2.1. Learning is caring

When food existed in liquid form after having been spiritual 'black food', the Mamas narrated the subsequent process 'of learning' by which foodstuffs and crops were first conceived in spirit, then 'organised', and finally created by a corresponding succession of masters and apprentices. For humans and other species to be able to nourish themselves, a character called Kaxzinama set the spiritual bases for the existence of food. He then taught what he learned to his son, Gukasá, who continued the process, 'thinking'. In doing so, Gukasá realised that his father had not taught him

⁷³ *Espeletia*, a plant typical to the highland *páramo* ecosystem of highland Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela that grows starting at altitudes above approx. 3200mts.

everything, and that there was still a lot missing to this incomplete knowledge before food could be obtained. The next character, Zénduldzi, also saw that to organise everything his father's (Gukasá) knowledge was not enough, and prepared the future growth of foodstuffs under the earth. Yet it was the fourth character, Mukuánabue, who finally materialised and created food as we know it. As I was told, the first two fathers had worked on the initial, spiritual side of things, and the third one had worked on the transition into the physical. Mukuánabue also created a range of special, sacred plants called *Kagguba*. These were the first exemplars of each main type of plant and crop, by which Mukuánabue ensured their creation, 'future birth' (*mundaldzika*) and 'growth'. These *Kagguba* plants were spread around the Sierra at particular sacred sites, and the Mamas identify the exact specimens. Mukuánabue also discovered what humans should consume, demonstrating how to nourish ourselves.

As the story indicates, the creation of foodstuffs (*alimentos*) required the acquisition and implementation of *knowledge* obtained from the spiritual realm to learn how to make them grow in this world. This happened in stages of *four*, which as shown in Chapter 4 is a cosmologically important number. Consequently, the Mamas explained these four characters 'did Kuivi of food' (*Kuivis* are Mama apprentices). I was initially confused about this analogy, but it was clarified to me that they were *Kuivis* because they 'studied' (the ontology of) foodstuffs in order to implement this knowledge for their creation. Similarly, Mama Manuel compared, Younger Brother also first learns specific subjects to then put them into practice. He said that in fact all things were first 'studied' by spiritual powers to then create them, be it the sun, the mountains, or stones. Each mythical *Kuivi* therefore specialised in certain natural elements, just as the Mamas do today. In this case, the *Kuivis* hereby became the 'fathers' or 'owners' of particular crops, fruits and vegetables, I was told, and organised their growth and distribution according to the nine cosmic layers and the nine earths, discussed in Chapter 4. This epistemological process, we may say, was simultaneously an ontological practice of creating and establishing things, being two sides of the same coin (Chapters 2, 7).

Back in those times, Mama Manuel continued, the Earth was 'on fire', having landslides, earthquakes, erupting mountains (*guinue gas gas gas!*) and other dangerous conditions. 'Like volcanoes in Younger Brother's history of the world', compared Alejo. According to Mama Manuel, the fact that these phenomena still exist in some parts of the Earth shows the veracity of the story. By planting trees, plants and crops on the Earth, these spiritual characters 'organised and removed' those rough circumstances. Consequently, 'by doing Kuivi they healed the Mother'. Based on this, Mama Luntana stressed the practical, ecological significance of things, as he usually did, remaining focused on the sessions' objective. The *Kuivis*' 'studying', he said, established the knowledge

(*shibuldama*) of how to manage and care for things nowadays, for example how to plant trees, how to have water, and how to make crops grow. Following Mama Luntana:

In order to form all things, organise them, and create a home for them (i.e. sacred sites, respective ecosystems) these Kuivis had to study and work hard, really hard. That is why we say that things have to be respected and not removed or taken out from where they belong. That is wrong, it cannot be done. Everything was left in its place. Just like parents care for children, so did the Spiritual Fathers, with great care, create the necessary conditions for nourishment, growth, and the protection of all things. We must therefore understand to respect their existence.

At this point Mama Manuel intervened:

Luckily our ancestors did Kuivi. If they had not done so, things would not exist, and crops and trees would not grow. By studying, they foresaw our future living conditions, and saw that 'if we do not organise this, people will not live well'.

'That's good', Mama Luntana approved. In other words, I synthesised, 'the Kuivis studied and organised things for a reason', to which Alejo nodded. In a heartfelt manner, Mama Luntana grabbed his chest and said 'aluna ga'. He meant to express that 'we eat' this knowledge spiritually, it nourishes us (for the Kogi, the soul, our *aluna*, is mainly in the chest). The Mama stated that 'in our heart, we human beings have the knowledge (*shibuldama*) that our ancestors left us with to protect things'. It is like a 'writing' that we mentally carry within us, or 'like a spiritual book', Alejo elucidated. Every time we are about to do something bad therefore, Mama Luntana indicated, 'we should stop and remind ourselves of this truth', letting out the knowledgeable and nourishing spirit that is within us to 'think' according to these 'teachings' and thus 'see better'. For the Mamas, the information to behave correctly is right there in people's minds; we only have to intuitively let it guide us. *Mhm!*, *hantshibé!* ('good!'), both Mamas said with conviction. Mama Manuel then checked if I had understood. He was pleased when I confirmed I did, saying *mikuldú!*, meaning 'it [the information] entered you!'.

As spirit, the Mamas associate nourishment with essential truths inherent in the world and humans that need to be acknowledged and employed to sustain things and generally do good. Similar to the lessons related to trees in Chapter 5, growing and nourishing are equal to the 'planting' and 'sowing' of knowledge (*shibuldama*). To apply nourishing practices, the Mamas have to know (how, when, where) to take care, to know they have to learn these truths, and to access them they

have to communicate with Aluna, itself the medium of spiritual nourishment sustaining the physical world. The cosmological principle of ‘doing Kuivi’ then, is thus not only an integrated epistemological and ontological process, but also has an ecological purpose as a moral imperative, all in one, as developed in Chapter 7.

6.2.2. Nuhuakalda and emulating the ancestral *Kuivis*

These ancestral *Kuivis* then, were ‘the first learners, the first students’, passing this knowledge on to human Kogi *Kuivis*. The latter follow the former’s creational ‘studies’ and ‘teachings’, in this case re-learning the *shibuldama* of producing foodstuffs. ‘Here (in the Sierra) we also do Kuivi’, the Mamas continued, ‘that is why foodstuffs grow nicely, we organise them’. At this point I asked: ‘Where did these ancestor Kuivi learn then? Where did they get their knowledge from?’. Mama Manuel responded that they performed their studies in the celestial realms, introduced in Chapter 4, of Ñiuwabake and Mulkuaba, where respectively the Spiritual Fathers and Mothers reside and hold the world’s knowledge and principles. ‘That is where the *Kuivis*’ books’ are, the Mama compared to modern, formal education. After studying up there, ‘they [*Kuivis*] came down here [on Earth]’ and implemented what they had learned, leaving stones, trees, water, crops, and everything else in its place, not to be removed.

In emulating what the ancestral *Kuivi* learned *up there*, Kogi *Kuivis* learn in caves from the dark realm of Nuhuakalda *down here*. Following chapter 4, this realm seems to be a repository of the forces and truths of the celestial realms. Like the former learned ‘in Aluna’ how to materialise foodstuffs, so do the Mamas first form their ‘thought’ in spiritual darkness to then sustain the luminous physical world. After a Mama’s long training in darkness (caves, night-time, inside the *nuhué*), the sense is that he *emerges* into the world to *shine* his nourishing light upon it. Following Mama Ramón Gil (2009: 49), this is because ‘a Mama is like the sun [...] always providing its warmth’. By embodying the sun, the Mama recreates the world’s creational ‘dawn’ from spiritual darkness⁷⁴ (Chapter 3), “radiating” life.

To contact Nuhuakalda and Aluna and obtain knowledge, Kogi *Kuivis* have to be pure and avoid spiritually polluting substances, having therefore dietary restrictions. When Mama Shibulata was a young *Kuivi*, he told me, his mentor Mama Valencio forbade him meat (especially bloody/red), non-Kogi foodstuffs, fatty things, and anything containing salt. When he received his *poporo* and

⁷⁴ As indicated in Chapters 1 and 3, the *Sahas* (Mamas’ wives) nourish contrary but complementing forces, related to the moon.

become a man, Mama Valencio eased the restrictions and allowed chicken, fish, and pork, but no beef or anything from cattle, something he still follows⁷⁵. When I unknowingly brought him cheese once, he gave it to his family instead. During male initiation (Chapter 1), boys also have to temporarily restrict their diet as a brief version of what a *Kuivi* does for years. Since initiates also have to spend a few sleepless nights in the darkness of the *nuhué* (which reproduces Nuhuakalda, Chapter 4), their learning seems to be a “mini” *Kuivi* apprenticeship where *all* Kogi men acquire basic cosmological competency.

Figure 6.6: For the film *Aluna*, Mama Manuel, Mama Luntana, and the latter’s wife recreated part of a *Kuivi*’s training in caves with boys from Tungeka. An actual training situation would probably not be allowed on camera.



As a spiritual storehouse of cosmic essences, principles and blueprints (Chapters 3, 4), and a source of knowledge, thought, and life-power, the inner otherworld Nuhuakalda is for the Mamas also the nourishing, vitalising soul of the Sierra-body (Chapter 5) as the world’s ‘Heart’⁷⁶. Because this inner strength makes the Earth grow things and sustain⁷⁷ organisms, following Mama Luntana ‘we always say that the Mother is in there (Nuhuakalda), She takes care of us that way’. In exchange for payments to Nuhuakalda, some Kogi told me that in the more knowledgeable past Mamas could obtain food, such as fish from the sea, by ‘making it appear’ at certain sacred sites. In Kogi terms, sacred sites are specific outlets of the Earth’s inner power, which equal the ‘teachings’ and ‘knowledge’ ‘left there’ by the ancestral *Kuivis*. At these *nodes of energy and thought*, life pours out and sustains the surrounding environment. The Mamas reciprocate these life-forces with payments at these sites, tapping into the nourishment cycle. From my understanding, they hereby stimulate

⁷⁵ Half-jokingly Mama Shibulata said that before Alejo became his son-in-law, his family did not use to eat so many things bought below in towns. Alejo chuckled when hearing this, being teased for his greater contact with outside society.

⁷⁶ Following how for the Kogi, the *aluna* of humans has its main seat in the heart.

⁷⁷ *Nuk* means everything, and *kalda* means leg or support.

Nuhuakalda, through which they communicate with and 'feed' the celestial Spiritual Fathers and Mothers as the ultimate receptors. Being embodied in the sacred sites, these spiritual powers thus continue sustaining the Earth. All this is what makes it so grave for the Mamas to physically damage the Earth, and especially the hills as 'houses' containing Nuhuakalda (Chapters 4, 5). Besides directly disarticulating the world-body, this weakens the life-sustaining spirit inside it.

The Amerindian understanding of nourishment presented here may be seen as a cosmologically and ecologically elaborate version of how Colombian highland peasants in Boyacá claim that 'the Earth' provides 'the strength' or 'force' for life (*la fuerza*) (Gudeman and Rivera 1990). Similarly, for these *campesinos* the Earth is a repository of creation in turn sustained by the celestial divinity (God). This strength, present in all things, is transmitted to humans and nourishes them as food, who 'use up' what the Earth 'gives' to in turn help the land produce more. Beyond strength, this also provides the peasants with good spirits to work, who also distinguish between physical food and spiritual food. For them, the Earth needs humans to produce, who are its 'administrators, generating a reciprocal 'give-and-take'. In Highland Bolivia, Harris (2000: 47) reports how the fertility and the reproduction of both the land and of humans are equally inseparable.

More than that however, Mama Luntana said the Kogi were *created* to nourish things and take care of the world, which also constitutes a 'teaching'. In turn, food was created to support/nourish them in this task, allowing the Kogi to have the strength and 'good thinking' to learn that knowledge and apply it ecologically. In this close cycle of re-creation, feedback, learning, exchange, and growth between the human and the non-human, the intention is not only to 'make the earth bear fruit' as Harris (2000: 24) says is the central Andean concern. The Kogi preoccupation is to sustain the world itself and live well according to cosmological and epistemological guidelines, making nourishment a cornerstone of Kogi ontology more widely.

6.3. The story of *gakue*

6.3.1. Paying for foodstuffs to ensure future nourishment

Mama Shibulata's story about food follows chronologically the Tungeka Mamas' account of how the ancestral *Kuivis* 'studied', created, and organised foodstuffs, teaching how to take care of them and make things grow. This story is set when *Aluna Kaggaba*, the spiritual Kogi who were nourished only through 'black food' (Section 1), were materialised and populated the Sierra, and when 'this Mother Earth' was already formed with its nine layers.

The (northern side of the) Sierra, Mama Shibulata began, was divided by the Mother into an upper section, where the Kogi lived at the *ezwamas*, and a lower one where other indigenous people lived (now extinct). These were called Nañi Səgaká and Nañi Uldabángwi (*nañi* means ‘younger brother’)⁷⁸. ‘Like a fence?’ I asked. ‘No, a spiritual border’ came the reply. Seeds, crops, fruits, and vegetables had been distributed accordingly. Nañi was assigned for example plantain, avocado, manioc, and cocoa, while the Kogi received things like beans, potatoes, arracacha⁷⁹, and fruit trees. ‘Who gave them the seeds?’, I enquired. Mama Shibulata said it was Kualdzhubañ, the ‘Mother of Food’ and of the Kogi ceremony to sustain foodstuffs and life, Kualdama. ‘Did this happen after the story of trees and Kaxsouggi?’ (Chapter 5), I corroborated. ‘Yes, first we humans were turned into food by them, and then we received the seeds to cultivate’.

Mama Shibulata then narrated how the Kogi and the Nañi groups visited each other’s territories to exchange their foodstuffs, being curious about them. To cross the dividing frontier they asked for permission by confessing and making payments, ‘just like you have to show your passport on border control’, Alejo explained. However, both proactively concealed their cultivation techniques, not letting the other see their actual plants. ‘What are Nañi’s plantations like?’ the Kogi wondered. Conversely, Nañi Uldabángwi was jealous of the Kogi’s differently coloured cotton plants, which had been ‘spiritually received’ by a character called Mamougi⁸⁰. ‘How come they have those cottons? We also want to make our clothing with them!’. The jealous and powerful Nañi Uldabángwi then invented mosquitoes with diseases and sent them up to sting the Kogi, who with their powers nevertheless sent these mosquitoes back down as a plague that eventually finished the Nañi Uldabángwi.

Nañi Səgaká however, managed to steal all cotton seeds from Mamougi except white cotton (used for Kogi garments). Consequently, a character called Mandáouldo (also planted trees, Chapter 5) decided in turn to steal seeds from Nañi Səgaká and avenge Mamougi. Being spiritually protected (‘secured’) by the *ezwama*-Kogi, Mandáouldo pretended disinterest by skilfully occluding his thoughts from Nañi Səgaká’s mind-reading powers, acting ‘as if he had no mind’ (*aluna ahalelegelde*). Unlike other Kogi, Nañi Səgaká thus considered him an educated, serious, and respectful person who did not desire their ‘daughters’ (i.e. plantations). Yet despite Mandáouldo helping them with daily tasks to gain their trust, Nañi were still sceptical and hid their fields from him.

⁷⁸ Upon asking, I was told that these peoples were the ones that later turned into the Zhaldzhi (*mestizos*) after the arrival of the Spanish.

⁷⁹ *Arracacia xanthorrhiza*

⁸⁰ He was entrusted by the Father of Cotton to look after the plant as its ‘owner’.



Figure 6.7: Mama Shibulata named the places that form the dividing line (600-800 m.a.s.l). Approx. from here down to the sea lived the Nañi People.



Figure 6.8: More or less from this point upward lived the Kogi (same valley system as *Figure 6.7*).



Figure 6.9: This spot is on the boundary by the path. I was told that ‘the Kogi still pay’ here when passing, ‘like in the story’. They brush leaves and twigs against their legs and put them on the rock, leaving their tiredness there as payment.

Mandáouldo visited Nañi Sɔgaká in nine stages, finally stealing the seeds the tenth time⁸¹ when he managed to mentally and invisibly ‘enter’ the fields and secretly ‘see’ them. Oblivious, Nañi Sɔgaká thanked Mandáouldo for his work and asked: ‘how can we repay you?’. He did not reply and overall stole five different types of seed ten times, taking breaks of four days and going up and down the mountain on the fifth. By the *ezwamas*, Mandáouldo stored the seeds in a place called Kuktuma and then sowed them according to cultivation techniques copied from Nañi Sɔgaká, learning how to grow many things nowadays consumed by the Kogi. However, Nañi Sɔgaká was still sceptical, spiritually watching him at a distance, until they discovered the theft. Foreseeing their complaint, the omniscient Mulhueke (mentioned previously), who ‘was a chief of everything, like the Kogi Council

⁸¹ The whole process lasted *eizua kálkua*, translated as ‘one century’.

Governor', discussed what to do with Mandáouldo. Despite stealing the seeds, Mul kueke saw that Mandáouldo had acted rightfully, providing necessary future foodstuffs/nutrition to the Kogi, and decided to protect him from Nañi Səgaká. Given Mama Shibulata had been talking for long without interruptions, I asked Alejo whether he was retaining it all to later translate, which he confirmed. After the Mama shook off a horde of small ants silently walking up his legs that I pointed out to him, we paused the story and resumed five days later because of approaching rain.

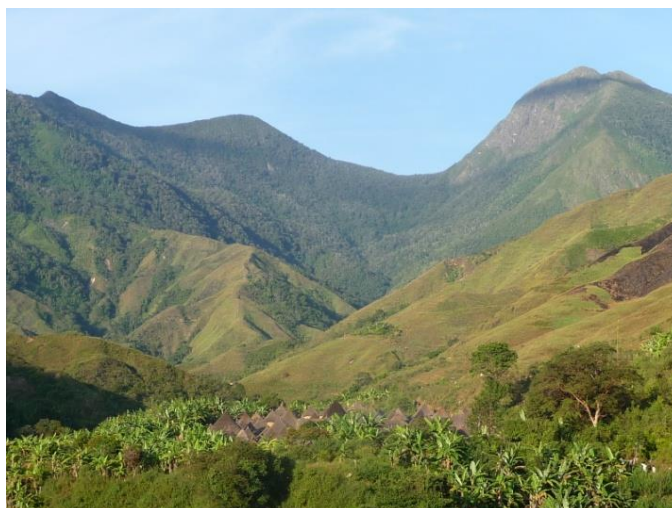
Nañi Səgaká tried to punish Mandáouldo during four days with their *Cabos*, yet *Mul kueke* refused to give him in and called Nañi's leaders to instead come and settle the matter in a place called Nituáñ. 'Just as the Kogi have to confess when doing something wrong', said Mama Shibulata, 'Mandáouldo confessed his theft'. However, he complained about not having been compensated for his labour: 'am I being paid much?' (*matshuí nakžabi guashi?*). *Mul kueke*, playing the arbiter, consequently made the Nañi confess too: 'what will you give him in return for his hard work, what did he earn?'. Yet Nañi insisted on having been unfairly robbed, and punished Mandáouldo by beating him nine times with nine pieces of hard wood, yet *Mul kueke* magically protected him. In exchange for this beating, *Mul kueke* told Nañi Səgaká 'now you have to give [Mandáouldo] your daughters' (crops). Since these 'fathers' refused, *Mul kueke* determined that it should rather be the mothers of plantations themselves who further judged Mandáouldo. Consequently, *Mul kueke*'s four powerful *Cabos*⁸², described as 'organisers' of natural elements like thunder, made Mandáouldo confess at/to the Mother of Plantain (Haba Mantakalda)⁸³. Similarly, I was told, Kogi *Comisarios* (like *Mul kueke*) instruct their *Cabos* to bring wrongdoers to the village to be corrected, and confess to the Mama. 'Was Mother Mantakalda a person or a place?' I asked. 'A person like us', replied Mama Shibulata while asking me for tobacco paste (*nuai migaksñ?*) to sweeten his mouthful of coca leaves.

Haba Mantakalda partly acknowledged Mandáouldo's right to payment, but also partly accused Nañi Səgaká for letting him rob. 'You didn't ask me for permission!', Mama Shibulata imitated her agitatedly. Despite being indignant, Nañi acknowledged this. *Mul kueke* then instructed the mother to punish Mandáouldo, strategically making her give him her seeds in return. Nañi Səgaká's claims to exclusive ownership of the seeds were thus silenced, not having endured Mandáouldo's pain. Since Kogi confession also settles disputes, we may say that at sacred sites, 'agreement' (*zhuluka*) is 'sown' and 'grown'. Confession pays, payment nourishes, nourishment reciprocates, reciprocity is balance (socially, ecologically and spiritually).

⁸² Often the mythical *Cabos* were also animals. Shinduldzi for example, was the 'white lizard', a real animal that Mama Shibulata described to me.

⁸³ *Manta*=plantain, *kalda*=base/support.

Figure 6.10: A Kogi village surrounded by plantain bushes.



6.3.2. Distributing crops around the Sierra

Mama Shibulata finished the story a day after one of his granddaughters had died due to a sickness that neither he nor doctors in Santa Marta could cure. He was nevertheless as concentrated as ever, and together we remembered where we had left off five days before. Shortly after Mandáouldo ‘won’ the seeds, the ancestral Kogi of Mamaldwúa, an *ezwama*, approached him saying ‘we will need your seeds’ to cultivate. ‘I earned them through my punishment’, Mandáouldo replied, ‘so you will need to pay me with something, for otherwise I will have to punish you too’. ‘We won’t steal like you did’, they said, ‘but merely buy [the plants] from you’, paying him with gold figures. Mandáouldo accepted this exchange and showed the Mamaldwúa Kogi how to plant and look after the plantations ‘like his daughters, like persons’⁸⁴. Being the first sacred site/*ezwama* to ‘receive those seeds’, Mamaldwúa became a place of origin and sustenance of various foodstuffs, ‘ensuring the nutrition of future generations’. It therefore serves as a key spot where the Mamas’ hold the *kualdama* ceremony, I was told.

Following Mamaldwúa, ancestral Kogi from other *ezwamas* equally approached Mandáouldo, seeing that asking and paying him with gold was necessary ‘for seeds to be everywhere’. Similar to the distribution of trees (Chapter 5), different kinds of seeds and crops became related to different sacred sites that became their future source of spiritual sustenance. However, a male character called Bakaishgaka did not have gold and stole seeds from Mandáouldo. Seeing the future importance of seeds, like before Mulkueke made him confess at the Mother of Foodstuffs and receive the seeds directly from her in exchange for being punished. While she also taught him how to take care of the seeds, Mandáouldo hereby also kept his seeds. After that, a long succession of male and female characters bought seeds from each other in fruitful exchanges free of

⁸⁴ This shows the necessary combination of female, earthly growth and male cultivation forces.

punishment. Mama Shibulata vividly recounted the dialogues between the many actors and listed several places, which Alejo sometimes forgot and had to be reminded of while translating.

In this light, paying for seeds with gold figures (*ñiuba*), seems to be the creational antecedent for how the Mamas equally nourish foodstuffs (and other things) at sacred sites, whose gold objects transmit their payments (Chapter 4). The story also provides a background for the relationship between gold figures and natural elements (Chapter 4). In this case, the gold figures are called after their corresponding plants (e.g. *Ñiuba Kəlmənte* for the *kəlmənte* plantain), ‘look alike’ (*túngatsé ñiuba*), and spiritually sustain them. More widely, Mama Shibulata’s story places creational process and spiritual forces in arguably more historical and tangible circumstances, practices, and understandings on the Sierra and in Kogi society. As with other topics in previous chapters, he and Alejo hereby reflexively related the acquisition and distribution of certain seeds and foodstuffs to cosmological principles (e.g. numbers four and nine). Similar to Mama Luntana and Mama Manuel’s teachings, Mama Shibulata equally related nourishment to ecological and moral lessons. These interrelated paying, debt, work, exchange/reciprocity, justice, conflict resolution, truth, learning, purity, and care-taking practices.

Mama Shibulata then reflected: ‘in this way our Spiritual Fathers organised and fought for things, so [that] our grandchildren can live well and be strong’. Consequently, ‘thanks to Mandáouldo, who was a person like us that was born, grew up and lived, we nowadays have many kinds of consumable crops’. He ‘discovered’ and ‘earned’ those foodstuffs, and ‘bought’ (*había*) them with his labour and punishment, realising ‘our future needs’. To do this, Mandáouldo trained in the mountains as a *Kuivi*, learning the *kualdama* ritual and how to cultivate⁸⁵. ‘Was this apprenticeship like that of a Kogi *Kuivi*?’, I asked. ‘Mhm! It is the same, no different. A Mama prepares a *Kuivi* about all things in the world’, explained Alejo. ‘Just like Mama Valencio taught me’, Mama Shibulata added, and concluded: *Nasñ ki ekí nuka, haklde agatsé yioú, ya!* (‘That is how we understand, that was the whole process, done!’). *Pald, sai tueldzi? Matshuí dulda!* (‘Falk, how do you see this, I’m telling a lot!’)

6.3.3. The *Kuktuma* stones and the *Kagguba* plants

Next to the story, Mama Shibulata and Alejo also explained that on certain sacred sites there are specific and unique plants generically called *Kagguba*, the creation of which was told by Mama Manuel and Mama Luntana in Section 2. Being the first, original specimens of each type of plant, *Manta Kagguba* for example are *the* plantain bushes, where the Mother of Plantain (*Mantakalda*)

⁸⁵ He learned in Nituáñ (where the dispute was settled), and was taught by Father Aldusángwi.

and the corresponding gold figures are. After buying the seeds, these *Kagguba* were sown by the Spiritual Fathers at sacred sites (named after them). ‘Still standing there like samples’ that the Kogi look after, which are also ‘teachings’, *Kagguba* plants ‘remind us that the story was true and difficult, allowing us to identify the places and think and know about the origins of nourishment’. ‘If we didn’t know this’, I was told, ‘we could think [Kagguba] are any odd abandoned plants and abuse them’. Rather, ‘if we make payments at such a plant, it means we have paid for all those plants in general’.

Sounding like an energetic web of plants to me, I realised that *Kagguba* are the plant/crop equivalent of the sacred, primary *Kaxsouggi* trees (Chapter 5). Because *Kaxsouggi* generally indicates ‘something ancient’, something that grows ‘from the source’ (*kasa zǎlda*), *Kagguba* and *Kaxsouggi* ‘are alike’ (*ekíbé hanna*). These undomesticated, non-harvested specimens cannot be felled (*menguasũñze*), and their fruit cannot simply be eaten (*gasũñze*), taken away, or cooked (*nungasũñze*). Only Mama apprentices (*Kuivis*) can eat the fruit, only on the spot, and only when fully ripened/fallen to the ground. ‘Eating all kinds of things containing salt, sugar and so on, if we [normal people] ate *Kagguba* plants they would dry up, spiritually we would be seen as a sickness’. Sensing something Alejo struggled to translate, I tested my intuition:

Falk: Please ask the Mama if this is true. I understand that *Kagguba* are plants of origin, they contain the strength of a species.

Alejo: *Eeeepa* (‘that’s it’)

Falk: So to learn, a *Kuivi* has to be in touch with what’s most pure, most primordial

Alejo: Indeed, Falk, that’s how it is.

Falk: And that helps him to learn more, those *Kagguba* have *shibũldama* (knowledge) in them. Am I right?

Alejo: *translates this exchange*

Mama Shibulata: *Eeeeso, tukí!* (‘thaaat, like that!’)

Falk: *Tukí hate* (‘that’s it father’)

Finally, the Mama said that Mother Mantakalda also gave Mandáouldo a vertical pile of nine, circular, stone disks of nine different colours, called *Kuktuma* (where Mandáouldo stored the seeds). Formed like the nine cosmic levels and nine earthly layers (Chapter 4), these stone disks contain the nine principal types of seeds of all foodstuffs that exist in the world. ‘Everything is in there’, affirmed Mama Shibulata, they are the fathers of ‘everything, everything!’ (*nuk, nuk, nuuuuk!*), while

emphatically repeating the name: *Kuktuma*⁸⁶. Alejo explained that through these stones, the Kogi make monthly payments to all these foodstuffs. ‘From there the Mamas do the *kualdama* of everything’ (the nourishing ritual). *Kuktuma* is hence also a ‘Mother of *Kualdama*’, *Kualdama chi a Haba!*, the Mama said vigorously. ‘These stones still exist’ in a place called *Kuktumaha* near the village of San Miguel, Alejo said. Pondering, I asked: ‘can I say that these stones contain the power of foodstuffs, which the Mamas reaffirm when paying them?’. ‘Yes’, answered the Mama, ‘the Kogi tend to *Kuktuma* so that foodstuffs do not diminish or dry out, and remain abundant’. Presently however, Mama Shibulata sees that due to multiple problems foodstuffs ‘are vanishing, spiritually going back to their mother’, and ‘we Kogi are not fulfilling these duties like before’⁸⁷. Interestingly, Colombian highland peasants told Gudeman and Rivera (1990: 27) that ‘the earth gives less now’, talking much of scarcity.

Figure 6.11: Being in this *ezwama* and next to stones, these could be *Kagguba* plants. Since the Kogi call themselves *Kággaba*, *Kagguba* may be ‘plant-people’”, like *Kaxsouggi* are ‘tree-people’. Photo: Bernabé Zarabata.



6.4. The practice of nourishing

6.4.1. *Kualdama*

The practice and understanding of *kualdama*, mentioned earlier, is a good synthesis of the ontology of nourishment among the Kogi. These reasonably secretive⁸⁸ ceremonial rituals held at certain times of the year, like the solstices, complement the regular Kogi payments and confessions. They are directed at sustaining fertility, planting, harvesting and the growth of all things, while regulating the seasons, rainfall, the sun, and other phenomena. Beyond that, *kualdama* is about invigorating and sustaining nature as a whole. The ceremony involves various days of dancing and singing by the

⁸⁶All Mamas repeat certain important terms or concepts to emphasise their importance.

⁸⁷ Especially since his mentor Mama Valencio died, which meant a loss of related knowledge.

⁸⁸ The Kogi still reveal little about the *Kualdama* ceremony, having been witnessed by few non-Kogi. My account is thus partly based on what I was told.

Mamas, while other Kogi play the drums, the flute, and the rattle. The rest of the village partakes in related communal payments and confessions. Most significantly, the Mamas wear powerful gold pieces that are said to reverberate with Aluna, and sacred wooden masks that depict the faces of important Spiritual Fathers, say Siókokui or Mandáouldo. The Kogi claim that the masks were made by these characters and contain their essence and their knowledge. These objects ‘were given’ to the Kogi so that momentarily the Mamas could contact and embody the Spiritual Fathers during the dance, assume their personality, and reproduce their creational and life-giving powers⁸⁹ to sustain and renew different natural elements.



Figure 6.12: A Mama wearing the mask of Hiséi. Konrad-Theodor Preuss, 1915. ©Världskulturmuseet Göteborg.



Figure 6.13: Kogi dancer in ritual attire wearing the mask of Mama Surli Uakai. Konrad-Theodor Preuss, 1915. ©Världskulturmuseet Göteborg.

The word *kualdama* breaks up into *kua*, which means to heal/renew/purify, and *lama*, which means life and growth. As stated by Arregocés Conchacala, an ex-Council Governor: ‘Kualdama is the great prevention, the great improvement, the indigenous “well-being”’. All things in life have to pass through the ‘filter’ of *kualdama* to be ‘processed and polished’. During these ‘dances that sustain the world’, the Mama ‘heals’ not only natural cycles, but also human ones of birth (‘when parents sow the child’), growth, adulthood, and death (OGT 2009: 66). Also describing this interrelated ecology, Mama Manuel explained that *kualdama* is not just about food and crops, but about ensuring the stability and the continual coming and going of all things/phenomena. There is hence also the *kualdama* of rain, fire, earth, animals, stones and so on. Everything ‘grows’ and has to be nourished through dances and payments to maintain its availability, he clarified, and not just biological organisms. Mama Manuel explained that all things sustain each other. Fire for example, contained as

⁸⁹ The Kogi claim that these masks are so strong, that an untrained person who wears them can die.

potential sparks in stones, 'gives counsel' to water in rivers. Thunder avoids the coming of disease, and informs of problems, 'saying "pay me" ' to us Mamas' to rebalance the situation at sacred sites. For them, it is all these balancing, nourishing interactions that make the Earth fertile.

More specifically, Mama Manuel continued, each natural element requires different dances and different knowledge, 'not being mixed' but addressed separately. Accordingly, the different types of *kualdama* are carried out at particular *ezwamas*, and therefore by particular Kogi lineages, which together cover all main natural elements. While for example in Magutama the Kogi have the responsibility to do the dances, singing, and payments related to fire, and its Mamas specialise in this knowledge, Alduaka was entrusted with foodstuffs. Mama Shibulata is a Mama trained to control and channel these forces, and is known for his ability to do spiritually efficacious song and dance. He leads the ceremony in Mamaldwúa⁹⁰, the same place that first obtained seeds in his story (Section 4). I once joined Alejo on a difficult, muddy trek there, set in a very green valley next to a steep precipice.

Kogi music, employed during *kualdama*, is quite peculiar, having sounds and intonations that may appear squeaky, unmelodic, and repetitive to non-Kogi people. Beyond being an aesthetic, entertaining, or religious matter, I reflected, for them music is principally a technique to achieve vibrations that transmit spiritual forces and messages. It is a form of nourishing communication, just like the wind or a chorus of frogs (Chapter 3). Kogi songs are related to certain things, as in 'the song of the snake', slightly replicating their sounds. This establishes contact with the Spiritual Mother of that species, who is nourished by the music. Like other Kogi I witnessed, Mama Shibulata's singing is a sequence of fluctuating tones, wails, and hums very hard to describe in words. These sounds are attuned to the apparently clumsy turns, hops, bows, and twists that he does simultaneously, also being quite different from a common sense of "dance". This tiring mental and physical coordination requires much concentration, while the Mama evidently tunes into something. From my experience, the men who play accompanying instruments, walk within, out of, around, and again into the dimly lit *nuhué*. Meanwhile, the women sing and play drums in the nearby women's house. Other Kogi stand outside watching or sit in the *nuhué* while doing the *poporo*.

⁹⁰ His family has a house there.



Figure 6.14 (top left): Kogi men playing music.

Figure 6.15 (top right): Kogi women dancing.

Figure 6.16 (bottom): Men, women, and children in a procession during a *kualdama*-type ceremonial period.

6.4.2. Organised nourishment, balance, and reciprocity

Among the Kogi, nourishing is reciprocating, and reciprocating is maintaining balance. While the necessary ‘exchange’ between things is called *shaldá*, ‘balance’ may be expressed through the term *zhuluká* (Chapter 1), which following Reichel-Dolmatoff (1951d) means ‘agreement’. Beyond strictly denoting equilibrium, *zhuluká* also seemingly indicates harmony, understanding, and the resolution of conflict. These are key themes in Mama Shibulata’s stories. For things to be created, organised, and grown there had to be agreement between different cosmic parties. Kogi nourishment practices like payments or *kualdama* rituals are directed towards being ‘in agreement’ with cosmic principles, spiritual agencies, sacred sites, landscape features, animals and plants, celestial bodies, climatic phenomena etc., and also between the Kogi. This needs to happen at the levels of Kogi society generally, of different lineages and their associations, of families, and of Kogi individuals. The agreement of Kogi society is understood to affect and be affected by the agreement of all the Sierra Nevada’s elements, while these non-human relations are also managed by the Mamas for their own sake, not just the Kogi’s. Making foodstuffs grow then, is part of this wider regulation.

As the main Kogi way to nourish, 'payments' (*z#biel'd*) may in summary constitute collective and individual confessions (i.e. thoughts, feelings, actions), nourishing music and dance, human bodily fluids, materials like seeds or cotton, certain mental exercises by the Mamas, special coloured little stones (Chapter 1), or simply 'imagining one gives food'. What, when, where and how this is done is guided by divination (*iltuel'd*) and depends on the situation, the problem, the lineage, the sacred site, and the natural element and corresponding spiritual character paid to/fed. The Mamas may pay themselves or transmit others people's payments, and some non-Mama Kogi can do it too. Payments can be for using material resources, to balance a personal issue, to cleanse communal impurities, to restore negative weather patterns, or to sustain an animal species.

Generally speaking, this 'transfer of essences' may be likened to the 'cosmic web of interrelatedness' that Uzendoski (2004: 898) describes for the Amazonian Napo Runa. They practice a 'self-replacement of both things and people' through a mutual convertibility or transformation of energies called *tucuna*. Similarly, Weiner (1980: 81) discusses a 'deep interconnectedness of [reciprocal] relationships' beyond the human realm addressed by the Pacific Trobrianders. As indicated in Chapter 3, for the Kogi not only does everything communicate, be it as wind, thunder, or the singing of animals, but this simultaneously constitutes nourishment. Based on the previous sections moreover, in Kogi terms communicating, thinking well, knowing, paying, reciprocating, asking for permission, and confessing are all forms of nourishment.

Rather than being a romantic notion of harmonious reciprocity however, in Kogi terms this ecological relationality is a pragmatic, necessary exchange of forces. Beyond a generalised interrelatedness moreover, this is structured by cosmological categories, anchored in a concrete territorial order, embedded in environmental and biological cycles, and involves organised relations between human and non-human agencies through sacred sites, Kogi lineages, and knowledge practices. Nourishing therefore involves constantly vitalising this *network of life* (Chapter 4). This is more akin to the Andes, where a respectful 'care lavished on the earth' is combined with networks of mountains, priests, shrines, propitiatory practices, principles of reciprocity and symmetry, and so on (Lorandi 2009, Murra 1984: 120). Understood as places of origin, homes of divinities and centres of lineages, the different features of the landscape sustain human and natural life, provide fertility, control weather patterns, and regulate the territory. As with the Kogi, this entails ceremonies and rituals to these patterned forces to ensure the reproduction of crops, animals and humans (Castro and Aldunate 2003, Leoni 2005).

This network is in turn organised according to the altitudinal levels of the Sierra Nevada, along which the Kogi practice the mode of subsistence of 'ecological complementarity' (Murra 1972a, 1984) mentioned in Chapter 1. Similar to Andean regions, beyond being an agricultural technique, this integrates environmental, social, and economic aspects in an overall balance between the different levels. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 have shown how ecological verticality derives from the vertical nine-tiered structure of the cosmos, reproduced in the Sierra Nevada's nine altitudinal levels and nine coloured earths, and formed by its downward expansion through sacred sites. This *cosmological complementarity* as I call it, is what for the Kogi defines and regulates the climatic, geographical, and biological order of the Sierra. The Mamas have indicated that the ecological sustenance of this order is built on a nourishing, spiritual feedback between its different levels and components that they maintain through their practices and ceremonies.

While building the *nuhué* in Dumingeka (Chapter 4), in a related ceremony villagers danced to 'nine songs' that reproduce the Sierra's nine levels by 'spiritually ascending from the beach to the peaks'. As a young Kogi called Bernabé revealed to me, the purpose was to 'strengthen' and nourish these levels. Following Chapter 3 moreover, these exchanges greatly depend on the basic complementarity between the sea below and the mountains above. Coastal sacred sites ('guardians'), estuaries, mangroves etc. communicate with the peaks, high lakes, and *ezwamas* and form the water cycle. To regulate this structured *cosmo-ecological reciprocity*, the Mamas make payments on the beach with materials from the mountains and lakes (e.g. *frailejón*⁹¹ plant), and payments on the *ezwamas* and lakes with materials from the beach (e.g. shells). A similar practice has been observed in coastal northern Chile for example, which for Castro and Aldunate (2003: 77) shows 'deep indigenous knowledge of ecology'.

Following the Tungeka Mamas in Chapter 4, these arrangements are dependent on the gold figures (*ñiuba*) at the sacred sites, which channel these communications along the Sierra's nine earths and nine cosmic levels. Resembling the things in nature they sustain, e.g. a gold-bird for a bird-species, these figures connect to the Spiritual Fathers and Mothers of these natural elements (e.g. Mother of Birds). At these places, the Mamas said, it is therefore 'forbidden to plant trees or grow crops'. Leoni (2005) suggests that the Andean *huacas* (Chapter 4) also served the regulation of forces in the landscape through rituals. 'Artefacts of high ritual and social value' were used at ceremonial centres (sacred sites?) to do 'offerings' (payments?) (Lorandi 2009: 41).

⁹¹ *Espeletia*.

These cosmo-ecological principles play out in daily Kogi life. Any assistance, service, or object is always reciprocated and/or claimed sooner or (often) later in some way. When a Kogi wanted something from me, say a flashlight, I was usually offered something I might need, such as coca leaves for my *poporo*. More specifically, the Mamas' spiritual care-taking activities for individual or communal well-being are reciprocated, and also supported, by the villagers through gifts of food for them⁹². I also regularly brought gifts to the Mamas for their teachings, often food, which implicitly constituted payment for their teachings, and also encouraged them beyond our agreement (Chapter 2). In turn, the Mamas regularly paid the spirits that guided our sessions and provided that knowledge with their own human essences, or by transmitting my confessions as spiritual food. In this mutually sustaining interaction or reinforcing cycle between the spiritual entities, the Mamas, and the anthropologist, each gave to and received from the other two.



Figure 6.17: Payments are usually deposited at stones and rocks. Sea-shells and pieces of cotton are on the lower left.



Figure 6.18: These oddly shaped and seemingly randomly positioned slabs are ancestral *Comisarios* and *Cabos* turned into stone (*Háxksinkanna*), who 'listen' and 'watch' what the Kogi do. Female ones are called *Háxkbelda*. Photo: Bernabé Zarabata.

6.4.3. The ecology of debt and un-nourishment

As the contrary of reciprocity, in its negative form the term *shaldá* can also denote 'debt'. In other words, someone or something has not given back, paid, confessed, or asked for permission. This creates an imbalance, something is 'owed' the Kogi say, causing all manner of forces to get out of order and control, and producing *disagreement*. Debt and imbalance are thus the failure to nourish, and also the consequence of harming and altering the natural world. Not paying the Father of Rain for example, or damaging his sacred site, may manifest as less rainfall, an earthquake, a specific

⁹² Given his spiritual obligations, a Mama has less time to work on his own mundane subsistence.

epidemic, or social violence. Beyond a matter of cause and effect, this is understood as a conscious reaction to the abuse, a warning, a sign that something is wrong. If not heeded, these phenomena worsen and become a way to 'claim' back or 'charge' what was not paid or damaged, to forcibly settle the 'debt'. The human/animal suffering generated, or the lives claimed, in Kogi terms *are* that forceful re-payment. The Mamas affirm that they constantly try to prevent, control, and if necessary ameliorate this through their spiritual payments and nourishing rituals, not as "offerings to placate vengeful gods", but as a practical re-balancing of forces.

The looming threat and constant worry about becoming involved in negative spiritual entanglements is very present in Kogi society, which creates great pressure. This should ideally make people watch their every step and its possible consequences, as Reichel-Dolmatoff (1950c, 1951d) also frequently suggests. Social relationships are quite marked by a heavy sense of paying back, owing someone, or being owed. Collectively, this takes form as the perceived Kogi responsibility to be 'in agreement' and fulfil the Mother's care-taking mandate as Elder Brothers, for otherwise the Sierra and the world also destabilise. While at times this is reinforced through humorous warnings about people's mistakes, the pragmatism of *shaldá* can sometimes be harsh or apparently cruel.

After his young daughter had died in the morning, a Kogi called Arregocés walked into the *nuhué* at night, sat down, and elaborately told everyone what happened, sharing his personal concerns as is custom. The men listened silently while rubbing their poporos around the four fires, but given the Kogi tendency towards inexpressiveness, no one seemed to express condolences or consideration. Arregocés admitted his inner pain to me, yet his attitude was equally quite pragmatic, saying 'it happens'. According to divinations he obtained from the Mamas, his daughter had died because he and his wife had not been regularly making spiritual payments and confessions, ignoring spiritual-natural warnings about the possible consequences of not harmonising his family's spiritual household. 'I should have reacted', Arregocés said, 'dreaming of building a house like I did, means someone close will die, it was a warning'. Certain spiritual agencies therefore 'claimed back' his debt as his daughter's life. 'That's how it is, what can I do now?'

Spiritual entities are said to become 'hungry' and somehow seek the 'food' that they are not being paid. Different Kogi explained that this is not because they are bad or want to kill. 'In the spiritual world humans are not seen as people being killed. Rather, they see us as food that they have to take if there is nothing else, and human lives are big food for them'. Mama Manuel's daughter once got extremely ill for weeks. His divinations indicated that this had to do with powerful gold figures excavated by treasure hunters and entrusted to him as a Mama by a Wayúu Indian who found

them. The objects had not been paid to for a long time and were 'hungry', and Mama Manuel failed to quickly nourish them and rebalance the situation. He therefore got entangled with dangerous forces out of place, which then 'fed' on his daughter. Mama Manuel has now done the necessary spiritual work to resolve this.

More generally, like the Tungeka Mamas (Chapter 4), a Mama called Luis once said that '[many objects] are now destroyed or gone'. Consequently, 'we cannot send spiritual communication [and payments] to other parts, many connections are no longer there [...] it is like if I call you and you don't pick up'. Moreover, life and fertility in the surrounding areas is weakened, natural elements are no longer sustained (e.g. birds die off), and the Mother 'charges us' for this disruption through e.g. natural disasters or disease. 'Wherever [the figures] have been taken out we have to spiritually recover the place, but often we don't even know where exactly something was taken out [...] that's what's happening with the Mamas and the places'. Among the Laymi in Bolivia, the sacking of shrines and relics has also impeded ritually harnessing certain powers (Harris 2000: 31).

In Kogi terms, I was also affected by such debt. After having a road accident in Santa Marta while riding a motorcycle-taxi to catch a coach to the Sierra, I informed Mama Manuel over the phone⁹³. He stated having already been worried about me because of an earlier divination he performed to check on me, which had told him there was 'some trouble'. Based on some precognition, Mama Manuel instructed me to remain in Santa Marta for three days, since only on the fourth would there be no more potential dangers in going to the Sierra⁹⁴. A few weeks later in Santa Marta, I was suddenly struck by a strong Dengue fever which put my whole body in pain, having never felt so ill in my life. When finally making it back to the Sierra after recovering, Mama Luntana divined and said that both my accident and the fever were a consequence of not having sufficiently paid back the sacred site's mother in exchange for the knowledge she was 'feeding' me. He said Alejo and I should therefore spiritually 'renovate' the work.

We informed Mama Shibulata, who later carried out the task. Firstly, he 'collected' our *aluna* by drawing two circles above our bowed heads and, as a non-Kogi to whom partly different spiritual rules apply, he also encircled my chest, my *poporo*, my notebook, and my audio recorder, spiritually tying them together. Holding these invisible collections in his hand, Mama Shibulata turned around and with an unfixed gaze concentrated while quickly shaking the hand. He then briefly passed his

⁹³ Having a phone is a notable exception among the Mamas

⁹⁴ Mama Manuel regularly offered to spiritually help me at a distance.

hand before his mouth, 'giving counsel' to our essences and mentally 'telling' them where to go. Finally, the Mama put these "contents" next to a stone in the middle of the sacred site, said 'that's it', and agreed that we should repeat this with Mama Luntana. According to this logic, through my research I became part of the Sierra's cycle of nourishment and unavoidable exchange. My 'debt' was forcibly claimed (i.e. re-balanced) from me through misfortune and illness. These experiences made me remember the Mamas' initial indication to fulfil our agreement with the mother(s) of the sites(s) lest there be problems (see Chapter 2).

If for the Kogi disregarding these principles of balance, nourishment, exchange and debt can cause death, accidents, illness, and misfortune, we may begin to conceive the scale of what the Mamas perceive to be a worldwide disruption of balance. According to them, present alterations and imbalances generated by Younger Brother are so great, that the resulting amount of debt is unmanageable, further generating environmental disasters, epidemics, and social conflicts. In Kogi terms, *shaldá* is a macro-cosmic matter through which current problems are understood. In this light, I sensed that the Kogi also seemingly perceive that the Younger Brothers have a collective 'debt' with them specifically, for the wrong done to the Sierra over the centuries. In this sense, we also 'owe' them as Elder Brothers for continuously healing this damage and caring for the world.

Chapter 7

The System

In Chapter 1, I suggested that given their organised, holistic interrelationship, the Kogi and the Sierra Nevada can only be understood together as an *organic composition*. Manifesting in all aspects of life, Chapter 2 explained that this all-encompassing arrangement made almost everything relevant to my aim of relating Kogi ecology to their wider way of being and knowing. Understanding and elucidating this rather monistic ontology required experiencing it in its own terms, and also following the closely related *top-down* epistemological rationale of knowledge being inherent to the world. What then is the outcome of having allowed the Mamas to guide the process at length? What is the nature of the content and form of the material? In the Core Chapters, the Mamas (and translators) consciously presented what is arguably an elaborate *whole* in their own way. The Mamas had the chance to explain 1. *what* they perceive, understand, and know about the world (ontologically), 2. *how* they know this (epistemologically), 3. in which way they *relate* to the Sierra Nevada and take care of it (ontologically and ecologically), and 4. *why* this is so (cosmologically).

In combination with my experience of Kogi life generally, the Mamas' teachings led me to a gradual appreciation of the all-imbuing logic of the information I gathered during fieldwork, slowly realising how the Four Topics or 'paths' (*hiúnguldê*) are interwoven. Being initially confusing, a given aspect was often simultaneously a Spiritual Father, a principle, a mountain, a sacred site, a natural phenomenon, a mask, a teaching, and a social institution, revealing overlapping layers of interpretation. In order to provide a theoretical rendering of this multifaceted whole, I came to the conclusion that the material should be analysed as a very elaborate, structured, and lived *system*. In consideration of Kogi realist terms, this chapter discusses why and how capturing and accounting for this system, may entail integrating the four anthropological concepts of *cosmology*, *ontology*, *epistemology* and *ecology* into a unified framework. Following Chapter 2, I further expose how content and form are intimately related in the system and in the Mamas' teachings as part of it. I relate *what* the Kogi say, think, know, and do, to *how* this happens through certain categories, mechanisms, expressions and forms of reasoning. Moreover, I explore how these Four Concepts might be related to the Four Pillars of Kogi being and knowing presented in the Introduction (Origin, Order, Function, Relationality). Suggesting the notion of *holistic realism*, I hereby intend to make the proposed conceptual translation involving three frames of reference (Kogi, anthropological, "Western") part of my analysis.

7.1. The Mamas: teaching the whole

7.1.1. An organised presentation

Mama Shibulata, Mama Manuel and Mama Luntana systematically related Kogi ecology to a knowledgeable, ontological relation to the Sierra Nevada, and situated this within an elaborate *cosmological* framework. They continuously tied these transcendent, creational structures and principles to Kogi society, daily life, and concrete practices. In all Core Chapters the Mamas directed the discussion towards current environmental issues facing the Sierra Nevada, remaining faithful to our sessions' objective. Besides making a case for the validity and relevance of their knowledge and practices, the Mamas emphasised their interrelatedness, providing an intricate overview of the Kogi way of being and knowing as integrated with the Sierra Nevada. This complex whole moreover, was placed in a global context and within the wider cosmos. For the Mamas then, explaining environmental issues in their terms and clarifying the Kogi eco-political cause requires this holistic contextualisation. The way they presented the material hence reflects its inherent organisation. This also instantiates how the Four Peoples' activism invokes a complete 'Ancestral Territory' defined by the 'Black Line' that is unified with their societies .

The Mamas also proceeded in a methodical, chronological sequence that generally followed the order of creational development. Each of the Four Topics (four Core Chapters) was more primordial than the next, reflecting the Four Pillars and thereby my Four Concepts. Overall, the narrative began with 1. *cosmological* and spiritual *origins* through 'Water' (Chapter 3), proceeded to 2. the *ontological* constitution and *order* of the 'Earth and the World' (Chapter 4), then presented 3. an *epistemological* diversification that defines the knowledgeable *function* of things in a more organic creational stage through the figure of 'Trees' (Chapter 5), and culminated by focusing on 4. the *ecological* sustenance and *relationality* of life as 'Nourishment' through more recent (historical) circumstances (Chapter 6). These domains of course overlap and are not clear cut, and each Core Chapter also presented this hierarchical organisation within itself, generally going from the more primordial and transcendental to the more tangible, current, and practical. This showed how the structure of Kogi holistic realism is also a *processual* and *causal* matter as expressed in the stories, and given a rhetoric that is both abstract and concrete. Spiritual principles become components of the structured cosmos, which manifest ontologically in the territory and nature, are reproduced and learned in society through Kogi epistemology, and are related to and maintained ecologically, altogether framing current environmental issues. Below I will explain how the Mamas' presentation thus followed a possibly fractal type of organisation, constantly interlinking its different levels.

7.1.2. Conscious wholeness

In this way the Kogi, and especially the Mamas, showed a noteworthy ability to conceive, describe, and explain things as a whole, being very aware of the “logic” of what they presented. This would go against the common, long-standing assumption that ‘people live rather than reflect on a great deal of their knowledge’ (Sillitoe 1998: 229). Douglas (2001 [1966]) once argued that people rarely contemplate their worldviews, being unaware of underlying cultural conditions drawn out by the anthropologist. Among the Kogi however, everything has its predefined reason and place to be, which they have to relate to. This requires constantly and consciously reproducing, thinking about, discussing, and sustaining this organisation through storytelling, divination, payments, teachings, and confessions. The conscious, holistic ontology makes the epistemology equally conscious and holistic, which implies awareness of the content and form of what the Kogi say and do.

My interlocutors explicitly expressed totality by variously talking of the Sierra and the world as the ‘Mother’, a structured cosmic ‘House’, a ‘Body’ with all its parts, or a Life-‘Tree’ and its many branches. They made it clear when the teachings and stories applied or referred to ‘everything’, saying *nuk, nuk!* or *todo, todo!*. Holism was also implicitly conveyed by making comparisons and analogies, drawing connections, tracing sequences of events, explaining causalities, or making references between the different parts and levels of the material. Reflecting on their words, the Mamas and translators sought ways to clarify and translate the principles, concepts, forces, or events in question, regularly providing reasons for what the Kogi do and how. When I asked questions or made comments, their answers demonstrated an assertive grasp of the topic and its meaning, relevance, and purpose. All of this was helpful to me in organising a complex and extensive body of information according to the order of the world as presented and related to by the Kogi. Following Kroeber (1935: 547), I was presented with a world that already has a ‘relational coherence’, rather than one theoretically rendered coherent by the anthropologist. Yet beyond constituting a ‘nexus of phenomena’ (ibid.: 546), this involved clear structures and patterns.

While the Mamas spoke ‘from our origin’ as the Kogi say, they also regularly “took themselves out” of their own terms to relate them to concepts, events, and objects pertaining to ‘Younger Brother’. Partly adapting their knowledge to a non-Kogi, “Western” audience, they hereby applied their characteristically analogical explanations to the demands of translating and improving understanding for outsiders. Examples are portraying the Sierra as a regulated ‘Government’, comparing damaged sacred sites to a faulty mobile phone that cannot call or (spiritually) communicate (Chapter 4), or using the Spanish term ‘payment’ (*pagamento*) to express the necessary ecological reciprocity of feeding spiritual powers (*zubiield*). Rather than being only

figurative analogies, these were meant as parallel forms of the same basic regulation, communication and reciprocity of life, whether between sacred sites, phones, spirits or humans.

7.1.3. Two forms of teaching

Mama Shibulata taught me principally through complete creational stories or “myths”. Overall, Mama Manuel and Mama Luntana articulated their knowledge more as descriptive lectures and explanatory discussions in a more “naturalistic” and less mythically loaded manner. Hereby they engaged more directly in conceptual translation compared to Mama Shibulata’s continuous narratives in purely Kogi form. The Mamas in Tungeka used physical illustrations (e.g. cosmic model, Chapter 4), more explicitly related cosmic principles and ecological realities to daily life, and used hypothetical situations and rhetorical questions (“if your house was destroyed like the Sierra, how would you feel?”). Especially Mama Manuel showed an ability to think in non-Kogi terms and seek ways to make me understand, whereas Mama Luntana kept the discussion focused on ecological issues. Yet they also regularly contextualised their points through the “mythology”, especially Mama Luntana, taking the stories as definitive creational accounts like Mama Shibulata. Conversely, I sometimes obtained explanations and illustrations from Mama Shibulata, where he equally “distanced” himself from the stories to discuss their meanings directly and relate the events to current circumstances.

As the sessions progressed, I increasingly appreciated how these forms of instruction supported each other, considering that Mamas have different but complementary knowledge specialisations (Chapters 1, 5). In the Water Chapter for example, Mama Shibulata emphasised the interdependent formation of the Sea⁹⁵ and the Sierra, which provided a cosmological template for Mama Manuel and Mama Luntana to introduce the water cycle. With Mama Shibulata, I experienced being plunged into creational narratives in their original version as told to the Kogi themselves. Like them, I was meant to listen and learn the story’s significance along Kogi epistemological procedures. This mental immersion into radically different reality postulates was difficult, but provided rich insights into Kogi cosmogony and how it links to thought, understanding, morality, and practice. Mama Shibulata’s narratives provided a creational background to Mama Manuel and Mama Luntana’s explanations, which felt somewhat less foreign and more tangible to me. I could more easily engage the latter Mamas in conversation to exchange ideas, make comments, and pose questions. Moreover, we tried to relate our different ontological understandings, which helped to

⁹⁵This knowledge makes him responsible to look after certain coastal sacred sites as part of the Kogi Organisation’s eco-political activism, see Chapter 8.

concretise the cosmological framework as something presently relevant. Altogether, all Mamas directed what was taught, how and why. They shared the purpose of laying out cosmological principles along the rationale of Kogi epistemology and the lived practice of the ontology, to clarify and contextualise Kogi ecology and their current environmental activism in this *whole*.

Consistent with Kogi holism, towards the end of my fieldwork Mama Pedro Juan, a higher-ranking Mama, integrated my entire work. At Nubaka, a sacred site located ten hours by foot above Dumingeka in a narrow valley, Alejo and I told him about our now culminated sessions with Mamas Shibulata, Luntana, and Manuel. After divining by sensing and watching a wet and completely transparent stone, Mama Pedro Juan ‘organised’ my learning sessions ‘in Aluna’ and ‘closed’ the process by putting my I.D. card on a stone to ‘tie’ my essences to the site. By alternately touching my head while concentrating, the Mama made me ‘familiar and known’ to the Spiritual Mothers of the surrounding mountains, while his wife (a *Saha*) did this for the Spiritual Fathers. To conclude, Mama Pedro Juan said he would engage in an ongoing spiritual ‘strengthening’ of my project and original spiritual agreement with the Sierra (Chapter 2). For my thesis to go well, I would need to visit him *four* times, and when finished writing he would spiritually conclude my work and ‘return’ it to its origins in the Sierra Nevada. These four stages then (as *form*), complemented the other Mamas’ Four Topics (as *content*) by the same cosmological principles.

7.2. Understanding Kogi holistic realism through four anthropological concepts

Since what Sillitoe (1998: 230) identifies as ‘the theoretical shift in anthropology from a structural to a processual perspective’, anthropology has seemingly refrained from seeking holistic, integrative theories and avoided generalisations. Following Barth (1992), by questioning coherent social order ‘as a whole composed of parts’ and ‘norms and shared ideas [...] as blueprints for acts’, social science focused rather on ‘lasting incongruities’ and the ‘construction of [...] meaning’. Perhaps precipitating the ontological turn discussed in Chapter 2, in this approach order is an ‘emergent property’ of shifting personal interactions ‘in differently constructed worlds’ (Barth 1992: 19, 23, 24). Overall, the ‘historical, changing, conflicting, and partial character’ of social formations was emphasised (Lave et al. 1992: 257), significantly channelled through the so-called ‘reflexive turn’ which questioned previous more deterministic forms of representation in anthropology (e.g. Clifford and Marcus 1986, Rabinow 1978, Rosaldo 1993, Scholte 1999). Given this emphasis on historical contingency, situational particularity, and conceptual disjunction, grand theories seem implausible (Kuklick 2010: 317).

However, Kogi society and the Mamas' sessions are notably characterised precisely by stressing predefined principles, structure, and strived-for coherence, considering themselves part of an integrated whole or unity with the Sierra Nevada. Moreover, while Appadurai (1991: 191) maintains that 'groups are no longer tightly territorialized, spatially bounded, historically self-conscious, or culturally homogenous', the Kogi exhibit these qualities to a good degree. To reflect their terms then, my research needs a corresponding attention to holism and structure. I am therefore led to find inspiration in classical anthropology as at least a theoretical starting point, which sought more 'the general in the particular' (Evans-Pritchard 1961: 3). The related old quest for definable totalities or 'integral wholes', which are 'studied through the broadest range possible' (Malinowski 1922, 13, 1944: 36), bears more relevance to my ethnographic conditions. For this study, I require an integration 'in terms of the totality of phenomena' (Kroeber 1935: 547), where particular aspects are understood in relation to that totality. This reconsideration of integration theory for my material is not only a matter of analytical choice, but a necessary way to approach, define, and understand the Kogi's own native, essentialist integration "theory". Broadly speaking, I build on Ingold's (2008: 70, 71, 75) argument that 'theoretical integration' should still be a necessary aim of anthropology, which complements 'descriptive integration' at a contextual, ethnographic level.

Rather than invoking an idea of "bounded" social units, by "whole" I mean the ordered integration and interrelation that defines the Kogi way of being and knowing. As we have seen, this encompasses situations, places, and forces beyond the Sierra Nevada, placing the Kogi in a structured but dynamic, wider cosmic-natural arrangement. Capturing, conceptualising, and articulating this multifaceted totality through available anthropological theories and literature is consequently problematic, especially when taking Kogi reality postulates seriously (Chapter 2). Moreover, any particular theory or concept, even if broad, such as "religion", "culture", or "way of life", would be limited in accurately and sufficiently accounting for what I consequently call Kogi *holistic realism*. I was both directly presented with this and also experienced and identified it myself daily on the Sierra Nevada. Accordingly, my own holistic integration in this chapter builds on the realist stance developed in Chapter 2 to fully acknowledge Kogi terms. The material therefore invites a rather eclectic theorisation of useful ideas, rather than a focus on particular themes such as ritual or animism. I hereby seek to match my analysis to the material, similarly to how I have adjusted my approach to the interrelated ontological and epistemological conditions of fieldwork. My discussion therefore combines analysis and synthesis, understanding particulars while also integrating them.

How, then, might this not only holistic but also systematic arrangement of principles, forces, agencies, objects, stories, natural elements, social norms, ritual practices, topographical features and

so on be defined? My proposition is that the Kogi material constitutes an elaborate, highly ordered, lived, and allegedly self-regulating and conscious *system*. To appropriately define and analyse this system theoretically, I suggest integrating the four anthropological concepts of *cosmology*, *ontology*, *epistemology* and *ecology* as specified by and understood in Kogi terms. These Four Concepts may be loosely paired with the Four Pillars of the system (Origin, Order, Function, and Relationality). Elucidating the system’s different aspects, the *content*, requires a parallel articulation of the three *forms* or frames of reference mentioned in Chapter 2. These are: Kogi terms, anthropological concepts, and wider “Western” forms of expression (my informants were only in dialogue with the latter). Having already been used to describe and explain in the Core Chapters, I now employ these frames as part of my theoretical framework to continue carrying out the conceptual translation proposed in Chapter 2, as an exercise in commensurability. By thus integrating holism, realism, and translation then, I hope to provide a basis to examine how this system is deployed to address environmental issues in Chapter 8, further clarifying Kogi eco-politics. Overall, the integration can be represented as follows:

Water (Ch. 3)	Earth/World (Ch. 4)	Trees (Ch. 5)	Food/Nourishment (Ch. 6)
Origin	Order	Function	Relationality
Cosmology	Ontology	Epistemology	Ecology
Mother(s)	Spiritual Fathers (<i>Kalguasha</i>)	Planting	<i>Aluna gakue</i> (black food)
Sé	Creation	Sowing	Feedback
Darkness	Light	Life	Exchange
Emergence	Structure	Development	Balance
Spiritual	Material(isation)	<i>Shibuldama</i>	<i>Zhuluka</i>
Profundity	Axis mundi	Knowledge	Agreement
<i>Aluna</i>	<i>Kaggi</i> (earth)	Variety	Reciprocity
Consciousness	<i>Kalbésánkua</i> (Cosmic-Pillar)	Unity	<i>Gakue</i> (food)
Causality	Formation	Branches and threads	Nourishment
Shells (<i>nukšwza</i>), poporo (<i>suggi</i>), coca leaves (<i>hãñú</i>)	<i>Shkuákalda</i> (cross)	<i>Kalbésánkua</i> (World Tree)	Relationality

Agency	Levels / earths	Distribution	Sustenance
Thought	Circularity & rectangularity	Purpose	Communication
Identity (Elder Brothers)	Centre	Cover	<i>Z#biel</i> (payment)
Birth	Expansion	Growth	Cycles
<i>Îtueld</i> (divination)	Naming / baptising	<i>Kaxsouggi</i>	<i>Kagguba</i> plants
Inside/outside	Verticality	Kogi and non-Kogi	<i>Kuktuma</i> stones
Mountain and sea	Concentricity	Mama specialisations	Dance and music
<i>Séishizha</i> (Black Line)	<i>Nuhuakalda</i>	Lineages (<i>Tuhke</i> & <i>Dahke</i>)	Regulation
Water Cycle	<i>Nuhué</i>	Comisarios & Cabos	<i>Kualdama</i>
<i>Aluna ishguashi</i> (confession))	<i>Siagawĩ</i> (organisation)	Use and abuse	Masks
Lakes, rivers, rain	<i>Ezwamas</i>	Transformation	<i>Ñiuba</i> (gold)
<i>Zaldziwê</i>	Territory	Axe and chainsaw	<i>Kuivis</i> (apprentices)
Black Water	Landscape	Respecting & valuing	<i>Shaldá</i>
Gender / duality /complementarity	Bags, spindle, loom	Learning	Debt / owing
<i>Sahas</i>	<i>Mamas</i>	<i>Sewá</i> (to be well/accredited)	Cancelling
Cold, Moon, Night	Warm, Sun, Day		
Transcendence	<i>Ñiuwabake/Mulkuaba</i> (Heavenly realms)		
Immanence	Numbers 4 and 9		

Table 7: An overview of the interrelated principles, components, and qualities of the system, roughly grouped according to the Mamas' Four Topics/Chapters (Kogi terms), the Four Concepts (anthropological terms), and the Four Pillars (Western terms). Each table therefore contains concepts from all three frames of reference.

The Kogi notion of *shaldá* for example, was identified through the anthropological theme of “reciprocity”, yet also explained and expanded through Western concepts such as “feedback” and “debt”. Requiring different levels of interpretation, *shaldá* is also associated to *zhuluka* (Kogi), generally translated as “agreement” (Western), which adds the (anthropological) question of “agency” in variously “spiritual”, “environmental” and “social” relations (Western). This invokes the

(Kogi) principle of *gakue* or “nourishment” (Western), which is an “ecological” matter (anthropological) of exchanged “energies” (Western) according to a “network” of sacred sites (Western) in a wider “cosmological structure” (anthropology).

7.3. A fractal model

7.3.1. Chains of associations and levels of interpretation

The Kogi-Sierra unity or *whole* presented by the Mamas has not been analytically recognised and integrated as a *system*. While Reichel-Dolmatoff lacked a theoretical framework for the Kogi material, his methodical and ample work is to be credited for its skilful (explicit and implicit) exposure of this whole and its inherent logic. In his monograph (1950c, 1951d), he attempts to cover and integrate all aspects of Kogi life and tradition. Especially in a section entitled ‘The Kogi World’, Reichel-Dolmatoff discloses how all this constitutes a wider, interrelated range of understandings about the cosmos, life, the Sierra, and themselves. Nevertheless, he analyses the intricate concepts, objects, and practices through which the Kogi instantiate this as “religion”. In other works, Reichel-Dolmatoff more concisely tackles Kogi holism in different ways. Examples are the Kogi “metaphor” of the ‘fabric of life’ that interweaves everything as a ‘principle of integration’ (1978f), the all-encompassing universal figure of the ‘Great Mother’ (1987b), and by totalising the Sierra Nevada as an all-defining Kogi ‘sacred mountain’ (1990f).

As Reichel-Dolmatoff (1987b: 78) eloquently explains, the Kogi ‘operate mainly by analogy’ and ‘chains of associations’ on ‘specific level[s] of categories’. These overlapping configurations and patterns intricately relate cosmology, social organisation, nature, material culture, the life cycle, behaviour, aesthetics and others. If houses represent mountains, this also corresponds to a human body, the Mamas’ pointy knitted cap, a constellation, a mythological being, and so on. According to him, *everything* is part of these configurations and full of such meanings, being ‘structured into significant units, forms, and clusters’ (ibid.). These relationships therefore ‘have to be read on certain levels of interpretation, [and] can only be understood by those who know [Kogi] thought patterns’. Even after ‘years of study, of textual analyses, and of comparative work’, one only starts to understand ‘the gist’ of Mama discourse, social organisation, ritual procedure, or ‘apparently simple statements on cosmology’ (1987b: 78). Like Reichel-Dolmatoff, in my experience discussing one aspect of what he called the “Kogi world” in isolation is difficult. It necessarily implies referring to a range of other related aspects. These coherent, layered, and intricate correspondences and

associations constantly invoke the whole, making it hard to organise the material thematically and analytically.

In the Andes, interrelated correspondences between orders of creation at different levels is also typical. The principles and arrangements that define social organisation, the constitution of the landscape, natural and astronomical phenomena, and cosmological structure are the same overarching ones. *Ayllus* (descent groups) and moieties are similarly associated to mountains, *huacas* or sacred sites, and deities (Castro and Aldunate 2003, Leoni 2005), while political divisions are congruent with the landscape's order (Murra and Wachtel 2009). Cusco's urban layout and the Inka state's functioning followed a 'controlled and coordinated network' of lines (*ceques*) between sacred sites and ceremonial centres (Bauer 1992, Lorandi 2009: 40, Zuidema 2009). The design of woven bags in Aymara societies integrate principles and understandings about society, organisms, the land, relatedness, balance, and fertility (Cereceda 2009). Household architecture follows gender complementarity and equilibrium according to cosmological duality (Harris 2009). Rituals and ceremonies regarding the regulation of life-forces and communal well-being are performed at, to, and for landmarks and shrines of corresponding creational significance (Castro and Aldunate 2003). Agriculture and land distribution follow ecological principles derived from astronomical and cosmological categories (Murra and Wachtel 2009, Zuidema 2009). Beyond all this, I argue that with respect to Kogi holism, its systematic quality is partly based on a possibly *fractal* arrangement that interacts with all the analogies and correspondences presented by the Mamas.

7.3.2. Nine levels

Particular aspects of the structure of the whole viewed from different angles repeat elements of the overall pattern in a simultaneous, unifying expression at all levels. For example, in its various forms 'nourishment' is at once physical food for organisms, spiritual sustenance, information, music, communication between different creational realms, and 'payment' (Chapter 6). These payments are analogous to transactions in society, are given to gold objects that resemble aspects of nature, and these in turn are sustained by Spiritual Fathers and Mothers, being impersonated in the Mamas' masks used for fertility rituals. I have identified nine main interdependent and complementary levels (1-9) along which Kogi categories and principles may be generally classified and analysed. They follow the *top-to-bottom* cosmological order and epistemological rationale discussed in Chapter 2, and interrelate macro-, meso-, and microcosmic stages. This overview may show how each component is a manifestation, expression or facet of the wider whole, being a useful synthesis of the system, and of how the Mamas presented it in light of the Core Chapters.

Level 1: The first, top level, constitutes the main cosmological principles and spiritual forces of the system's creational *origin*. Being also related to truth and knowledge, they already tie Kogi ontology and epistemology together as sides of the same cosmological structure and development. For the Mamas, everything that the Kogi say and do needs to be understood 'from these origins', including current environmental problems. I mean for instance: 'the Mother' as the driving, conscious power of creation; the dark, spiritual origin of everything, Sé, and its associated Law of Origin; Aluna, the universal consciousness; basic dualities such as spirit/matter, darkness/light, female/male, inside/outside, or below/above; the numbers four and nine; *shibuldama* (knowledge) and its 'threads'; primordial essences such as 'black water' or 'black food'; principles like concentricity, verticality, 'agreement' (*zhuluká*), balance (*shaldá*), nourishment, or organisation (*siagawĩ*).

Level 2: These forces and principles take form as key components and/or agencies of the macro-cosmos that frame Kogi life and understanding. I refer to: the Spiritual Fathers/Mothers (*Kalguasha*) and their deeds; the Cosmic Base (*Shkuákaldá*); the World-Pillar (*Kalbəsánkua*); the nine cosmic levels; the four celestial realms (*Ñiuwabake*, *Mulkuaba*, *Héñkalaha*, *Teikú*); astral bodies like the Sun; the otherworld and existential 'support' *Nuhuakaldá*; the water cycle; the global confessional place *Mamaishkagaka*; or the four cardinal directions.

Level 3: The previous two levels materialise or manifest in the physical constitution and arrangement of the Sierra Nevada as an 'Ancestral Territory' and the Mother's 'body'. This landscape embodies the cosmology, which the Kogi relate to ontologically as a conscious, organised environment. Especially the territory's inner realm *Nuhuakaldá* as a meso-cosmos (Chapter 2) contains the forces and 'thought' of levels (1) and (2), being also a source of knowledge for Kogi epistemology. Geographical features constantly serve as a framework for Kogi society and life, and the Mamas' directed their ecological lessons at them. Especially the sacred sites (*gaka*) as 'fathers' and 'mothers' (*hate*, *haba*) hold and 'teach' cosmic principles, truths and forces, being focal points of Kogi learning, practice and discourse, such as divination, payments, confessions, or Mama apprenticeship. These sites can be related to conscious stones (e.g. *Kuktuma*, *Haxsunkaldá*) trees (*Kaxsouggi*) and plants (*Kagguba*), the high lakes (*Mébangokui*) and other bodies of water, the *ezwamas*, mountains/peaks, valleys and caves, the sea, the Black Line (*Séishizha*), or the nine earths.

Level 4: The Mamas stressed how this territorial configuration interacts with various communicating natural-spiritual elements, phenomena, and beings that further compose the ontology as defined by the cosmology (1, 2), enlivening the landscape (3). Firstly, the Mamas' Four

Topics, Water (*Ñi*), Earth (*Kaggi*), Trees (*Kaldzi*), and Foodstuffs (*Gakue*) roughly correspond to a creational sequence along the Four Pillars, from the Origin (emergence) of things, to their Order, Functionality (purpose), and Relationality. The Kogi also variously relate to and sustain the warnings of thunder (*kuīshbángui*), the female seasons of rain (*ñikâlda*), the bad omens of an earthquake, the ‘speaking’ wind (*mulkalda*) and its parallel in human words (*muldzigabba*), or the cleansing powers of fire (*guxsé*). Furthermore, animals are associated to Kogi lineages, the messenger bird (Shikaka) alerts travellers, dreams announce life events, complementary night and day reproduce creational ‘darkness’ and ‘dawn’, gold (*ñiuba*) relates to the sun, colours have specific meanings, primary plant specimens (*Kagguba*) regulate all others, and the World Tree is a blueprint for all trees.

Level 5: Since ‘humans are family with everything’ and ‘have the same origin’ (Chapter 5), the Kogi embody levels (1), (2) and (3) in their life cycles and make-up as humans, just as natural-spiritual elements (4) also reproduce them. I mean for example how the Kogi have ‘nine alunas’, the correspondence between body parts and the Sierra’s features, the nine months of pregnancy, or how their thoughts, emotions, and substances serve to pay the previous levels spiritually as shared, nourishing essences. Following the Mamas, this is a socio-ecological web of ontological relatedness and mutual support framed by cosmological organisation.

Level 6: The levels so far (1-5) are honoured, lived, and reproduced through Kogi social organisation, institutions, and practices as an all-pervading, lived ontology. *Mamas*, *Sahas* (knowledgeable women) and *Kuivis* (apprentices) guide the Kogi along the Mother’s ‘mandate’, while *Comisarios* (*Húgukui*) and *Cabos* ensure that this order is adhered to. Kogi lineages (*tuhke*, *dahke*) are arranged according to cosmological structure (1, 2), aligned with the Sierra Nevada and particularly the *ezwamas* (3), and associated to spiritual-natural elements, phenomena, and beings (4). Women and men relate as complementary dualities (darkness/light, moon/sun), and villages act as ‘communities’ (*ñikuma*) of ritual practice. All this is directed by spiritually derived knowledge or *shibuldama* (1, 2) through epistemological procedures (8, below) and specific ecological responsibilities (9) that correspond to the specialisations of each lineage.

Level 7: The human facet of the whole also includes how the cosmological-spiritual levels (1, 2), and partly levels (3, 4), are instantiated in Kogi objects/material culture. The *nuhué* emulates the cosmos, the Sierra Nevada and Nuhuakalda (2), family houses⁹⁶ are like individual mountains, and each village (6) represents the whole mountain range (3). The bags (*gamá/sugamé*) are the ‘Mother’s

⁹⁶ Mama Pedro Juan even said that the small ditch around Kogi houses where rainwater flows away is like the coast/Black Line where rivers flow into the ocean.

womb' and follow the Fabric of Life (1), and the loom and spindle are formed like the Cosmic Base Shkuákalda and the world-axis Kalbəsánkua (2). The *poporo* (or *suggi*) acts as the Mother's body (3) and spiritually accompanies men, coca leaves (*hãñú*) and shell-powder (*nuggi*) relate like mountains and sea (3). *Sewá*⁹⁷ objects mark life-stages (5), strengthen learning processes (8), and connect with Aluna and *shibuldama* (1). Masks impersonate creational characters (*Kalguasha*) (2) and power life-cycles (4), the divining bowl (*zhátukua*) reproduces lakes (3) and contacts truth (1), and coloured stone-beads (*tuma*) pay different natural elements (4) at sacred sites (3). Overall, objects at level (7) are therefore microcosmic reproductions of the lived ontology, channel epistemological practices, and are ways to relate to the Sierra ecologically (9).

Level 8: Levels (5, 6, 7) are informed by epistemological processes and practices whereby knowledge (*shibuldama*) is a cosmological principle and rationale (1, 2) that is ontologically inherent in the world (3, 4). Divination (*íltueld*) guides Kogi life (5) and society (6) by 'consulting' spiritual truths in Aluna (1). Mama apprenticeship ideally happens in cycles of nine years (1), in darkness (1), and in caves (3), thereby accessing teaching spirits inside Nuhuakalda (2). The Mamas' knowledge specialties and care-taking practices (9) follow their lineages (5) and *ezwamas* (3). Learning, rituals, meetings, and discussions centre on sacred sites (3) that have knowledgeable 'codes' left by the Spiritual Fathers (2). Male initiation lasts four or nine nights (1), and the Mamas taught me in four topics/stages (1). Men are reminded of the cosmos (2) and the otherworld (3) in the *nuhué* (7), and everyone considers creational stories to be sources of knowledge and presently relevant behavioural guidelines (6). Men concentrate with the *poporo* (7), women think along the life-threads *shi* (1) by knitting bags (7), and branches of knowledge are consolidated by *sewá* objects (7). The Kogi also learn simply by perceiving conscious signs in the natural environment (3, 4), and in general knowledge is exalted as the object of life, granting social standing (6).

Level 9: Finally, *shibuldama* (1) and the epistemology (8) teach that adhering to cosmological principles (1, 2) and relating to the Sierra Nevada (3, 4) via a lived ontology (5, 6, 7) is a matter of maintaining ecological relations and cosmic balance. Following the cosmic-natural order (1, 2, 3, 4) through the body (5), social institutions and living patterns (6), material culture (7), and knowledge acquisition (8), ultimately serves care-taking practices that sustain all nine levels. Centred around reciprocity/exchange (*shaldá*) and nourishment (1), the Kogi's so-called 'spiritual tasks' include ritual ceremonies like *kualdama*, payments (*z#biel*), confession (*aluna ishguashi*), dancing and singing (*kuñzihi*), 'naming', and 'baptising'. This perceived moral and ecological responsibility as 'Elder Brothers' set by the Mother's 'mandate' (1) is to live by the 'Law of Origin' (1). To thus be 'in

⁹⁷ Introduced in Chapter 1.

agreement' (*zhuluká*) (1), the Kogi also base themselves on certain capacities and *knowledgeable states of being* or onto-epistemological dispositions. These include clairvoyance (*ubastunka*), the mutual support of marriage (*sewá*), interpreting dreams (*kabizhi tueld*), 'thinking well' (*aluna hanguté*), being 'well-seated' (*i té*), 'giving counsel', or 'being knowledgeable' (*shibuldama akué*). In this logic, the order and balance of Kogi society and of the Sierra form an interdependent whole.

7.3.3. Teaching interrelated layers by overview

More specifically, any given element discloses a microcosm of relations in the system. The *poporo* (or *suggi*) is a good example, as Reichel-Dolmatoff (1987b) also recognises. The *poporo* (7) represents the Mother's body (3) and is spiritually female (1), so that the masculine (1) stick (phallus) (5) is inserted into a 'womb' (5). Men thus 'eat' the *poporo* by chewing the female coca leaves (*hãñú*) (7), picked by their wives in a supporting marriage (6). Reichel-Dolmatoff missed how, more ecologically, the shell-powder (*nuggi*) (7) represents the sea (3) and the leaves the mountains (3), embodying that complementarity in Zaldziwê's story (2), and thereby the cosmological orders of inside-outside, above-below (1). Reichel-Dolmatoff did report that the *poporo*'s stick also reproduces the world-axis *Kalbəsánkua* (2), and hence the women's spindle (7), making the gourd-container the Cosmos and the Earth (3), like Kogi bags also are (7). For all these reasons, the *poporo* serves to 'think well' (*aluna hanguté*) (9), be knowledgeable (*shibuldama akué*) (9), and contact the Mother (1). Creating a gradually expanding, circular coating of coca-saliva-lime paste by rubbing the gourd is like 'writing one's thoughts'. Adding to Reichel-Dolmatoff's insights, these growing layers of paste reproduce cosmological concentricity and outward development (1) from the axis mundi (2). Understanding the *poporo* then, requires being familiar with: the nature of Kogi knowledge, the cosmic structure, what 'the Mother' means, gender relations, the sea's creation/story, ritual uses of the coca leaf, or the role of the *nuhué* and sacred sites for using the *poporo*.

The Mamas exhibited the organisation here discussed in the way they taught it to me, expressing the system's multilayered equivalences and interrelations with e.g. analogies, comparison, or by expressing something in different ways. For instance, 'damning a river is like tying up a human vein', and 'destroying a hill is like demolishing a house'. Mama Manuel and Mama Luntana's model illustrated how the Universe, the Sierra, and the *nuhué* are respectively macro-, meso-, and microcosmic levels. *Kalbəsánkua* was described as a Cosmic Pillar, a World Tree, and a caring Father all in one. Mama Shibulata's narratives were simultaneously stories, cosmological principles, teachings, ontological explanations, examples, social customs, and environmental problems. Mama Manuel even explicitly indicated the system's fractal patterning in Chapter 4: given

the three parallel orders of a) nine cosmic layers b) nine planets, and c) nine earths, he explained that each level of each order is (micro-cosmically) unique, but simultaneously holds aspects of the other eight within itself. Consequently, only together do these orders and layers form the universe, just as all nine levels of analysis discussed above comprise the functioning system. Mama Manuel stated that this cosmic structure also implies an ecological interdependence of mutual sustenance.

This complexity shows why the Mamas taught me by overview, and why they continuously stress maintaining order between interrelated parts of a whole. Moreover, it may be said that the three Mamas presented current environmental and social issues as basically negative manifestations of, or alterations to, each of the nine levels and its principles, components, forces and relations. In terms of this interrelatedness, disruption is a holistic matter (Chapter 8). According to the Mamas' stories, current environmental and social problems (including Younger Brother) recreate past creational conflicts, which have therefore served as cautionary warnings of potential future disorder, disclosing the system's temporality. Altogether, the preceding fractal model allows to integrate and overview the system's many interrelated components according to its own organisation and rationale. Each individual aspect does not make sense if not related to that wider scheme of things, both *horizontally* within each level, and *vertically* across the levels. Because explaining one level or component implies constantly referring to others, the whole can be partly appreciated at every level or component, which contain features of all nine levels, and thus reproduce the overall order.

As I have indicated, the nine levels are simultaneously a cosmological, ontological, epistemological, and ecological matter. While these Four Concepts are relevant at each level to varying degrees, in Kogi realist terms there is a rough, overall progression along the Four Pillars (Origin, Order, Function, Relationality). The system *originates* in spiritual truths, principles, agencies, and forces that constitute a determining cosmological realm or structure (1, 2). As a conscious and knowledgeable creational process, this manifests as being and life in earth, sky, sea, and nature (3, 4, 5). The resulting *order* is reproduced by the Kogi as a lived ontology through social organisation and material culture (6, 7). This ontology is guided by that cosmological knowledge 'left' in things, which teaches the nature and *function* of different creational aspects through Kogi epistemological practices and procedures (8). The epistemology hereby informs how the lived ontology should 'agree' with cosmological principles via Kogi ecology (9), where knowledge serves care-taking rituals and practices that sustain the balancing *relationality* of the cosmos. In what follows, I discuss this creational progression along the Four Pillars to further show how this integrates the Four Concepts.

7.4. A causal, cosmological framework

7.4.1. The Sierra as Sea: cosmological origin

‘In the beginning, a plan was thought for the world, a vision, a process, an order, a way of behaving, which is to be followed. [For example], payments weren’t invented or created by us, this is a practice that was constituted as such from the origin’.

According to this young Wiwa man called Saul, this ‘thought’ is shared by all Four Peoples, who follow slightly different strands from the same source. They all originate in the Sierra Nevada as their unified Ancestral Territory (*Territorio Ancestral*). Especially Chapter 3 exposed the notion of spiritual emergence out of a dark profundity or nothingness called Sé, when the Mother was pure potential and thought as a primordial ‘Sea’. Chronologically, this was hence the first Kogi notion of the *whole*. Following this universal *origin*, things developed and diversified, having their individual origins in certain ‘Mothers’ and ‘Fathers’ who created or ‘gave birth’ to them at corresponding sacred sites, which illustrates the basic Kogi understanding of unity and variety. Instantiating this cosmogony, Kogi Mamas often start narratives by saying ‘in the beginning...’, thereby explaining, interpreting and justifying conversations, ideas, arguments and current situations. The Kogi recreate primordial, spiritual darkness in daily life by e.g. telling creation stories at night in the *nuhué* (Chapters 3, 4), and generally understand what they do as being ‘of origin’ (*de origen*) or ‘ancestral’. Moreover, they follow the Mother’s ‘mandate’ as her ‘first children’.

Origin, the first of the Four Pillars, thus combines *primordiality* with *wholeness*, and is the most fundamental Kogi principle, initiating the Mamas’ Four Topics. To index this all-imbuing sense of creational *causality*, the concept of *cosmology* is most suitable, capturing the strong Kogi emphasis on the reasons and background for why things are the way they are, including their traditions. Every aspect the Mamas presented, across all levels, was given its source, its place, and its purpose, be it the actions of Father Seizhankua, the role of trees, or the significance of the *poporo*. Considering this determining cosmological scheme of things in my analysis is crucial in overcoming the ontological pluralism critiqued in Chapter 2, for then it becomes harder to talk of indeterminate “life-worlds”. In Kogi terms, if everything has an *origin*, it is also part of an *order* and has a *function* in the wider *relationality* between life’s different aspects. In other words, creational origins determine the nature and order of being through a knowledgeable process whose function is to ensure the balance and sustenance of things. Accordingly, Kogi cosmology defines how they should recreate being (the

ontology), know being (the epistemology), and relate to and sustain being (the ecology), according to its principles.

Since the 'Mother' is said to have 'spun' and 'woven' the world while 'thinking', Kogi causality is driven by consciousness, agency, and intentionality. In this light, the cosmological is closely related to what they call 'the spiritual' realm, where things were conceived, foreseen, and planned 'in Aluna' before obtaining their current (material) form. As I understand it, if 'Sé' is the dark origin and potential of everything, the Mother is what gives the cosmos a *living* and relational quality, and 'Aluna' is the conscious spirit by which the world was created and still 'thinks'. As in the Andes, supernatural agencies like the Kogi Spiritual Fathers and Mothers '[shaped] the landscape, giving it meaning, taking possession of certain elements, and then governing and deciding the destiny of nature [and] humans' (Castro 2001: 77). The world is thus inhabited (Castro and Adulate 2003: 78). As universal consciousness, Aluna pervades and enlivens the material plane, whether as original spiritual essences (e.g. black water/black food, Chapters 3, 6), invisible connections between sacred sites, or conscious natural phenomena. Aluna influences everything the Kogi say and do, including spiritual consultations (divination, *iltueld*), confession (*aluna ishguashi*), 'thinking' like the Mother, things happening 'in Aluna', or communicating with Spiritual Fathers. Whether in terms of rationality, causality, space, time or the unseen/intangible, Aluna is significantly what makes Kogi reality postulates radically different/alien for "Western" audiences. In summary, *cosmology* can denote the system's generative, causal, conscious, agential and spiritual qualities.

7.4.2. The Sierra as House: cosmological structure

Especially in Chapter 4, the three Mamas introduced me to the basic building blocks and scaffolding of the cosmos as they claim to know it, consciously describing this macro-structure as a totality with its base, axis mundi, cross, nine levels, etc. Mama Luntana and Mama Manuel's model was complemented with Mama Shibulata's narrative about its planning and building by the 'Four Fathers' as 'architects'. This structure then, constitutes a complete *cosmological framework* largely not available to Andean ethnography in this scope and detail beyond its already discussed manifestations in the landscape. This framework situated and contextualised everything else the Mamas said in the Core Chapters, and disclosed basic organising principles of the system, such as unity and variety. As the vertical middle and horizontal centre of the cosmos, the Sierra Nevada embodies this cosmic structure by e.g. having nine altitudinal levels and 'earths', and is thereby a model for the wider Earth and the nine planets (Chapter 4). The Mamas expressed this structured holism by comparing the Sierra to a Cosmic *House* with all its components, both outside and inside (the realm of Nuhuakalda).

Being part of the cosmological, this framework of the system is closely related to the generative, processual, causal principles discussed earlier. After all, this structure is the *origin of form* along which things emerged and developed in orderly, conscious fashion. Creation initially arose *upwards* from an *internal*, spiritual darkness and ‘opened up’ through the high lakes, from where it conversely expanded *downwards* and *outwards* and gradually materialised until the world’s ‘dawn’. Verticality thus combines with horizontality, which in turn integrates concentricity (or circularity) with the rectangularity of the supporting Cosmic Base/Cross (Shkuákalda), and this orients the cardinal directions, the Kogi loom, etc. Moreover, darkness, spirit, profundity, and interiority are associated to the Sierra and the ‘Elder Brothers’, whereas light, materiality, surface phenomena, and exteriority pertain to Younger Brother’s realm beyond the Black Line.

One might argue that the structured categories, analogies, and patterns through which the Kogi, like Andeans, perceive and classify the world invoke Lévi-Strauss’ (1963a, 1963b) structuralism. In this view, the Kogi “logic” and its complex arrangement of “concepts” could be elicited as a matter of linguistic and mental rules and associations underlying others like kinship. This may include duality, complementary opposition, or reciprocity, much discussed by Lévi-Strauss and in Andean ethnography (Gelles 1995), his work having inspired structuralist analysis in the region. Descola (1992: 110) describes this as the idea that people ‘objectify’ nature and their relations with it through ‘mental procedures’ and ‘modes of representation’ that have roots in ‘cognitive universals’ and lead to ‘folk taxonomies’. In Kogi realist terms however, structure is *not* primarily a conceptual classification of things deriving from Kogi thought, or a mental construct. Neither would the system be a way of, following Ingold’s (2000) critique, mapping cultural meanings unto nature.

According to the Mamas, structures, associations, and patterns derive from the Mother’s own Fabric of Life. She ‘thought’ the world and generated its “concepts”, which in this sense are rather cosmic *principles* that organise things. After all, Aluna is taken to be the primary aspect of reality that shapes the physical world, which would be the *opposite* of the idea that humans conceptualise it. It is in this sense that the Kogi are said to have their own ‘nine alunas’ for example, shaping their thought and actions accordingly. Contrary to classic structuralist analysis then, in this case structure would not be “in here” but “out there”. Following the Kogi, it is a cosmologically predetermined organisation that crystallises in both nature and society and tangibly frames and regulates things as a set of real, ecological relations. Rather than things in nature being mainly ‘good to think with’ (Lévi-Strauss 1963b: 89), they are *practically* ‘good to relate and sustain’.

7.5. The interweaving of ontology and epistemology

7.5.1. The Sierra as Government: ontological order

In Kogi terms, cosmological origin, pre-determination, and structure imply *Order*, the second of the Four Pillars, which crystallises in the arrangement of the Sierra Nevada as indicated above. More specifically, the Mamas' stories emphasised how mythical characters 'organised' (*siagawĩ*) things for specific reasons. Sacred sites for example, were established and distributed by Seizhankua in a particular pattern or network based on their associations to Spiritual Fathers/Mothers. This arrangement includes topographical features, natural elements, Kogi lineages, and their knowledge specialisations and ecological rituals in the Sierra-Kogi whole. Mama Manuel concisely and directly expressed *cosmological structure* as an *ontological order* of being through his analogy of the Sierra Nevada as 'Government' (Chapter 4). He thereby consciously explained how the Sierra, with its 'president' and 'ministries', is understood to be a global centre of organisation, connecting to other regional centres (i.e. mountains, sacred sites) as 'governorates' and 'mayoralities'. Kogi society then, is understood to be part of this Government or 'family'. According to the Mamas, human social relations, patterns, units, and functions are a subset or particular class of wider natural structures and phenomena, in turn constitutive of an overall cosmic coherence and 'governance'.

Descola's (2013: 121) elaborate model of 'four major types of ontology' among human groups can help to make sense of the complex order and logic of Kogi holistic realism, yet based on my observations, in general it cannot be reduced to any one of these modalities. At first glance, the Kogi seem analogists (4th ontology), given the multiple layers of associations and correspondences where beings are unique compositions of various comparable features. Contrary to Descola's view, here beings/things do hold elements of each other within themselves in overall, continuous patterns by virtue of a shared cosmogony he seemingly neglects for analogism. The Kogi lineage rationale also presents totemic qualities (3rd ontology), similar to e.g. Australian Aborigines. Human collectives are associated to, or as Descola says identified with, particular groups of non-human elements as 'families' originating from common ancestors and particular places, constituting chains of being that share qualities and dispositions in a layered, even fractal expression of general structures (2013: 296). These Kogi collectives are not discontinuous, self-contained, 'ontological enclosures' (ibid.: 399) however – the relations of cosmic-natural-social elements *within* groups are similar to all groups, coupled in turn with specified relations *between* groups across their corresponding categories.

At the same time, the Kogi system also exhibits animist characteristics (1st ontology), based on how all beings in the cosmos share a continuity of spirit, intentionality or 'thought' as persons, which manifests as different bodies, natural elements, and ways of being alive. Nonetheless, as I have indicated this does not quite entail a pluralistic multinaturalism in Viveiros de Castro's sense, but leans more towards Descola's perhaps more monistic portrayal of animism. Finally, the Kogi can even be considered naturalists (2nd ontology), since they continuously emphasise a unitary world or "nature" in an arguably essentialist manner, stressing its predefined, overall order. One difference though, is that this is not separated from an immaterial realm of variable human cultures.

In other words, Kogi holistic realism would be composed of aspects of all four of Descola's (2013) modalities, and therefore seems to transcend them. Beyond these distinctions then, which Sahlins (2004) argues variously overlap in different societies to varying degrees anyway, in his words all things in the Kogi cosmos would be something like unique, overall compositions or instantiations of 'cosmocratic god-persons' (2014: 282). All things are children of the *Kalguasha*, the spiritual fathers and mothers. Yet before them, it is the universal 'Mother' that is the original source or model of all unity and variety, all substance and form, and all spirit and matter. Her manifestation as the overarching, primary Sierra-person is a blueprint for all other beings, thereby *integrating* difference and hence the cosmological, human, spiritual, and environmental *via* the structured territory. Beings are different but *whole organisms* in a whole environment as Ingold (2000) would put it, who share both body and mind (spirit). Yet in this *system*, the environment *is* the cosmos, and organisms *are* the Sierra's cosmological *organisation*. It is in this sense that we can understand Mama Manuel's notion of 'Government' and the Kogi's position in it as a way of expressing order, the second Pillar.

As suggested previously, in Kogi realist terms the analogies and associations of the system would not amount to representational "schemas" in Descola's (2013: 92) sense, 'deeply internalized [...] cognitive and corporeal templates that govern the expression of an ethos'. Rather, human structures like lineages, architecture, or the stages of learning, are what I call *ontological correspondences* with non-human structures like valleys, cosmic levels, or sacred sites. The role of the landscape as an ordered manifestation of cosmic order is not much considered in Descola's four models, which also constantly ties the ontological aspect to a practical ecological significance. Relating to and reproducing this order as presented in the Core Chapters, is what we may call the Kogi lived ontology. It is a coherent way of being manifest in all details of life, along the lines of Smith's (1998) holistic account of 'Chipewyan ontology'. Smith (1998: 427) describes very pertinently how this is embedded in a reality constituted by a 'multifaceted communicative interrelationship between human and nonhuman beings'. According to this 'monistic' ontology then, one needs to understand and harmoniously engage with that reality, and like the Kogi, the Chipewyan base this on

environmental awareness and *knowledge* (Smith 1998: 427). This also bears resemblance to Hallowell's (2002 [1960]: 19) earlier definition of Ojibwa ontology as a 'unified phenomenal field of thought, values, and action'. This brings out how the Kogi *heed* the storm's warning, *play* the jaguar's song, *feel* the power of the peaks, *respect* the lakes, *listen* to a bird's message, or *learn* from the sacred sites.

Yet in line with the above, the Kogi way of perceiving the environment and 'being-in-the-world' goes beyond the daily, sensorial experience and learning that Ingold (2000) focuses on in this respect. It also involves a direct *embodiment* of more transcendental cosmological structures, manifested in the landscape, in the form of those *ontological correspondences*. As explained earlier in my layered analysis, Kogi ontology (levels 5-7) is the way to understand and reproduce cosmological principles as an order of being through social organisation, institutions, objects, and practices. More than Kogi society "having an ontology" then, it would seem that Kogi society *is* the ontology, inextricable from the Sierra Nevada as the being or "onto" that regulates the "logy". Immutable and predetermined, this order is also dynamic and interactive, transcendent yet immanent, both abstract and practical. The Kogi understanding of being is also their corresponding way of being. Mama Manuel's notion of 'Government', also captures well the sense of *Functionality* (the third Pillar) inherent to this order, of a purposeful and knowledgeable *administration of* ecological relations, which the Mamas claim to maintain as an interrelated whole. In this sense, organisation *is* regulation, and ontology *is* ecology (see Section 6).

7.5.2. The Sierra as World Tree (and Fabric of Life): epistemology and functionality

This *Function* of the system's constituent elements, the third Pillar, is taught by Kogi knowledge, *shibuldama*. For the Kogi, knowing the way things are, their order, and how they work, is closely tied to knowing what *role* they have in the whole, which includes Kogi society. In other words, Kogi epistemology (level 8) is what guides and informs Kogi ontology (levels 5-7) in reproducing or adhering to the cosmos and being (levels 1-4). In this sense, knowledge and the rationale of Kogi epistemology are understood to be cosmological principles derived from the spiritual realm (levels 1, 2), thus being part of the ontological order established there. Aluna then, is where the Kogi obtain truths and knowledge from, whether through divination (*iltueld*) or in caves from the Nuhuakalda realm. This was clearly conveyed through the notion of cosmic threads *shi* as diversifications of knowledge *and* being from a *common* cosmological origin, i.e. the Mother's 'thought' (Chapters 4, 5). When knitting, women therefore 'think' bags like the Mother 'spun' and 'wove' the world from the bag's centre, and men do this while weaving clothes on the loom or using the *poporo*. Since as I

showed the structure of bags, the loom, and also the spindle reproduce the cosmos, in Kogi terms *shibuldama* is structure, and structure is thought. The “architectural” structure of the cosmos is at the same time the ‘Fabric of life’ (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1978f) that weaves everything together.

Mama Manuel and Mama Luntana also captured all of this through the figure of the World Tree Kalbəsánkua (Chapter 5), being another way of conveying the *whole*, and thus uniformity and diversity. Its structured, ramifying branches of creational development are also threads of knowledge, having a common source in the trunk that the Four Fathers ‘planted’ and ‘grew’ from the spiritual depths of creation. The Tree stands on the Cosmic Base-cross Shkuákalda, which is at once 1. the roots of the Tree, 2. the blueprint for the Kogi loom, and 3. its centre is also the centre of the Cosmic Bag and thus of the Fabric of Life. More than that, the World Tree model shows how this is a biological, relational organisation. After all, the Mamas explained how Kalbəsánkua sustains the Earth and all its things, which are ‘leaves’ and ‘flowers’ that grow along its branches and need to be ‘watered’. Following Chapter 6 moreover, the different Spiritual Fathers and Mothers (*Kalguasha*) learned these different branches of knowledge to create and organise things as the first ancestral *Kuivis* (apprentices). The result became ‘teachings’ about the world which they deposited or ‘confessed’ at sacred sites as ‘codes’, power, and knowledge, therefore contained in things themselves, inherent to the being they created. These teachings were hereby passed on to Kogi *Kuivis* in a genealogical succession that instantiates the *top-down* epistemological sequence discussed in Chapter 2.

As another version of the epistemology, Kogi creational stories also deliver these teachings but in narrative, instructive form. By presenting creation as a series of events, actions, and relationships involving various persons in a very *social* manner, they relate *shibuldama* and its ‘threads’ more clearly to moral and behavioural lessons for the Kogi. In this way, stories are the temporal, historical aspect of the system, guiding the present according to patterns established in the past, which are simultaneously cautionary indications for the future. Morality, behaviour, and sociality are hereby combined with truth, ‘thought’, and knowledge. Together, these constitute what may be defined as Kogi ecology. Overall, stories are charters to navigate and apply the Four Pillars of the system, disclosing at once the origin, order, function, and relation between things. They are an epistemological practice that reminds the Kogi of cosmological principles, explains their ontological implications, and teaches the maintenance of these principles as an ecological responsibility. As José Manuel said in Chapter 4, ‘everything is in the stories’. This underlies the strong Kogi emphasis on

memory (Chapter 1), and the social esteem attached to learning stories by heart (Oyuela-Caicedo 1986, Reichel-Dolmatoff 1950c), both seen as knowledge.

Following Chapter 2, Kogi ontology and epistemology are hence inseparable. For this reason, as I have shown the content and form of the Mamas' sessions were equally one. Moreover, both things are structured by the cosmology in a single, conscious, and intentional creational process. In Kogi terms, the cosmos as the Mother has its own epistemology and teaches its own knowledge, as was also instantiated in the sessions. For them, this epistemology is by definition the medium and the way to access cosmic principles and spiritual truths in Aluna, and this requires learning from or through being (i.e. caves, spirits, sacred sites, thunder, messenger bird, *nuhué*, etc.).

Furthermore, Mamas Shibulata, Manuel, and Luntana all indicated that knowledge should always have the purpose or *function* of keeping things in balance, of sustaining the *order* of the world. For them, knowing cosmological principles leads to caring, and caring ensures a good life. *Shibuldama* may thus be described as the 'path' (*hiúnguldê*) for a knowledgeable, ecological, and moral way of being. In this light, Reichel-Dolmatoff explains that 'the object of the life of the Kogi is "to know much." ' (1950: 216). This knowledge, he continues, has the ultimate purpose of guaranteeing the functioning of the universe, which depends in all its detail on observance of their laws and tradition. Kogi culture thus 'orient(s) the individual towards this path' (ibid.: 219). Epistemology serves the ecology by teaching the cosmology and how to live it ontologically.

7.6. The knowledgeable, ecological regulation of being

7.6.1. The Sierra as Organism: nature and society as one *being*

Throughout the Core Chapters the Mamas referred to the Sierra as the Mother's body, complete with all its interrelating parts. The snow-peaks are the head, rivers are veins and/or sweat, lakes are eyes, trees are hair, oil is blood, foothills/the coast are its supporting feet, caves are bodily holes, etc. This (fractal) meta-analogy of the body was perhaps the most recurrent Kogi definition of the *whole*, and the most direct way to present it as a *living* and conscious being. Moreover, the Mamas' *chronological* progression along the Four Topics to follow the development of creation, simultaneously narrated what for them is the *formation* of a/this person, indicated especially by Mama Luntana. After first being spirit and 'thought', the person/Sierra assumes a liquid form (Water), then she becomes bones and flesh (Earth), after which she grows skin and hair (Trees and vegetation), and finally she is ready to feed and be fed (Nourishment) as a full organism. Through the

close, overlapping, and organised association of human and non-human elements on the Sierra along the nine levels of the system as described above, the Kogi consider themselves fully and intricately part of this organism and its functioning. While he did make reference to certain Kogi analogies between parts of the Sierra and parts of the Mother's body, Reichel-Dolmatoff (1950c, 1951d, 1978f, 1990f) did not provide an overall, integrated analysis of this model.

Joseph Bastien's (1978, 1985) detailed account of such a model among the Qollahuaya People in Midwestern Bolivia provides a useful comparison. He reports that these people integrally understand and relate to their mountain as 'one geographical and anatomical unit'. It is divided into three main vertical levels, proceeding along the head, eyes, mouth, heart, stomach, legs, toenails, etc., and includes the mountain's inner fluids. According to this 'topographical-hydraulic model' (1985: 596), Qollahuayas understand the physiology of their own bodies, and also organise their descent groups (*ayllu*), who 'belong[...] together' with the land. The three levels are also ecological zones where different communities live, which are 'organically united' through 'kinship ties, common earth shrines, and exchange' (ibid.). This characteristic 'organic wholeness' or 'ethnophysiology' shares structural similarities to other Andean regions (Bastien 1985). In northern Chile, the Earth is also a human being with organs and parts (Castro and Adulate 2003). By contrast, while in the Amazonian lowlands cosmological meanings and 'conceptions' also socially and environmentally interrelate human and non-human bodies, there the emphasis is on their *transformation* and permeability (Rival 2005: 107, 108). In this (arguably more "horizontal") ontology of perspectives and parallel 'natures' (Viveiros de Castro 1998), 'impermanence [is] the cosmos' absolute ruler' (Rival 2005: 105). The more Andean-like ("vertical") Kogi ontology however, stresses cosmologically predetermined orders and relations and therefore *permanence*, so that the ecology focuses on maintaining them *as they are*.

In this light, the Mamas also stressed the organism's *spiritual* aspect, the Sierra as a *thinking person* with a soul, identified as the inner realm of Nuhuakalda (Chapter 4). This guides the Sierra-organism's "physiological" processes, just like the Aluna of humans is what enlivens their bodies. It is this spirit that makes the Sierra a life-giving Mother, similar to how Andeans speak of Pachamama (Bastien 1985, Castro and Aldunate 2003, Harris 2000). 'She is in there [Nuhuakalda]', said Mama Luntana. Furthermore, beyond the Qollahuayas' local mountain (Bastien 1978, 1985), for the Kogi the whole Sierra Nevada mountain *range* is an organism. Yet ultimately, it is the entire world that is a body, where following Mama Manuel different landmasses/continents are different parts. At this level, the Sierra-organism becomes the 'Heart of the World', the most important organ regulating "bodily" flows like the global spiritual water cycle (Chapters 3, 4). According to the Mama, other

regions/parts are 'copies' of this primary 'Centre'. These scales and reproductions again sound like a fractal arrangement. Consequently, the 'analogous qualities between Andeans and their environment' (Bastien 1985: 598), would in this case be 'analogous qualities between the Kogi and the cosmos'. As I explained, humans e.g. have nine *alunas*, the invisible cross connecting hipbones and collarbones resembles the Cosmic Base, the world-axis is also phallic, etc. In this organismic logic, cosmological principles order both Kogi and Sierra ontologically *as a defined set of ecological relations* to be kept in 'agreement' (*zhuluká*).

7.6.2. The life of the Organism

The Kogi notion of structure as a living, organic set of relations then, entails its persistence over time. To borrow Radcliffe-Brown's (1935: 395, 396) well-known formulation as a purely descriptive aid, for the Kogi the structure of the organism entails a 'life-process [that] consists of the activities and interactions of [its] constituent units'. Consequently, 'the life of [the] organism is conceived as the functioning of its structure', the *continuity* of which 'preserves' the 'continuity of the structure', and maintains its 'overall integrity'. The stability of the Kogi-Sierra whole is understood to be based on an overall *order* where each part serves a *function* in sustaining this organism. The Kogi's third Pillar then, Functionality, is directly tied to the inherently *ecological* purpose of the system, most clearly expressed through the figure of the living Organism, which emphasises the fourth and last Pillar, *Relationality*.

After all, Mama Shibulata stated explicitly (Chapter 4) that the Four Fathers erected the cosmic structure to make the world 'strong and stable', and the Earth in turn 'fertile, plentiful, and full of life'. The World Tree as cosmic structure clearly instantiates this purpose. Moreover, the primary cosmological complementarity of the spiritual and material planes that pervaded the Mamas' teachings, is also a basic ecological interdependence. As *mediators* here, the Mamas give back to the spiritual side its life-giving sustenance of the physical plane through payments, dances, and communal confessions as 'nourishment' (Chapter 6). Other structural dualities, such as female/male, darkness/light, moon/sun, cold/warm, or above/below, can be seen as derivatives of the primary cosmo-ecological interaction between the spiritual and the material, whose necessary communicative feedback or reciprocity ensures life and growth. Beyond physical interventions as in mainstream ecology, in Kogi terms they regulate things primarily by spiritual, no less pragmatic measures.

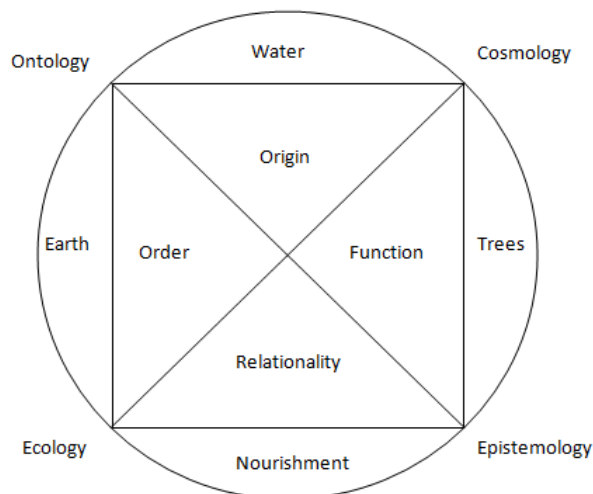
Similarly, as indicated earlier Mama Manuel clarified that the order maintained by the 'Government' serves the ecological regulation of life, just as human governments should ensure

collective well-being. By making payments and other ‘spiritual practices’ along the network of sacred sites, the Mamas monitor cosmological structure as condensed in the order of the landscape, keeping it steady as governmental *administrators*. As we saw, each sacred site fulfils a specific function in this order by being related to different Spiritual Fathers and natural elements. This is in turn associated to Kogi lineages, and the Mamas’ knowledge specialisations that epistemologically guide how each lineage contributes to care for certain aspects/parts of the whole organism. Overall, in Kogi terms cosmological structure *is* ontological order, which *is* ecological balance. Kogi ontology then, would simultaneously be an ecology that maintains the functioning, balance, and continuity of the system as a knowledgeable set of practices. Reichel-Dolmatoff (1974b) explains that in Kogi culture the balancing of forces is the principal problem of the human condition, based on which the Mamas maintain the order of the universe. Kogi cosmology therefore orients individual and collective behaviour towards this equilibrium. Practices such as payments and dances, would hence not be “rituals” separate from ordinary life. Rather, *all* of Kogi society is ecological, just as beyond the sacred sites the whole Sierra is a ‘sacred mountain’ (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1990f).

7.7. The Mother and the Law

As we can see, the Four Concepts (cosmology, ontology, epistemology, ecology) are all inextricably interrelated in the Kogi *system*, to the point of being *one*, inseparable within this *holistic realism*. This is the case whether seen in terms of the Mamas’ rhetoric (section 1), my nine-layered (fractal) elucidation (Section 3), or the Four Pillars and Kogi versions of the *whole* (sections 4-6). It is all based on how the Sierra and the Kogi form a unity, making these Four Concepts merely analytical distinctions that help to conceive and define this integration.

Figure 7.1: The interrelated structure of the Kogi system as represented through their own four-fold cosmic model (see Chapter 4). The Four Concepts are external tools to conceive what is already there, combining the three frames of reference (Kogi, anthropology, “Western”).



The Kogi understanding of the whole as Organism, is in a way what its other versions “boil down” to, mirroring the overall, creational development or chronological progression in the Mamas’ teachings (Section 1). Things gradually took form and became more dynamic, from the purely spiritual ‘Sea’, to the more defined ‘House’, to the living ‘Tree’, to the Sierra as tangible, nourishing Organism. Following the Mamas’ stories, this Organism would be the only purely *physical* manifestation of the whole. It is concentrated in the middle and fifth cosmic level, which is correspondingly also the only physical one, and hence *the most important* of the nine levels that regulates the others, as Mama Manuel said. While embedded in a wider cosmological framework, Kogi ecology is nevertheless strongly focused on this tangible, earthly existence. Creational principles and structures define the order of being as a knowledgeable process whose function is to regulate its relations. Kogi cosmology, ontology, and epistemology are all geared towards the ecology, which in turn stabilises the first three in a self-sustaining arrangement. By regulating this all-important, central territory moreover, the Mamas claim to stabilise the whole cosmic structure on which it depends.

The system then, is more than the Sea, the Cosmic House, the Government, the World Tree, the Fabric of Life, and the Organism. They are rather different facets of the whole, different sides of the same prism. As in my fractal analysis, at this macro stage each of these models also contains elements of the others within itself, and only together do they constitute what may be called *the system*. In Kogi terms, the system *is* the Mother, and thereby simply the universe as a living totality. The Mother is the common denominator in all Kogi models, which integrates all the system’s structures, associations, and fractal orders. She *was* the initial Sea, and ‘thought’ the Cosmic-House, which is also her ‘Egg’ (Chapter 4). Her sons, the Spiritual Fathers, thereby organised everything as the ‘Government’, and planted the World Tree, being also her life-giving ‘umbilical cord’. The Fabric of Life as bag is simultaneously Her ‘womb’, and the loom is where She wove the world. She did all this to finally *become* the Organism, the Sierra, Her physical manifestation. In other words, she thought, built, organised, planted, and wove things *in order to* enliven and sustain them.

If the system is the Mother, the Law of Origin is what for the Kogi stipulates how it works, being Her guidelines for humans to live accordingly. In this sense, what may be called Kogi ‘cosmo-onto-epistemo-ecology’ *is* the Law. It is the way to follow, be in, know, and regulate the system. All of this takes concrete form on the ‘Ancestral Territory’ as stage, i.e. the landscape as manifestation of the cosmos. More specifically, sacred sites are the focal points of the system, instantiating the Four Concepts and the Four Pillars. They are places ‘of origin’ that hold creational principles, outline the order of being as a network, contain and ‘teach’ knowledge, and regulate environmental relations around them. As we have seen, this makes sacred sites sources of Kogi cosmological understandings, centres of their ontological practices and institutions, channels for epistemological

procedures, and receptors of care-taking rituals. Being therefore interfaces of the creational and the everyday, the spiritual and the physical, sacred sites link the past, present and future.

Building on Chapter 2, in terms of Kogi *holistic realism* all of this is not a metaphor, and neither would their practices and understandings be mainly symbolic. Despite his insightful analyses, for Reichel-Dolmatoff (1978f, 1987b: 78), 'Kogi thought' 'codes' and 'imbues' nature with 'multireferential [...] configurations of symbolic meanings'. Similarly, for Bastien (1985: 597-599) Andean 'organic wholeness' is ultimately a 'metaphor' for social organisation, a 'projection' of common physiological/anatomical paradigms onto the mountain to understand it. According to the Kogi then, the system is not, in Geertz' (1973: 89, 93) words, a religion as a kind of 'symbolic system' of '[culturally and] historically transmitted pattern[s] of meanings [and] inherited conceptions' that provides a model *of* and a model *for* reality. In this sense, the Kogi are not 'suspended in webs of significance [they] themselves have spun' (Geertz 1973: 5), but in what they perceive as *webs of knowledge*, whereby meaning comes from the conscious world itself as 'teachings'. Rather than attributing human categories unto non-human ones (Descola 2013: 129), for the Kogi the system is inversely about understanding and organising human life in terms of a living, conscious reality (the world) practically related to. The landscape consequently does not 'come alive' by how it is perceived (Castro and Aldunate 2003: 78), but by being recognised as *already alive*, as Harvey (2006: xi) suggests. While for Ingold (2006) this happens in a world-in-formation and not a ready-made one, for the Kogi the world *is* partly ready-made, dynamic and alive yet still 'thought' from 'the beginning'.

Chapter 8

Systemic Eco-Politics

The Core Chapters and the Kogi system as elucidated in Chapter 7 provide a more comprehensive contextualisation and conceptual translation of how Kogi ecology is embedded in their being and knowing, than previous representations. Examples are principles like Aluna; expressions such as ‘in thought’; divination, payments and other practices; the role of Spiritual Fathers/Mothers; or the holistic Kogi relation to the Sierra Nevada. For example, the Kogi Organisation’s (OGT) declaration in Chapter 1 that the Sierra is ‘the physical and spiritual universe with all its components’, which are ‘represented’ in its stones, lakes, and peaks (OGT: 2012: 7), is now more easily understandable. It is also clearer what sacred sites are according to the Kogi, their place in the cosmology and society, their ecological functions, and why they hold knowledge. In this chapter, I am in a more informed position to return to the guiding objective of this thesis. That is, to clarify Kogi eco-political activism and throw more light on some of the difficulties in communication and understanding discussed in Chapter 2.

If cosmological principles are reproduced ontologically and learned through Kogi epistemological procedures to be maintained as ecological relations, how is this deployed politically to address current environmental issues? How do the system’s Four Pillars (Origin, Order, Function, Relationality) influence public debates and encounters over conservation or land? This chapter explores how the Kogi shape their eco-politics, and also translation, according to their knowledge, experiences, and objectives, and how these are presented as being the Sierra Nevada’s. For this purpose, it is necessary to first integrate the ecological issues of damage, disorder, and disease presented by the Mamas, and thereby appreciate how environmental disruption is understood as a holistic matter embedded in the system. In line with their organic interrelation with the Sierra Nevada therefore, I discuss how the Kogi perceive their society as being part of this equally multifaceted destabilisation. To address this, the Kogi Organisation’s structure, functioning and rationale is directed according to the usual principles, practices, and understandings of life on the Sierra Nevada. Seeing this through the lens of ethnic politics, local knowledge, resource management, or even political ontology, I argue, falls short of what is more adequately defined as *systemic eco-politics*. I propose that Kogi environmental activism is directly defined or shaped by the system, and that in these terms the OGT acts as an agent of the conscious Sierra Nevada.

8.1. Destabilising the system

8.1.1. Systemic disruption

As Mama Ramón Gil (1990) states, Younger Brother's actions are ultimately 'a continuous and total violation of *fundamental principles*' (my emphasis) that destroys 'all order'. In the Mamas' terms, destroying the Sierra Nevada threatens the very structure and balance of the world, which they seek to maintain. Mama Shibulata explained that the nine-layered cosmos was created to support the world and life. As I discussed in Chapter 7, cosmological structure serves ecological balance. By this logic, ecological *imbalance* would inversely be a wider disruption of cosmological principles and structures, tearing at the very fabric of being, the *onto*, and disrupting its inherent knowledge. As axis mundi and 'Heart' of the world-organism, the Sierra is accordingly understood as the core of this destabilisation, which affects and is affected by everything else.

In Kogi terms therefore, the stability of the system necessarily implies its potential *instability*. Just as in Kogi terms for example light cannot be without darkness, men without women, or the sun without the moon (and vice versa), so more widely order cannot be without disorder, nor health without disease. If the border (Black Line) between the Sea and the Sierra, which are separate but mutually supporting domains, is weakened harmful forces can transgress their respective spaces. Because of this structural disarrangement, as I show below, many of the OGT's activities are focused on the coastline. For the Mamas, Younger Brother's actions can turn *productive complementary dualities* into *conflicting relationships*. Interrupting the primary cosmological complementarity or feedback between the spiritual and the physical realms, becomes an equally fundamental imbalance.

Since Aluna, the Mother's 'thought', is crucial to life in the system and underlies everything the Kogi say and do, understanding Kogi dynamics of disruption also has to be done with regard to Aluna. Just as for the Kogi it interconnects and imbues nature with agency, spirit, and communication, so does physical damage inversely affect the spiritual realm. Breaking up hills for example, disperses the thought and knowledge inside, which then become harmful forces, and in Chapter 4 Mama Manuel made the analogy that broken sacred sites are 'like a mobile phone that cannot call anymore'. As the Mamas explained moreover, the effects of damage such as diseases travel through Aluna and between sacred sites, spreading and affecting things distant in space and time. For example, mining was said to cause earthquakes and intense sunshine, destroying coastal sacred sites alters the water cycle in different regions, and not paying the Spiritual Fathers diminishes

crops. In this 'ecology of spirit', as I call it, environmental harm is a sentient phenomenon where, as was shown earlier, different agencies variously react to the abuse, warn people, and retaliate.

In this light, Alejo explained in Chapter 3 that the problems and conflicts exhibited in the Mamas' stories enabled creation because they determined how things should and should *not* be through processes of negotiation and compromise. As we saw, while most characters created and organised the world, others enabled potential *disorder* through inappropriate or harmful actions. These negative events were necessary to reinforce the positive, established by means of the interactions between creational characters. Otherwise, José Manuel reflected after finishing the Earth's story, 'the world would be plain/flat, there would be no differentiation'. In Chapter 5 for example, the initial rejection of trees also established their future importance and care. Thus becoming a guide for life, the stories are an epistemology that teaches the Kogi what to be/do and not to be/do for the sake of ecological balance through a lived ontology. The Kogi 'Law of Origin' then, simultaneously specifies what is *unlawful*.

Moreover, the mutual implication of the "good" and the "bad" is also a temporal, causal aspect of the system. My informants emphasised in one way or another that everything has an origin and a function, and so according to them damage, disorder, and disease were equally foreseen 'in Aluna'. The past creation of potential disorder also holds the key to avoiding it in the future, and resolving it in the present. Long before Kogi eco-political activism, Preuss (1926: 47) argued that present and future developments are systematically attributed to Spiritual Fathers as their explanation, 'as if [...] contemporaneous with creational events'.

According to the Mamas then, environmental damage is a disruption of the wider system itself. Understanding this *systemic disruption* in light of Chapter 7, I propose, requires inverting the Four Pillars and all they represent. Origin becomes *disconnection* (from the origin), Order turns into *disorder*, Function is now *malfunction*, and Relationality becomes *disassociation*. Additionally, the Kogi principle of 'agreement' (*zhuluka*) is in this case *disagreement*. The necessary integration of the Four Concepts (cosmology, ontology, epistemology, ecology), is also necessary to understand the system in its holistically destabilised version. To express this, my informants used their ways of referring to the *whole* to explain damage to the Sierra Nevada. They talked about a crumbling 'Ancestral Territory', a destabilised Cosmic 'House', a malfunctioning ontological 'Government', a drying and dying World Tree, and a weakening, suffering Organism. In Kogi terms, these are sides of the same prism or facets of the same core principle: there is a complex and vast mechanism being disrupted in interrelated ways and with diverse effects. Given the structured interdependencies of

the Kogi-Sierra whole, so are ecological problems equally systematic, holistic, multifaceted, and interconnected.

8.1.2. Sacred sites: focal points of destabilisation

As key energetic and spiritual nodes in a network that normally maintains the system, damaging sacred sites is perceived as the most direct way to disrupt that system. The sustaining life-forces of these 'fathers' and 'mothers' are interrupted, weakening the surrounding land, upsetting natural cycles, and generating negative phenomena like storms or epidemics. Hukulwa, considered a 'gate' or 'guardian' who controls vital exchanges between sea and mountains, was presented as a vivid example. In terms of my analytical framework, damaging sacred sites disarranges the cosmologically defined pattern of the landscape, contradicting creational principles 'of origin', and therefore threatening the ontological order of things. The knowledge contained in the sites is also disabled, numbing the conscious epistemology or 'thought' by which the Sierra functions. All of this interrupts and imbalances ecological relations of sustenance. Following Mama Shibulata, 'the [sacred] sites are 'connected with the whole world. We [Kogi] hence see that by destroying them, all sorts of previously unknown [negative] things arrive here, such as various sicknesses'.

In early fieldwork, I described my research to the Kogi Council Governor in his office. Santos instructed me to write a text describing in my view the various difficulties faced by the Kogi nowadays. Based on my experience so far, I wrote this evaluation as comprehensively as possible, which Santos calmly read two weeks later while I waited at his house in Santa Marta. He said that my depiction was generally good, but missed one important aspect: the Kogi's close relationship with the sacred sites, on which they as a people directly depend. Damaging the sites therefore, Santos explained, also affects the Kogi by causing physical weakness, social disorder, spiritual disconnection, and knowledge loss. He described this as an unseen but direct and real energetic effect, indicating that the Kogi's vitality itself derives from those sites, being spiritually intertwined with them. 'The strength to look after and protect our culture is in the ezwamas and other sites, and through that with the Mamas and traditional authorities'. As the OGT (2012: 7) states: 'the norms and principles to maintain life', contained in the sites, ensure 'the equilibrium of the Sierra Nevada', as well as 'the cultural permanence of the four original peoples'.

As the Mamas' sessions later clarified my initial confusion, sacred sites also contain Kogi life-forces related to the creational associations of the lineages. Not only their strength depends on the sites, but also their stories, ceremonies, collective memory, biological cycles, social institutions, and

as Mama Shibulata emphasised, ‘all our ancestors’ knowledge’ held there. In political encounters, Kogi leaders often lack clear terms to explain this, instead saying that their ‘cultural identity’ is based on the sites. Following Chapter 7, broken sites disconnect the Kogi from cosmological principles and origins, and inhibit the epistemological procedures to learn those principles and the function of things, stored there as knowledge and ‘codes’. This disorients the practical, lived ontology by which the Kogi embody and reproduce the Sierra Nevada’s order, and hampers their ecological practices and abilities to regulate the system’s relations. The Mamas also explained earlier that broken sites no longer properly transmit their divinations, payments, and confessions. Following Santos, ‘the situation is so bad that [...] our efforts are becoming useless’. All of this is said to cause more environmental imbalance, which in turn affects the Kogi in the form of disease and social problems.

Using sacred sites as a focal point, the fractal model I developed is helpful to frame and articulate how this systemic disruption happens at all nine levels of the system. Mama Manuel explained in Chapter 4 that because each of the nine cosmic levels, planets, and earths holds elements of the other eight within itself, alteration in one level correspondingly affects the rest. Again, cosmological patterns are ecological relationships. In this light, damaging a sacred site (*level 3*) related to rain (*ñikâlda*) for example, disconnects it from Aluna and cosmic essences such as ‘black water’ (*level 1*). The Mamas cannot hereby communicate with the Father of Rain (*level 2*) through that site and make nourishing payments (*level 9*) to him there. This affects the spiritual water cycle (*level 2*) and therefore physical rainfall (*level 4*). Since Kogi bodies reproduce the Sierra’s body, this also alters the Kogi’s own circulation of fluids (*level 5*). The Kogi lineage (*level 6*) related to water (*ñi*) and tied to the damaged sacred site, is spiritually weakened, cannot properly do rain-related rituals, and loses knowledge and stories about rain (*level 8*). Finally, objects like the Father of Rain’s mask or those white water-related stone beads called *ñikwitsi* (*level 7*) are not effective anymore to make related dances and payments.

8.1.3. The health of the Organism

In Kogi terms, environmental disruption to the Sierra Nevada can also be expressed as a holistic *health* issue affecting the overall functioning of this sentient, thinking, living Organism. Damming a river for example, explained Mariano, ‘is like tying up a vein and causing infestations’. As persons, the Mother and other specific agencies ‘feel’ this damage as pain. Since landmarks are body parts, ‘the Mother is suffering. They have broken her teeth and taken out her eyes and ears. She vomits, she has diarrhoea, she is ill. [...] Does the Younger Brother understand what he has done? Does he?’ (Webb 2001b). Following Mama Luntana, ‘[the Sierra] is already ill, please do not harm it anymore’.

Following Kogi ontological understandings, illness is essentially a physical symptom of a preceding and wider spiritual/ecological imbalance. As said in Chapter 6, illness is also a way for spiritual forces to 'charge' people for the 'debt' of their environmentally harmful actions. In this light, the Mamas explained that physical damage to the earth turns its inherent forces into illnesses that affect humans and animals. As a cosmo-ecological matter, illness is hence a very salient preoccupation in Kogi life (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1950c, 1951d) that continuously must be avoided by harmonising relations with the Sierra. Accordingly, Kogi medicine is mainly *preventive*. Guided by everyday divination (*iltueld*), as the system's administrators the Mamas monitor when, where, and why to make pre-emptive payments to *maintain* things balanced, ensuring health through this reciprocity. If the disease is already there however, they search its spiritual origins/causes and corresponding cures. Given Younger Brother's current destruction however, the Mamas now also consider themselves as the system's repairers, having to carry out more payments than usual. These become rather *reactive* measures to *restore* and ease the resulting debt/imbalance. 'We look after nature', yet because damage is now too great, 'we can no longer repair the world [alone]' (Mama Valencio 1990).

Perceiving themselves as the Mother's 'first children', the Kogi say they have become ill like Her, whose health is their health. In other words, the Sierra's disarticulation is considered to also be the disarticulation of Kogi society and life, both physically and spiritually. By virtue of the association between lineages, landmarks and cosmo-natural elements, Kogi problems such as diseases, decreasing traditions, interpersonal tensions, or knowledge loss, are understood as on type of destabilisation, just as say drought or erosion. If, as explained in Chapter 7, Kogi society or culture is tantamount to Kogi onto-epistemology as a knowledgeable ecological way of being, in their terms ontological disorder *is* social disorder, embodying the Sierra's problems. Damming rivers for example, was said to be directly causing corresponding intestinal problems in Kogi individuals, or altering the landscape to disarticulate the order of Kogi lineages. According to the Mamas moreover, 'a damaged, weakened Sierra produces less animals and crops', creating subsistence problems. Shortly after the coastal site Hukulwa (presented in Chapter 3) was destroyed in 2009, Mama Valencio, considered the greatest Mama of recent times, passed away unexpectedly. Because the *ezwama* he is in charge of (Seizhua) is spiritually connected to Hukulwa below, the Kogi interpretation was that Mama Valencio died from having literally felt and embodied the damage, and from deeply perceiving the consequences.

8.1.4. Alteration and regulation

In summary, whether damage, disconnection, imbalance, disorder, disease, malfunction, failed reciprocity, or disassociation, for the Kogi these are all facets of the same overall disruption of the system. In the Mamas' teachings, their common denominator is *alteration*. I gathered how the Kogi perceive the Younger Brother as someone who changes, mixes, displaces and removes things. By contrast, the Kogi employ knowledge to, ontologically speaking, *maintain things as they are* in ecological balance and according to their cosmologically determined function and place.

Environmental disruption is a question of matter, spirit, and energy out of place. For the Kogi, altering ontological organisation is equal to ecological mismanagement and a failed epistemology that disregards cosmological principles/teachings. Regulating the system now also implies rearranging its modifications.

Negative natural phenomena (e.g. storms, illness, death, or drought) are understood as an interrelated, *three-fold* reaction to this systemic alteration. Firstly, they are the physical *effect* of alteration - the problem or imbalance itself. Secondly, these phenomena are intentional *signs* by the Sierra that something is wrong⁹⁸ - warnings about further consequences (e.g. greater epidemics) if damage or bad behaviour continue. Thirdly, such occurrences are a *vehicle* for conscious, spiritual powers to retaliate abuses, and *reclaim* what is taken from them as an outstanding 'debt' (*shaldá*). A certain Mama for example, specialises in managing earthquakes with a special, powerful stone (*sewá* object, Chapter 1) by which he pays/reciprocates/feeds the Father of Earthquakes. Accordingly, his work is jointly 1. a way to heal or stop the symptom (earthquake), 2. heed its warning, and 3. prevent future telluric reoccurrences by settling the debt that caused it. By 'cancelling debt', the Mamas rebalance things. For them, human-produced debt is growing out of control, further intensified by the Mamas' inability to sufficiently repay it. Colombia's recent catastrophic floods and droughts, for example, are understood as huge 'debt collections'.

When in October 2016 the Caribbean hurricane Matthew brought snow again to the Sierra Nevada's peaks after several years, the public was pleased, especially environmentalists, considering the receding glaciers. Mama Manuel however, while agreeing that the snow was good, explained to me that this was possible *because of* animal and human lives claimed by the hurricane elsewhere, thereby reclaiming Younger Brother's environmental damage. These deaths constituted spiritual 'nourishment/food' for the peaks, which manifested as physical snow. The normal water cycle being

⁹⁸ Mama Luntana compared this to human signals of illness, such as shivering or crying.

disrupted, this was the only way for the Sierra to obtain snow once more. In this seemingly harsh onto-ecology, the principle of reciprocity/exchange can become the enforcement of a strict law. Following Mama Luntana, 'the Mother continuously gives us all we need to live and protect things, yet we just harmfully take it without even paying back? How is that? Before, everything was in its place'. In this consequently *self-regulating*, reactive, retributive system, balance *must* be sought and alteration minimised, including the stability of Kogi society. Because suffering, disease, and death are 'food' for the spiritual realm, the Mamas proactively pay.

8.2. The Sierra Nevada and Kogi eco-politics

8.2.1. Cosmo-social administration

How does the Kogi Organisation concretely deal with this complex, *systemic destabilisation* eco-politically? In which ways is the system enacted through Kogi eco-politics? While the OGT needs to conform to certain governmental regulations and expectations, it is strongly conceived and structured in terms of cosmo-ontological principles, and 'according to our culture' (OGT 2017). As with all Kogi endeavours, the OGT was founded following a series of divinations and ritual preparations by different Mamas, and long conversations in the *nuhués*. The process was guided 'from the origins' and 'in Aluna', as the Kogi say. The Organisation states that 'our duty to maintain unity' derives from a commitment to 'the Law of Origin', and the 'fulfilment of [its] norms and mandates as were assigned to us accordingly' (OGT 2017). This 'legacy of Origin' and its postulates are the 'pillars' for the functionality of Kogi communities and the 'practical running of the Organisation', which the Mamas always remember and insist 'should be maintained' (ibid.). In political encounters and publications, Kogi representatives *always* frame current issues according to Sé, the Mother, Aluna, the Spiritual Fathers, the sacred sites, payments, the Sierra as centre, and the Black Line (OGT 2009, 2010, 2012). Moreover, diagrams representing the OGT partly reproduce the system (next pages).

In Kogi terms, the running of the OGT is primarily *non-human*. Waiting for Mama Luntana in his dusty house, Silvestre (also an OGT representative) explained that in parallel to Kogi meetings at sacred sites, spiritual entities/beings also hold meetings in the otherworld, listen to the Kogi, and give feedback. Similarly, certain rocks outside the *nuhué* are *Comisarios* and *Cabos* that monitor conversations inside. Especially *ezwamas*, Silvestre continued, are 'places that gather, that organise, where decisions are taken'. Consequently, the OGT calls them 'political places' of 'government', therefore being specific centres of regulation in Mama Manuel's wider analogy of the whole Sierra as

'Government'. The necessary negotiation of creational events and rules shown in the Mamas' stories, would in this sense also be a *political* means to achieve cosmological 'agreement' (*zhuluka*) and ecological balance.

As reflected in *Figure 8.3*, the OGT's highest instance is the so-called 'Unity Congress of the Kággaba People'⁹⁹. Composed especially of the Mamas and Elders as knowledgeable spiritual leaders, they speak for the *ezwamas* as conscious non-human agencies, who are *part of* that congress. Next is the 'Council of Kággaba authorities', who are mainly the *Húgukui* or *Comisarios* representing all main river valleys, and thus representing the Kogi lineages. Similar to how they carry out the Mamas' spiritual indications in Kogi villages, the *Comisarios* monitor and discuss OGT projects and issues affecting the Indigenous Reservation¹⁰⁰ as determined by the Unity Congress. Only then comes the practical, administrative running and representation of the Organisation, subordinating modern politics to traditional life on the Sierra. This administration is directed by the Council Governor, Spanish-speaking Kogi 'leaders' and spokespersons, and three Kogi 'coordinators' of three fields of action: Territory, Health, and Education¹⁰¹ (see below). The OGT is assisted by non-Kogi 'advisors' elected by the congress (lawyers, anthropologists, cartographers, and other personnel) who provide support and expertise on bureaucratic, linguistic, legal, and administrative affairs¹⁰². Occasionally, some Mamas descend from the Sierra and sit around the OGT's offices, silently observing what goes on, as in Kogi villages.



Figure 8.1: The OGT's logo as the cosmos' middle cross (fifth level), surrounded by the Black Line, and supported from the four cardinal directions by the four main Spiritual Fathers. The central heart is the Sierra Nevada. Gonawindua mountain is the 'President' of Mama Manuel's 'Government'.

⁹⁹ Kaggaba: Kogi name for themselves.

¹⁰⁰ Resguardo Kogui-Malayo-Arhuaco.

¹⁰¹ This post is currently filled by my already mentioned friend Mariano.

¹⁰² Also secretaries, drivers, etc.

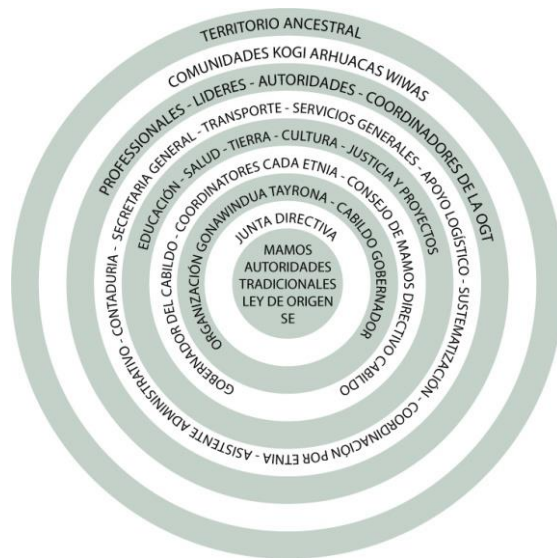


Figure 8.2: The OGT's structure, mirroring cosmic concentricity. An internal, spiritual core (the Law, Sé, the Mamas) expands in order and hierarchy along nine levels, all encompassed by the 'Ancestral Territory'. Mama Manuel's 'Government', is hereby transposed to political, institutional administration. Image provided by Mauricio Blanco.

8.2.2. Practicing onto-political governance

As I witnessed by attending Kogi gatherings, putting into ontological practice the cosmological administration above, OGT activities are guided by divinations with 'Mother Zhátukua' (divination bowl), and regulated by congress/council meetings on the Sierra in the familiar context. As customary, the Kogi consult spiritual agencies and truths 'in Aluna', and base their actions on the Spiritual Fathers' knowledge and powers 'stored' in the sacred sites. Following their structured network, given eco-political issues must be divined, paid for, and balanced at cosmologically corresponding sites. A proposed river dam for example, will involve a sacred site related to water or that specific river, and preparing communications with the state requires visiting the 'Mother of Words'. In the *nuhué*, men discuss and decide external, political affairs in the usual dark and cosmic ambience, concentrating with the *poporo* and connecting with the Mother. By implicating Mamas and *Comisarios* from different Kogi lineages (e.g. Zalabata) and *ezwamas* (e.g. Seizhua), their expertise and responsibility for particular natural elements (in this case 'earth'), as directed by the corresponding Spiritual Father (Seizhankua), is applied to matching external issues (e.g. land negotiations). If a situation involves (representing) the whole Sierra/Kogi, such as a decree about the Indigenous Reservation, a unifying Congress and Council summit will gather Kogi from all lineages, combining their creational associations. For matters concerning a specific valley or village, local meetings are held. Inter-valley or intra-village conflicts and disagreements are also treated during these meetings and solved by divination (*íltueld*).

Kogi sociality and public political engagements then, which like everything else should also be aligned with ‘the Origin’, emulate this primordial, preceding creational order to regulate human affairs accordingly. Spiritual Fathers, sacred sites, rocks, ancestors and other agencies are thus direct, active participants in a wide, very literal ‘cosmo-political’ (De la Cadena 2010) interaction. When put into practice through the OGT, this would constitute a ‘political ontology’ (Di Giminiani 2013). For the Kogi, this implies an organised coordination between the physical and the spiritual realms through epistemological procedures mediated by the Mamas, where agencies on *both* planes seek ecological regulation. The spiritual realm is thus given primary voice and space, as in my own sessions with the Mamas (Chapter 2), being consistent with the principle that ‘everything is first in thought’. The conscious, teaching, sentient nature also invoked in other indigenous movements (De la Cadena, 2010, Di Giminiani 2013, Nadasdy 2007), is in the Kogi case a very structured, predefined, and determining one. Despite modern developments then, the Kogi retain key onto-epistemological practices to access and apply cosmological principles for ecological management through political action. Like other Kogi rituals and institutions, the OGT is tied to the Sierra to shape public encounters and negotiations. Altogether, political issues related to Younger Brother are still embedded in a (Kogi) way of ‘being-in-the-world’ and knowing it directly as advocated by Ingold (2000), firmly placing eco-political activism in the system.

Given the particularly strong spiritual aspect of Kogi eco-politics, they do not partake in mobilisations, direct confrontation, or other forms of more physical activism, such as in Colombia’s southern Andes (Rappaport 2007, Uribe 1998b). When asked by the more militant Paez Indians in the Cauca region to participate in national indigenous demonstrations, the Mamas’ divinations indicated that this would not correspond to their ways. Instead, they would join and assist the Paez with ‘spiritual work’ from the Sierra, as is their more premeditated tradition. The recent destruction of the coastal site Mother Hukulwa however (Chapter 3), was deemed so grave that in an unprecedented event hundreds of men, women and children from the Four Peoples jointly descended the mountains to occupy the sacred site in protest.

Figure 8.3: The Four Peoples walking towards the coastal hill that was split in two to build a port, the sacred site Hukulwa in Mama Shibulata’s story of the Sea. Photo: Amado Villafaña, Arregocés Coronado.





Figure 8.4: Summit of Kogi Mamas, *Comisarios*, and OGT leaders. As always, they are on a sacred site.

8.3. Four Fields of action

8.3.1. Holistic Kogi-Sierra politics: Autonomy

Given that systemic destabilisation also variously affects the Kogi as seen in Section 1, besides safeguarding the Sierra Nevada their environmental activism also seeks the legal, political, cultural, and territorial conditions to protect Kogi society and its 'cosmo-onto-epistemo-ecology' (Chapter 7). In Kogi terms, preserving one is preserving the other, as discussed in the next chapter. The OGT's often emphasised overall mission, is consequently to defend, protect and 'strengthen the [Ancestral] Territory' as 'Heart of the World', *together with* the 'strengthening' and 'reproduction and defence' of Kogi 'culture' and its 'internal order' (OGT 2017, THT 2008, my emphasis). In this way, the OGT *politically enacts* the Kogi-Sierra unity. As way to organise their cause in these terms, and also frame their interaction with mainstream society accordingly, the Kogi divide eco-political activity into *four* (cosmic number) main interrelated fields. These are 1. Autonomy, 2. Education, 3. Health, and 4. Territory. Because the former three are subservient to the fourth, I shall discuss them in this order.

'Autonomy' is already implicit in my preceding discussion, referring to how the OGT and related activities are structured cosmologically in relation to the Sierra's principles and Kogi tradition. Autonomy is therefore also called 'self-government' (*gobierno propio*), reflecting the Sierra as a conscious ontological 'Government' administered by the Kogi as indicated above. As the four organisations of the Sierra's Four Peoples assertively state in a general guide of interaction with the

Colombian State and national society, 'Autonomy' is the independent regulation of the Sierra's affairs according to their 'own mode of thought' derived from *Sé, Aluna* and *shibuldama* (OWYBT., OIK., OGT. and CIT. 1999)¹⁰³. This is hence the starting point to organise the other three fields of action. However, Kogi Autonomy constantly clashes with bureaucratic limitations, imposed external agendas, and arduous negotiations (Introduction). Puerto Brisa for example, the company that split the sacred coastal hill Hukulwa, has denied the sacred site's existence despite state recognition of the Black Line since 1973, creating heavy tensions. The directors of this coal port deny also the Mamas access to spiritually alleviate the damage.

In this light, Mama Shibulata observed the following, translated by Silvestre. Formerly the Mamas worked 'only according to our own customs at the *ezwamas*, to ensure no harm happens to humans and the world'. Nowadays however, 'Younger Brother makes us learn and partake in consultations, studies and customs that are not our way'. People 'ask us many questions', using 'new' projects and tools that are 'from the material plane' and 'not of spiritual Origin'. 'Why?'. They act 'as if we didn't know how to consult, study and care for things and our own territory [...] However, we maintain, strengthen, and protect all things through our spiritual work and payments, fulfilling our knowledge of Origin, seasonally every month'¹⁰⁴. While 'we have never taken down a hill', Younger Brothers 'say they will do this and that, while knowing that it will be very harmful', such as 'the proposed railway along sacred sites'. Moreover, attending these meetings and projects 'is a lot of extra work for us' and takes time away, 'which worries us because the Mamas neglect their normal work up in the Sierra', and use the *zhátukua* (divination bowl) to consult about 'things that affect and don't pertain to the sacred sites'. Persons 'in the spiritual realm ask, why do you do this?'. Consequently, 'when Younger Brother does not harm there are no problems, but when he does, we feel much pain'. As Silvestre added, 'they should be listening to us and not harming, so that everyone is equal'.

8.3.2. Relating epistemologies: Education

An important epistemological tactic of the OGT that supports the cosmological structure and ontological functioning described above, is to treat the more isolated Kogi living in the higher Sierra as a repository of native custom, spirituality and knowledge. Being closer to the *ezwamas*, lakes, peaks and other places 'of Origin', these communities keep the learning and traditions on which the ecology depends, especially through Mama apprenticeship (*Kuivis*) in darkness, caves, and from the

¹⁰³ Please refer to 'Abbreviations' on page X. for clarification of these acronyms.

¹⁰⁴ For instance, 'June is when we do work for the air, so that the wind doesn't harm crops and trees'.

teaching otherworld, Nuhuakalda (Chapters 1, 4). Their purity should not come in contact with mainstream society, seen as loud, polluted, mindless, and disorganised. After emerging from his long spiritual training, I was told, a *Kuivi* himself would see this as ‘broken shards’ or ‘weeds’. Just as in everyday life Kogi people from lower levels seek their higher counterparts for counsel, divinations, personal harmonisation, or corrective measures, Kogi political representatives/ OGT leaders also periodically visit the *ezwamas* to spiritually strengthen their work, learn, and be guided ‘in Aluna’. The Council Governor Santos was trained up there for his post, and ideally, he should follow the indications of Mamas and *Comisarios*.

The field of ‘Education’ is a way to complement this tactic. Through the limited introduction of Western schooling to low-lying Kogi villages close to national society, such as Dumingeka and Tungeka (Chapter 2), about 20% of children learn the ways of Younger Brother. Officially the strategy is to hereby have lower populations more knowingly mediate between outside pressures / mainstream society at the Sierra’s base and the values of Kogi life at higher levels. While the schools are part of the national education system, they enjoy certain administrative and curricular autonomies by being in a legally autonomous Indigenous Reservation. The Kogi therefore orient this educational interface along their epistemology. Western-type subjects (e.g. Maths, Spanish, Chemistry) are combined with classes about Kogi tradition and knowledge taught by Kogi teachers, while the pupils hear creational stories and undergo initiation rituals in the villages. Pupils often have to sit on sacred sites to ‘receive counsel’ from the Mamas and *Comisarios*, who regularly visit and monitor the schools. The villages/schools are also used as venues to hold meetings of Mamas, village authorities, and OGT representatives with teachers, Ministry of Education officials, and other foreign actors. Following the cosmological divisions already discussed, these villages act as buffers between the cultural ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ of the Sierra, being conceived as frontiers into deeper Kogi territory called ‘barrier/gate villages’¹⁰⁵. However, their mediating role also opens doors to non-Kogi cultural influences and foreign visits, therefore being double-edged swords.

As Dumingeka’s English teacher (Chapter 2), I attended gatherings to discuss the general aims, intricacies, and procedures of articulating Western and Indigenous learning, which involved highly interesting conceptual, cosmological, and epistemological questions, debates, and exercises. Being at the interface between Kogi and external understandings (and policies) concerning conservation, education, and knowledge transmission as they attempted to bridge them, was helpful to contextualise my proposed conceptual translation and ‘co-theorisation’ of the Kogi material. My sessions with the Mamas, partly became part of this communicational interface, yet arguably by

¹⁰⁵ *Pueblos de talanquera*.

inverting the Kogi educational strategy. This time, it was a foreigner (me) who came to the ‘inside’ to learn about those Kogi ways from ‘above’, instead of Kogi people coming ‘down’ to learn about the ‘outside’. While I consequently often visited the Sierra’s higher parts, our encounters also happened mostly in this middle transition zone, and as with everything else, the Mamas aligned them with the system and the Kogi environmental cause (Chapter 2).

The OGT *communication* strategy, i.e. their so-called ‘message(s)’ to the wider public about the Sierra’s deterioration and the state of Kogi society, is in a way part of the ‘Education’ field. Complementing what they are learning about the ‘Younger Brothers’ at the schools, hereby Kogi leaders seek to in turn teach them about onto-ecological problems based on those traditions and knowledge up the mountains, “speaking out from” the Sierra as it were. As I have indicated, they have consistently tried to communicate through letters to the state, OGT publications, at regional, national and international meetings, in interviews, or the films. In this light, the OGT has a ‘communications centre’ named Zhigoneshi (meaning ‘to help’) that uses modern technologies of communication to teach, learn, and also conserve their languages and customs. The aim is also to *control information* about the Sierra and counteract the ‘plundering’ of it by e.g. journalists, researchers, and tourists (Centro de Comunicaciones Zhigoneshi 2010). The Council Governor however, told me that they need to properly organise their communication strategy, unifying what he sees as hitherto loose efforts ‘here and there’.

8.3.3. Sierra Ecology through Kogi Health

In a book entitled *Law of Sé: Indigenous Health in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta* (OGT 2009), current health issues are explained according to cosmological principles, territorial relations, Kogi rituals, and the Mamas’ knowledge. The political field of ‘Health’ therefore, is basically about ensuring the well-being of the Kogi population in terms of the Sierra’s well-being, considering the organic understanding of disease, imbalance, and disorder discussed in Section 1. By alleviating how the Kogi are being variously affected by environmental degradation (see above), the aim is to retain their capacity to protect the Sierra. As Mama Manuel and Mama Luntana explained, the Kogi’s *spiritual, preventive* medicine is nowadays reliant on Western, *physical, curative* medicine. Firstly, this is necessary because broken sacred sites obstruct their spiritual-medical practices (payments, confessions) that retain ‘agreement’ (*zhuluka*), the precondition to being healthy, or which if necessary restore/cure any imbalances and affectations. The resulting disconnection in turn generates more illness as ‘debt’. Secondly, the intention is to treat what are for the Kogi foreign and fierce diseases and epidemics (e.g. tuberculosis, measles, diarrhoea) understood to originate *outside*

the Sierra with Younger Brother. As explained in Chapter 3, this outer cosmological realm is generally associated to negative forces, be they illness, harmful winds, colonisation, environmental damage, and cultural invasion. 'We didn't have these things before', Mama Manuel said. Native treatments are therefore currently overwhelmed by these forces, which following the Mamas are also better addressed with Younger Brother's own corresponding 'outer' treatments.

Therefore seeking to support the native health management with Western medicine, the Four Peoples have jointly created an indigenous clinic in Santa Marta¹⁰⁶. Lower Kogi villages like Dumingeka also have small health posts equipped with some medicines and tools, and run by Kogi individuals with basic medical training¹⁰⁷. While being partially integrated into the Colombian national health system, these facilities are directed and regulated by the OGT. Patients are taken there when the activities of Mamas and native healers are insufficient, yet native spiritual healing/balancing continues to be practiced in parallel, or resumed when the person is back in the Sierra. As also happens with other current indigenous health struggles, the Mamas think that modern medicine does not *solve* the person's spiritual imbalance, i.e. the origin of the disease; it only alleviates the physical symptoms. Similarly, mainstream ecology may help conserve the Sierra, but the Four People's ecological practices are considered to properly regulate it. Given his long experience in assisting the Kogi's modern health programmes and treating Kogi patients, medical doctor Arbeláez-Albornoz (1994, 1997) says that by understanding the world as a body (Chapter 7), the Kogi know how damaging one part ecologically 'destabilises the system'. This 'goes against our whole concept of development' (my personal field notes). Arbeláez-Albornoz (2005) therefore discusses how the Kogi have organised healthcare as a public service to 'strengthen' their territory, their government, and their culture in an integrated manner.

8.3.4. Regulating the Territory through political means

As indicated earlier, the 'Autonomy', 'Health' and 'Education' strategies are subservient to the 'Territory' field of action. Autonomy is the basic organisation of eco-politics in Kogi-Sierra terms. By promoting Kogi well-being, the Health strategy ensures their ability to continue ecological practices. Education maintains the epistemological processes that guide this, and serves to negotiate with Younger Brother about the Sierra. Regulating the Sierra-territory ecologically then, is the main reason to subject the OGT and its political engagement to cosmo-onto-epistemological principles, places, and practices. A former OGT Council Governor, Arregocés Conchacala, consequently explains that

¹⁰⁶ Gonawindua Ete Ennaka IPS Indígena (IPS stands for *Institución Prestadora de Salud*).

¹⁰⁷ These Kogi are called *Promotores de salud* ('Health promoters').

'the highest priority for the survival of we indigenous people [is] the restoration of our traditional territory, [taken] for more than five hundred years'. The purpose is to thereby 'work on the environmental recovery of our sacred mountain' (THT 2008), according to its 'ancestral ordering' (*ordenamiento ancestral*).

For all Four Peoples, this recovery involves regaining access to, and control of, the entire Ancestral Territory from the peaks down to the Black Line, where mainstream society is and most environmental deterioration occurs. The OGT hence focuses on officially extending indigenous territory, either by legally expanding the Indigenous Reservation¹⁰⁸, or by purchasing lands beyond it assisted by sympathetic external donors, e.g. French foundation Tchendukua¹⁰⁹ (Julien 2001, 2004). Historically, Kogi settlements were relegated to altitudes beyond approx. 1000mts. due to colonisation and foreign pressures (Chapter 1). For a couple of decades now, there has been a gradual but systematic move of Kogi populations 'back down' the mountain to regain occupation and management of the lower sections. The 'barrier villages' are therefore new settlements built relatively recently.

Firstly, the intention is to impede interventions and degradation of the Sierra and its sacred sites through development projects, deforestation, tourism, settlements, mining, treasure hunting, and other activities. Secondly, territorial control strengthens their necessary spiritual connection to the land, secures Kogi living space, and improves 'food security' (*seguridad alimentaria*). This facilitates the Mamas' life-sustaining and nourishing *kualdama* rituals (Chapter 6) to restore the Sierra's stability/productivity and thereby that of the Kogi (OGT 2010). Thirdly, this expansion allows the Kogi Mamas to better access the sacred sites at low levels from which the Kogi have been historically cut off due to foreign colonisation and occupation (Chapter 1). Finally, the aim is to hereby also keep the Kogi (inner realm) largely separate from mainstream society and its influences (outer realm), being part of the principle of 'Autonomy' mentioned earlier. This modern political continuation of the marked Kogi historical tendency to limit contact, be reserved, and maintain traditions (Chapter 1), helps preserve the traditions that protect the Sierra. Altogether then, by controlling the Ancestral Territory as demarcated by the Black Line, on which Kogi cosmo-onto-epistemology depends, ecological rituals can be continued and even spatially extended relatively undisturbed. For the Four Peoples, putting the entire Sierra into indigenous hands, in conjunction

¹⁰⁸ Resguardo Kogi-Malayo-Arhuaco. Recently it expanded from 384.000 to 412.871 hectares (OGT 2017).

¹⁰⁹ Their website states having helped the Kogi regain 1500ha. Moreover, they aim to gradually put an entire specific valley back in Kogi hands to let them restore it environmentally and provide the living space on which Kogi culture depends (Tchendukua – Ici et Ailleurs 2007)

with stabilising their societies, is indispensable to balance this ‘Heart’ and ‘look after the continuity of life’ (Indigenous Authorities 2006). They ‘truly believe that this is necessary for the survival of life on Earth’ (THT 2008).

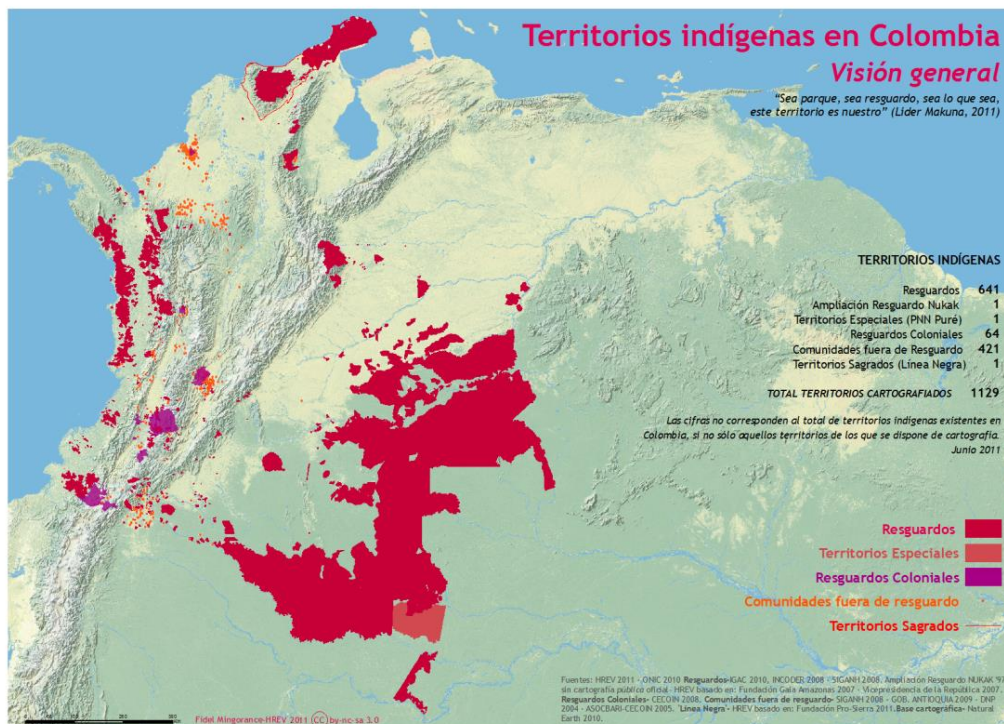


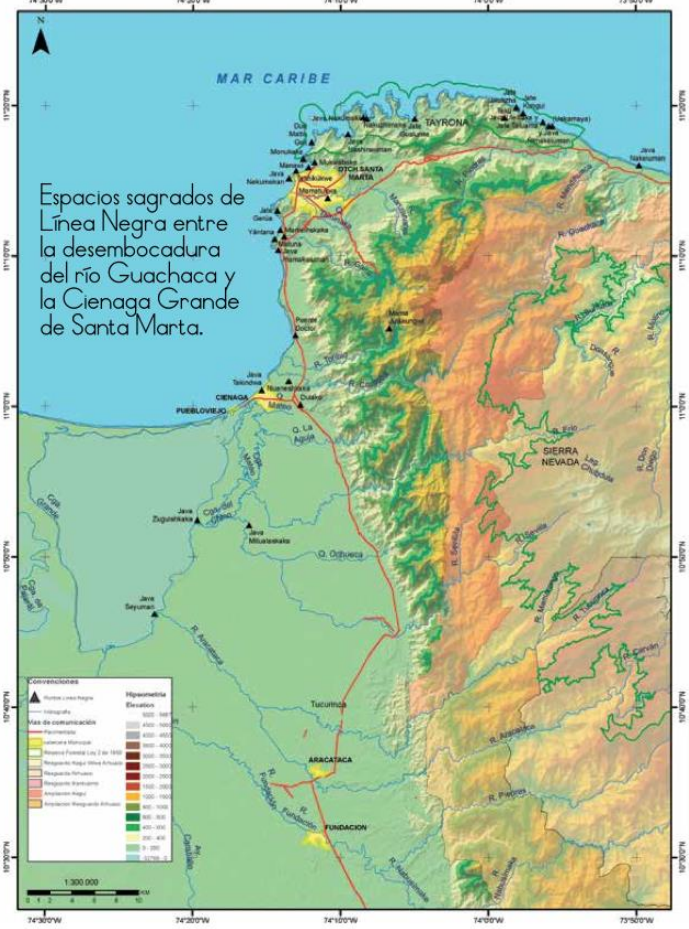
Figure 8.5: Official Indigenous Territories in Colombia. The Sierra Nevada (top) is the only one surrounded by a wider orange line termed ‘Sacred Territories’. This is the Black Line, thus legally recognised and mapped. The Four People’s aim is to have the red area fill that orange line. Source: DANE.

Kogi leaders maintain that the Mamas’ capacity to regulate natural forces through spiritual work is real, tangible, and has visible effects on physical nature, making for instance crops grow again where land was thought sterile. Based on his observation during many years of assisting the Kogi, I heard Arbeláez-Albornoz (1997, personal field notes) explain that ‘the material effects of Kogi spiritual work are not immediate but only visible in the long term’. He mentioned Guachaca, a lower valley of which the Kogi officially regained control after its long colonisation and environmental exhaustion by peasant farmers. ‘Some years after the Mamas resumed their work there’, the doctor said, ‘there was a notable and astonishing environmental recovery; many animals returned, more water flowed, the forest cover grew, etc’.

Probably the OGT’s most important activity is to look after the sacred sites on the north, north-western coastal stretch of Sierra, which the Arhuaco and Wiwa do on their sides. The

organisation regularly arranges journeys for Mamas and Spanish-speaking Kogi leaders to sacred sites along the Black Line to monitor their condition, pay/nourish them, heal damage, and (re-)balance the natural elements of which they are ‘mothers/fathers’. Sometimes external institutions assist these trips logistically and financially. Earth Action (2011) for example, supports the natives ‘in compliance with [the] Law of Origin’ (Harlow 2010). These journeys facilitate the Mamas’ usual duty to visit sacred sites through modern transportation means across great distances and along roads, in cities, by tourist destinations and other not easily accessible places. During these visits the OGT also officially identifies and cartographically plots the locations of these sites, using the Mamas’ knowledge of them to exactly name and describe their functions. This allows to later make substantiated claims and negotiations regarding the sites with the government.

Figure 8.6: OGT map of sacred sites (black triangles) on the north-western stretch of Black Line. Some are in Santa Marta city (top yellow area).



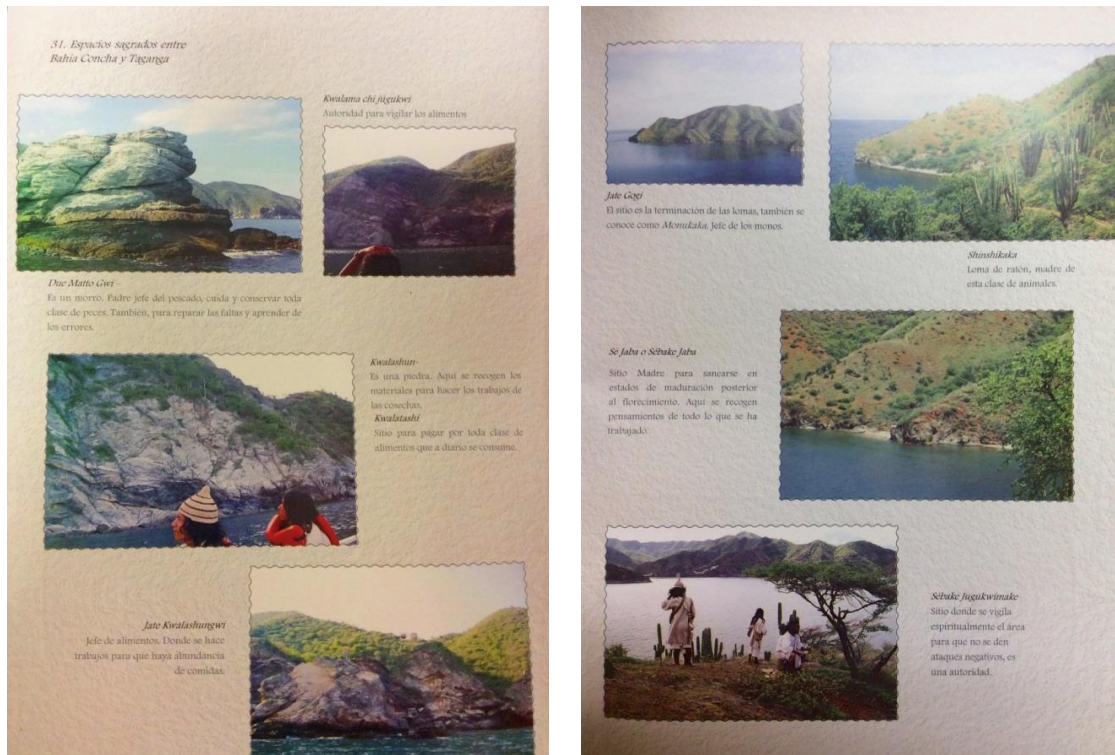


Figure 8.7 and Figure 8.8: A booklet entitled *Jaba y Jate* ('Mother and Father') (2012) shows and explains sacred sites along the Black Line. Mama Shibulata appears in the pictures.

The Kogi also focus on slowly restoring particular sacred sites. Haba Tañiwashkaka is located by the coastal town Dibulla¹¹⁰ in a piece of land recently acquired as OGT property. Mama Shibulata was chosen by high-ranking Mamas to now be in charge of this 'mother'. For the first time since the Spanish conquest, a *nuhué* was built again by the beach to reintroduce indigenous presence and traditional spiritual practices there, along with two Kogi houses for Mama Shibulata's family. Now that he can divine and pay on-site, Mama Shibulata is re-establishing communication between Mother Tañiwashkaka and specific related lakes and peaks up on the Sierra to reignite spiritual-ecological exchanges between the sea and mountains, e.g. the water cycle. His knowledge of and rituals related to the story and cosmology of the sea therefore presented in Chapter 3, constitute an epistemology that he puts into practice to purposefully manage ontological relations dependent on this site. The homestead is also an accessible meeting place between Kogi leaders, OGT advisors, and external actors. This includes an ex-minister of environment, who writes that sacred sites are essential in carrying out practices that sustain the Law of Origin, which informs the Kogi ecological message (Mayr Maldonado 2008). NGO Amazon Conservation Team (2017) has been providing funds and technical support, and has even got Julian Lennon involved. Building on his translation

¹¹⁰ The only Spanish/*mestizo* town on this coast until the 20th century (Chapter 1).

experience with me, Alejo is translating between these parties as Mama Shibulata's son-in-law. This is a concrete example of the system realising itself through eco-political manoeuvres and alliances, or rather of political activities serving to uphold the system.



Figure 8.9: Alejo at the recently erected Kogi houses by the Caribbean Sea at Mother Tañiwashkaka.

8.4. The inside and the outside

8.4.1. Directing and regulating from within

Given that the Kogi understand the Sierra to be interrelated with the wider world as its 'Heart', 'Government', or trunk of the 'World Tree', their eco-politics transcend their own territory in many ways. As I have explained, as 'Elder Brothers' their perceived responsibility is to care for the whole world from this 'Centre'. To start with, regulating the political according to the cosmo-ontological means that interactions with the outside realm of mainstream society are directed 'from within', as Kogi leaders say. Following how creation spiritually originated from the 'dark', 'deep', 'inner' Sierra-realm and developed outwards, so are modern circumstances (also foreseen 'in Aluna') dealt with in this manner. So-called 'internal' meetings, discussions, and divinations on the Sierra are considered a private, spiritual matter for the Elder Brothers, differentiated from Younger Brother's external, materialistic and destructive public events, laws, policies, and institutions. Earlier I explained how Kogi eco-politics are therefore organised by cosmological principles, in creational concentric fashion, putting spiritual forces first, directed by divination, from sacred sites, and in the *nuhué*.

Taking this further, the Mamas also direct ecological rituals from within the Sierra to spiritually regulate forces and situations *beyond it* across space and time. Above the Kogi village of Luaka, a pupil from Dumingeka showed me specific places that ‘connect with Bogotá’. Almost casually, he explained that here the Mamas divine about, and make payments for, the balance of that city, such as its public health or criminality. Sometimes the OGT informs the Mamas of current harmful events happening elsewhere, for example ‘the recent hurricane in the United States’. The Mamas then pay a sacred site related to that country or to the Father of Storms, to alleviate the situation there, ‘for Younger Brother to be well’. ‘What is he giving us in return for what we do for him?’, Mama Bernardo once asked, thereby globalising the principle of reciprocity.



Figure 8.10: The site that connects to Bogotá.

8.4.2. Incorporating the external

The Kogi also inversely try to bring external forces and actors *into* the Sierra’s realm and subject them to the system. Often government officials, National Parks employees, United Nations assessors, or company representatives are met at (lower) Kogi villages, told to confess (*aluna ishguashi*) to harmonise their arrival and departure, watched by Mamas and authorities, and stay overnight while Kogi men discuss the meeting in the *nuhué*.

Most impressively, before officially assuming office in 2010, the recently elected Colombian President, Juan Manuel Santos, visited the Kogi in the Sierra Nevada. By helicopter he flew into Seizhua, and in the presence of Arhuaco, Wiwa and Kankuamo members. After having the president ‘ask’ certain sacred rocks for ‘permission’, Kogi Mamas spiritually aligned his rule with the Sierra, ‘secured’ him to this *ezwama*, and ordained him in native ways. Mama Valencio’s son, Mama Santuno, gave the president one of their black staffs that mark authority. He also received four small coloured stones (to be returned) to guide his four-year term according to four principles, of which the president should be a ‘guardian’. Following the Kogi Council Governor, these were 1. ‘Water and

Air', 2. 'Earth', 3. 'Foodstuffs', and 4. 'Good Governance and Society', similar to how the important cosmic number *four* also structured my learning sessions. In his inaugural speech in Bogotá later that day, the president spoke of how the Sierra's 'Elder Brothers' are 'to this date [...] still overseeing the balance which should govern our nation and our relationship with the universe' (Presidencia de Colombia 2010).

During my fieldwork in mid-2013, the president returned with some ministers to meet Mamas, authorities, and representatives of the Four Peoples and discuss policies relevant to the Sierra. Besides agreeing to rustically meet outside under the sun at a sacred hot spring near the mountains by the Colombian town of Ciénaga, these high-ranking guests also made confessions (*aluna ishguashi*) there. The Mamas then paid the spring, a 'mother' who 'listened' to the meeting. Compared to other indigenous movements, the Four Peoples have achieved a salient and authoritative resonance in Colombian national discourse, and significantly in their own terms. The Kogi apply their cosmo-onto-epistemo-ecology, irrespective of how others perceive it.



Figure 8.11: The Colombian President, Juan Manuel Santos, holding the staff. His wife and daughter receive the stone-beads from Mama Santuno. An Arhuaco standing behind. Source: Presidencia República de Colombia (http://wsp.presidencia.gov.co/Prensa/2010/Agosto/Paginas/20100807_08.aspx).



Figure 8.12: The Colombian President confessing (*aluna ishguashi*) at the meeting. The Ministers of Interior and Transport are not visible. The sacred spring is in the background.



Figure 8.13: The president (in blue) with leaders of the Four Peoples. To his left are two important Kogi Mamas. The first four men sitting from the left are (in order): The Kankuamo, Wiwa, Kogi, and Arhuaco Council Governors.

8.4.3. Taking understanding and practices out into the world

Besides directing things ‘from within’ and bringing ‘the external’ into the Sierra, Kogi leaders also take their principles and practices *out* to other regions and countries to encompass public relations there. Spanish-speaking Kogi representatives usually take at least one Mama to local, national and international events, summits and organisations to provide their knowledge and guidance as OGT spiritual leaders. At these encounters, the Kogi always focus on the Sierra’s environmental deterioration, such as at the UN, having met figures like the Dalai Lama there. Even if the Mamas cannot follow conversations/presentations, subsequently they are translated/summarised for them. Independently of language, their presence spiritually aligns the process to the Sierra, where they later make relevant divinations and payments to harmonise these events with the sacred sites. Similarly, despite foreign audiences not understanding them, and whether in meetings, videos or documents, the Mamas speak *in Koggian* about the Ancestral Territory and the Law, putting lakes, mountains, *ezwamas*, and other landmarks at the centre. Their words (later translated) are taken to have *power*, bringing the Spiritual Fathers’ teachings into the setting.

Furthermore, the Mamas and the OGT practice Kogi payments, divinations, and dances in places beyond the Black Line, firmly asserting that spiritual forces and ecological rituals are also effective/apply there. For example, sometimes Mamas are flown to Bogotá and then driven to the highly sacred Andean lake Guatavita to make payments to it. Guatavita, the Mamas say, is ‘like a navel’ that communicates with the *ezwamas* and lakes on the Sierra-Heart. As Elder Brothers, they hereby compensate for the absence of the Muisca peoples¹¹¹ discussed in Chapter 1, who centuries ago took care of the lake with rituals involving gold objects (this initiated the fabled Spanish legend of ‘El Dorado’¹¹²). The OGT also seeks to recover gold figures and other items taken away by colonisers, explorers, treasure hunters, and archaeologists which have ended up in museums. Examples are the Gold Museum in Bogotá, or two important masks taken by German ethnologist Konrad Theodor Preuss (1926) now housed at Berlin’s Ethnological Museum. Beyond reclaiming a “cultural heritage”, in Kogi terms this is about restoring missing components of the Sierra-system. Once returned, these objects can again fulfil their spiritual-ecological functions in transmitting the Mamas’ rituals, powering sacred sites, sustaining natural elements, and communicating with Spiritual Fathers to altogether regulate the Sierra Nevada (Chapters 4, 6).

¹¹¹Surprisingly, tourist guides include indigenous cosmology when explaining the lake’s significance to visitors.

¹¹² A chief was initiated by jumping into the waters covered with gold. Based on the Kogi-Muisca similarities (Chapter 1), Juan Moscote explained that hereby the chief probably ‘paid’ the mother of the lake for his new authority, ‘nourishing’ and ‘registering’ himself with her. The gold transmitted this communication.

Since in those museums the objects ‘become hungry’, until they are recovered they must be nourished (Chapter 6), *wherever they are*. In the Tairona Gold Museum of Santa Marta, I saw Mama Luis (mentioned earlier) perform a ritual to ‘speak to’ and ‘feed’ a specific pair of gold pieces normally worn during ceremonies, a ‘father and a mother’ spiritually related to Teizhuna, the Tairona Lost City (Chapter 1). Being ‘alive’, the figures were ‘asking for food’, because they need nourishment ‘like us’. As I learned, by paying those spiritual parents, the Mama ‘cancels that debt, greets them, and asks for permission to be here’, sending them ‘messages’. Mama Luis’ gaze became fixed in space, entering deep concentration and visibly tuning into some frequency that I could not pick up by shaking¹¹³ his right hand. Mama Luis then let out a rising and falling hum that alternated speed and tone. Rather than following a predefined melody, the humming apparently responded moment by moment to a mental communication with the gold. Afterwards, the Mama sprinkled the objects behind the glass of the exhibition with an invisible substance he had been holding between his fingers. To finish, Mama Luis did a 360° turn to the left to disentangle the spiritual thread of his presence before leaving the place.

Figure 8.14: Alejo with his *poporo* at the Guatavita lake in the Colombian Andes.



¹¹³ Different Mamas often do this when carrying out spiritual work.

8.5. Systemic Eco-Politics

8.5.1. Ethnic politics and local knowledge

Early in this thesis, I distanced myself from sceptical interpretations of Kogi eco-politics as mainly an essentialist, romantic, and a-historical idealisation of people and place. I argued that this follows a wider tendency to overemphasise the strategic, constructed, and contested side of indigenous movements, and neglect their potential cultural consistencies, ecological importance, and relevant knowledge. Other studies (and also environmental policies) that do focus on indigenous ecological knowledge (IEK) and its values, such as ‘political ecology’ ones, nevertheless tend to limit its relevance and scope. IEK is approached mostly as a practical, sensory, situated, ‘culturally based’, know-how management of natural habitats (Lauer and Aswani 2009, Ross and Pickering 2002). As indicated by Ellen (2010), it is normally associated to qualities such as experience, intuition, and skill that pertain to a *local* environment at ‘grass-roots’ levels and in the context of sustainability and development. Despite of course varying in its understandings and objectives, this basic approach to IEK seems to underlie various works (e.g. Antweiler 1998, Escobar 1998, Sillitoe 1998), including about the Sierra (Rodriguez-Navarro 2006). Accordingly, indigenous eco-political claims have often been seen in terms of control and access to resources, ownership of land, and the group’s physical livelihood (Conklin and Graham 1995, Hodgson 2002), which in turn creates a focus on political processes of negotiation and representation.

As I have shown however, Kogi eco-politics constantly and assertively aim to encompass local, regional, and global matters, and their environmental cause is inherently ontological. This requires seeing IEK in terms of the wider, more fundamental, and transcendent regulation of the Earth, spiritual forces, and life itself advocated very strongly by the Kogi but also by many other indigenous groups. I thus follow other anthropologists who by contrast have sought to acknowledge, focus on, and theorise this (radically different) ontological component on which indigenous eco-political activism is frequently based (Blaser 2009, De la Cadena 2010, Di Giminiani 2013, Nadasdy 2007).

Hereby these authors also intend to counter mainstream or state multiculturalist and conservationist policies which relegate such indigenous claims to the realm of culture, ethnic politics, or even symbolism and belief (see Chapter 2). Following De la Cadena (2010) and Di Giminiani (2013), these policies are in turn based on a monopolising, universalist scientific understanding of “nature” and “ecology”, which does not let itself be challenged by other reality postulates. Nadasdy (2007: 37) argues that in attempting to incorporate indigenous knowledge, environmental managers and state

officials regularly engage in an 'epistemological cherry-picking' that retains mainstream 'standards of relevance', and continues to disempower the people. In this 'process of distillation' (ibid.), they decide which types of knowledge are useful and fit their scientific framework and methodologies. These types, I argue, are usually the more harmless, ontologically unchallenging, (quantifiable) practical skills indicated above, whereby IEK can be adjusted to development/conservation projects as local resource management, and analysed as 'political ecology'. What are perceived as 'magico-religious beliefs' however, are excluded as cultural and/or moral values, often being 'drop[ped] out of the database' as irrelevant (Cruikshank 1998:57, 58). Povinelli (1995: 506) therefore warns that seeing indigenous understandings of the world as metaphorical and not as 'methods for ascertaining truth', reinforces state-defined terms of debate. Similarly, I have shown that reducing Kogi knowledge to a situated practice would equally limit its negotiating power.

8.5.2. Political ontology, literal truth, and environmental relevance

In light of the above, some anthropologists have redefined indigenous eco-political encounters and ethnic politics as 'political ontology'. Blaser (2009) proposes that environmental conflicts in Paraguay between the Yshiro and local bureaucrats and scientific experts are a matter of clashing "life-worlds". Similarly, to avoid seeing Mapuche sacred sites in Chile as mere symbols of identity or political strategies, Di Giminiani (2013) argues that they are mutable, emergent phenomena which reveal the conditions of possibility for "multiple ontologies". He therefore sees the sites as something like volatile "thing-concepts", drawing on Henare, Holbraad and Wastell (2007). In Peru, De la Cadena (2010: 360, 361) defines what she calls the 'cosmopolitics' of non-human actors and forces ('earth-beings') in Andean indigenous movements as 'partially connected heterogeneous socionatural worlds' that constitute a 'pluriversal political order'. These approaches may be said to build on earlier 'political ecology' approaches to the convergence of indigenous environmentalism and ethnic politics in the South American context. In general terms, Conklin and Graham (1995) and Escobar (1998, 1999) for example see these situations through the lens of different "constructions" of nature in different socio-political contexts, thus constituting shifting "worlds".

These valid and insightful efforts nevertheless reinforce the localising and relativising "ontological pluralism", which I argued is inappropriate for Kogi realism, essentialism and monism, by now applying it to the political realm. By assuming different worlds as a starting point, this approach may level the negotiating parties, but simultaneously separates them. This makes the already complicated communication issues of translation discussed in Chapter 2, not only *conceptually* but also *politically* cumbersome, and may inhibit a practical resolution to common environmental

problems. If what we grant Indigenous Peoples is a sort of self-absorbed, pluralist “ontological self-determination” as proposed by Viveiros de Castro (2003), this would weaken Kogi eco-politics and its potential bearing on environmental problems. If some development and ‘political ecology’ approaches to IEK have lacked attention to wider cosmo-ontological issues, ‘political ontology’ apparently does not fully allow tying the cosmo-ontological to possibly practical and universally relevant ecological knowledge. As discussed in Chapter 2, commensurability is precisely what Kogi eco-politics builds on. They seek the public’s understanding about what they consider globally relevant ontological matters, which they claim to know via a different epistemology, by framing them cosmologically, and for the sake of ecological conservation in a shared Earth. Based on this common ground, Kogi Mamas and leaders even attempt to change Younger Brother’s perception of and behaviour towards the Sierra. In this way, the Four Concepts of the Kogi system (Chapter 7) are mutually implicated in Kogi political activism, framed in terms of the Sierra within the wider cosmos.

I hence side with Nadasdy (2007) who, building on Ingold (2000), argues that ‘the only way’ to stop theoretically ‘contributing to [native people’s] disempowerment’ is to consider the possibility of there being *literal truth* in indigenous people’s claims (Nadasdy 2007: 37). Political ontology as conceived above does not seem to completely forego ‘a priori assumptions to the effect that “rocks cannot really listen” or “animals cannot really think”’, as Nadasdy (2007: 37) advocates doing. The realist stance argued for in Chapter 2 then, is not only necessary to approach Kogi claims seriously as reality postulates in *theoretical* terms. Allowing them to participate in the ‘universal dialogue about truth’ (Habermas, see Chapter 2) is also necessary for Kogi ontology to truly have *political* power and challenge the scientific understandings of “nature” and “ecology” on equal grounds. After all, Kogi knowledge claims are equally universalist: ‘I want to give some advice to tell the real truth to the Younger Brother’ (Mama Valencio 1990). The difference would be the organic, conscious, non-dualist, and spiritual nature of Kogi realism. Moreover, instead of negotiating a ‘middle-ground’ as a mutually constructed set of shifting discourses proposed by Conklin and Graham (1995), the Kogi’s intention is to first have the public acknowledge their cosmo-ontology and knowledge *before* engaging in environmental conversations.

8.5.3. Enacting and maintaining the system politically

As Silvestre explained, ‘we are not speaking [to the public] simply because someone came up with an idea; we are talking from [the] beginning, from knowledge, and not materially’ (*en lo material*). By ‘from beginning’, he meant that their words derive directly from the spiritual truths of ‘deep’ creational origins (Sé), retrieved through for example divination (*iltueld*). The Kogi contrast this to

what they see as the superficial, political talk on the material plane of e.g. conservationists, government officials, companies, and NGO's. As in the system, Aluna is hence also a key aspect of Kogi systemic eco-politics. It not only constitutes the spiritual realm on which their ecological practices are based (Chapter 7), but also the consciousness that guides their public engagement, providing constant feedback. 'Nowadays', Silvestre continued, 'many people say they take care of things, but they don't really know how to do this; they think at the *physical* level. Because of not guiding their thinking from the Origin, they protect but simultaneously alter and change things' (my emphasis). Sometimes I heard Kogi leaders express that Younger Brother's notion of 'development' is diametrically opposed to the Kogi principle of *maintenance*. Following Mama Manuel, in Kogi terms 'development is not about making and building and changing, it is about not doing all of that, about not finishing off things'. This relates to how in Kogi epistemology, knowledge decreases over time from an initially complete state, contrary to ever-increasing knowledge in "Western" epistemology. *Shibuldama* then, is also something to be maintained, rather than developed.

With Silvestre's words in mind, we may generally define mainstream eco-politics as: the negotiation and implementation of the scientific management of physical nature through various *human-made* strategies, changes, and programmes to harmonise environmental sustainability, economic development, resource use, and conservation. Kogi eco-politics by contrast, are the negotiation of public relations to continue enacting Kogi ecology as: the relational regulation of ontological order according to given cosmological principles, the function of which is taught by *non-human* spiritual forces through Kogi epistemological practices and procedures. In this sense, Kogi politics are the result of, structured by, embedded in, and intended to protect, the system. The intention is to address the organic, systemic disruption discussed in Section 1, i.e. disconnection, disorder, malfunction, and disassociation (the "negative" Four Pillars), through modern political means of communication and activism.

To consider the potential literal truth of indigenous claims, Nadasdy (2007) proposes building a theoretical framework that can accommodate this. Identifying and elucidating the Kogi system through the Four Concepts in terms of Kogi *holistic realism* and the Four Pillars, has been my attempt at such a framework. Accordingly, I propose that *cosmology, ontology, epistemology* and *ecology* have to be equally integrated to understand Kogi political activism. I term this Kogi *systemic eco-politics*, the basic functioning of which I have discussed in this chapter. Like everything else, for Kogi leaders public political interactions and modern developments are/should be subordinated to cosmological principles, part of ontological order, led by the usual epistemological practices, and should uphold ecological relations. Thus part of the all-encompassing system, for them the political has to be regulated by the Law of Origin. In Kogi terms, this puts the principles and rules of life at the

centre of environmental negotiations. In this light, the OGT would be another of the Kogi institutions that, through knowledge and for ecological reasons, honours, reproduces and maintains cosmological principles and natural order as a lived ontology. As such, the Kogi Organisation would belong to the system's *sixth* level in my analysis (Chapter 7), next to e.g. lineages, Mamahood, or storytelling. In this way, Kogi indigenous activism is tied to daily life on the Sierra Nevada and subordinated to its organisation.

In summary, Kogi eco-politics are thus consistently carried out in their terms, which for them are the terms of the Law of Origin, a spiritual 'mandate' from the 'Mother' repeatedly invoked in meetings, letters and media. As I showed, this makes the Kogi practically and consistently: 1. direct political endeavours 'from within', 2. bring external matters *into* the Sierra and subject them to their framework, 3. *take out* their knowledge, divinations, words, understandings and rituals beyond the Sierra, and 4. perform spiritual practices on the mountain to have effect *outside/elsewhere* in the world. Since all of this is based on the network of sacred sites, these places and the landscape or territory more widely are the concrete outline and stage of Kogi systemic eco-politics. Sacred sites not only embody cosmological principles, but are a focus of Kogi ontology, serve epistemological procedures, and hold ecological rituals (Chapter 7). As I have discussed, this structured *holistic realism* also makes these places centres of political deliberation, discussion, and decision-making as framed by the 'Government' of the Sierra Nevada. Overall, I argue that only in the framework of these *systemic eco-politics* can Kogi interactions, negotiations, and tensions with Western conservationism, governmental policies, and scientific knowledge be understood.



Figure 8.15: Systemic eco-politics.

Representation of Seizhankua, one of the Four Fathers that created the world (Chapter 4). Like a Mama, he sits on a stool in the Sierra Nevada, surrounded by the Black Line and all its sacred sites (white labels). The other circles depict cosmic concentricity. The straight lines radiating outwards signify connections with the wider world as a 'spectrum that covers the whole of humanity'.

Source: <http://www.testimonios-de-un-discipulo.com/imagenes/>.

Chapter 9 - Conclusion

The Law of the Mother

9.1. Living the Law today

This dissertation departed from the Kogi eco-political emergence to address current environmental problems on the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. The Kogi, Arhuaco, Wiwa and Kankuamo have presented themselves as an ethnic unity intertwined with the mountain range, said to be ‘the Heart of the World’, which they claim to take care of as ‘Elder Brothers’. Based on their greater adherence to native traditions, the Kogi have been most consistent in protecting the Sierra from the developments of mainstream society, whom they refer to as ‘Younger Brothers’. Kogi Mamas and leaders have communicated why and how these activities are environmentally destructive according to their understanding of and relationship to the world. To work out the nature of this environmental activism, I argued that it was necessary to suspend overemphasised scholarly critiques of such indigenous mobilisation as an idealised, historically emerged, strategic matter of ethnic politics. Instead, I have proposed exploring to what extent and in which way Kogi eco-politics are based on historical continuities, cultural consistencies, and on a holistic way of being and knowing on the Sierra Nevada that needs to be understood as part of an elaborate system of human and non-human elements.

As said in Chapter 1, the notable degree of historical continuity, cultural coherence, and attachment to tradition among the Kogi, has been reported by the literature as an old “religious” persistence (Fischer 1992, Chapter 1). Reichel-Dolmatoff (1950c, 222, 224) clarifies that ‘observing the cosmic laws’ implies acquiring knowledge as the ‘object of life’, based on cultural norms ‘whose sole purpose is to orient [the individual] toward this path’. This in turn has the ‘ultimate purpose of guaranteeing the well-being of the universe and of humanity’. Following Rodriguez-Navarro (2000: 456), ‘the strict observance of this complex code of knowledge [...] has enabled [the Kogi] to survive and remain self-sufficient over [...] several centuries’. Expanding on Reichel-Dolmatoff’s recognition, I have attempted to show the ways in which the Kogi ‘objective’ or ‘purpose’ he identifies constitutes an elaborate and organised *cosmo-onto-epistemo-ecology*. Based on my work, this ‘religious persistence’ may now be reformulated as follows.

The Kogi perceive that cosmological principles need to be maintained as manifested in a given order of being, the function of which is to keep creational elements in mutually sustaining and balancing relationality. Since they practice this ecological regulation, the corresponding stability and continuity of their society as a lived ontology is required to reproduce the cosmological order as guided by the epistemology through which this is known. Put briefly, their deliberate cultural preservation is understood to be necessary for cosmo-environmental preservation. Given the Kogi-Sierra organic interrelation moreover, not only does the constancy and vigour of their way of being and knowing preserve the Sierra, but maintaining the Sierra in balance is also stabilising Kogi society. As I have indicated, according to this logic Kogi customs *are* care-taking practices, so that culture *is* ecology, and ecology *is* the lived onto-epistemology (i.e. the society), in turn derived from the cosmology. Altogether, this suggests that Kogi essentialism, holism, realism, and strived-for coherence and continuity, are sides of the same prism. In contrast, Silvestre affirmed, during political meetings the Kogi tell Younger Brothers that ‘your laws constantly change, passing new resolutions and decrees all the time. Our Law however, never changes, it is only one Law of Origin’.

To protect the Sierra and nowadays also counteract Younger Brother’s actions, in Kogi terms they have to remain Kogi. This perceived *responsibility*, called the Mother’s ‘mandate’, includes retaining stories, divination, learning procedures, knowledge, social organisation, practices like paying and confessing, material culture, and deep familiarity with the landscape. This relates to the strong Kogi tendency to uphold the past, value memory, and retain traditions noted by Reichel-Dolmatoff (1950c, 1951d), ‘so that nothing might be lost’, as Nicholas (1901: 639) also heard. To persist culturally, regulate things ecologically, and fulfil their responsibility, the Kogi have to first and foremost *remember* cosmological origins. More specifically, all of this supports the Mamas in their activities as leaders of this life and care-taking experts. For the Kogi then, both their historical persistence and their current eco-politics are ways to keep fulfilling the Law of Origin. Beyond continuing their traditions, long-standing attitudes to external forces, and ecological dispositions (Chapter 1), the Kogi are in this sense trying to continue ensuring the social and cosmic ‘well-being’ mentioned by Reichel-Dolmatoff (1950c). His work however, did not get to the stage of relating his encompassing insights about the organisation and purpose of Kogi society to how this is nowadays channelled politically as a response to present environmental, demographic, and economic developments.

Based on my anthropological fieldwork, I have shown that the Kogi’s environmental activism is their attempt to *keep maintaining the system* by regulating the Sierra and preserving their cosmo-onto-epistemo-ecology. This builds on the unity of mountain and people that I have described, a

relationship that seems to have persisted through time. In Kogi eyes, their historical, public emergence to mobilise politically was a pressing, necessary reaction to how the degree of environmental destruction started destabilising the system itself (Chapter 8). With the help of technological aids, legal strategies, and modern means of communication, Kogi leaders aim to represent, explain, promote, and repair the system's principles, values, forces, and components. In their terms, the system's stability and balance is therefore dependent on its *continuity* over time, for otherwise it would stop working as a system. This temporality is especially tied to the first Kogi Pillar, Origin. Since according to the Mamas' stories creation was 'thought' or conceived/defined by the Mother since 'the beginning', this includes the future sustainability of things, which is a matter of the other Pillars of Order, Function, and Relationality.

Despite the passage of history, for the Kogi the physical territory of the Sierra Nevada tangibly endures, embodies, and crystallises the system's permanence. Most importantly, this is anchored in the sacred sites, which as I said connect to cosmological origins, focus ontological order, hold epistemological guidelines, and are centres of ecological regulation. These focal points therefore hold the system together both structurally and *over time*, especially by virtue of tying the primordial spiritual plane to the physical one. Considering the temporal aspect, the Mamas also assert that their identity and collective *memory* depends on the sites as links between past origins, current life, and future cultural continuity.

9.2. The Mother speaks

All of the above suggests that the so-called Kogi 'message' *is* the system. To generate understanding and change regarding current environmental damage in their terms, the Kogi strategy is to raise awareness of this system, how it works, and their role in it. Since in public meetings, documents, and films, Kogi leaders have been very limited in their explanations, our sessions allowed the Mamas the time, space, and conditions to provide an overview in organised detail. Establishing this frame of reference has enabled them to more fully explain environmental damage in Kogi terms as a cosmological matter, and illustrate why and how the system is being destabilised.

More than that, we have seen how the Sierra is considered a conscious, volitional, and knowledgeable Organism, composed of many individual 'thinking' agencies who manifest in different landmarks and interrelate as a structured 'family' that includes the Kogi. Since this living environment 'speaks', 'teaches', and 'warns' the Kogi in daily life through divination, signs, dreams

(*kabizhi tueld*), thunder, and other means, it is equally understood to be communicating about its destabilisation by Younger Brother's activities. Just as long ago Reclus (1861:275) was told that 'the mountain roars' and has 'voices', so it is roaring now and additionally expressing itself via the medium of the Kogi eco-political message. Based on his clairvoyant abilities as an *ubastunka* ('seeing with inner eye'), Mama Julian claims to directly communicate with spiritual entities, who are saying 'we are not well'. Other eco-political contexts have also seen phrases like '[mountains], rivers, fish, and forest call out for help, but the government does not [...] listen' (De la Cadena 2010: 349). In Kogi terms however, these non-human voices constitute a unified 'Mother', as not only a 'personification of the biosphere' (Milton 1993: 12) but of the cosmos. 'The Mother is a total person', my friend Mariano and OGT spokesperson once said, 'this is not a game, it is something profound'.

According to this logic, through modern tools and mechanisms the Kogi are conveying to the wider public what the Sierra is telling the Mamas about its own plight through the usual means (e.g. divination, signs, dreams, natural phenomena.). It is primarily in this sense that the Kogi say they direct the OGT and its activities 'from within' (Chapter 8), i.e. from the Mother's inner, spiritual 'profundity', and hence 'in Aluna'. As we saw, Kogi gatherings on sacred sites are allegedly quite literally informed by parallel meetings in the spiritual realm. On a hot day in the OGT's interior patio, another Kogi leader called Arregocés told me how the Sierra is 'mobilising' and directing the Kogi, as follows:

Ultimately it is the sacred sites, the territory itself, who speak and defend themselves. It should not really be me as 'Arregocés' saying things, not humans, for then many interests get in the way. Rather, it should be only the valleys and the sites telling us where the damage lies, who is responsible for that, and what we should do.

Speaking to Silvestre about these things, I asked him: 'So you Kogi are like messengers that speak for those spiritual entities on this material plane and pass it on to Younger Brother? Can I put it like that?'. With a mouthful of coca leaves, Silvestre replied 'mhm, yes. The Mamas think "how can I make them understand?". It is similar to when a Mama understands that thunder is telling him something and then consults with his *zhátukua* (divining bowl) about that to discover how to solve the problem, and then informs his village'. Mama Shibulata was sitting next to us, and said:

It is not us Kogi who are telling people to stop, but the spiritual realm itself is clarifying that. The *zhátukua* is pointing these things out, and we as Kogi think accordingly. It is the Mother and the spirits and the mountains asking 'Why do you do this to me? Who can help me? Don't do it'. I therefore ask people to please understand this message.

In the Kogi sense, this wilful and integrated mountain range is not just spoken for by humans because of 'lacking a political voice' (De la Cadena 2010: 358), but *is* an active political voice. Beyond the Kogi telling people that the system is being destabilised then, according to them the system is actively communicating and addressing its own destabilisation as the 'Mother'. As a *self-regulating* system moreover, 'She' not only communicates but also reacts to Her damage and imbalance by reclaiming 'debt' through disease, natural disasters, or social violence. All of this is consistent with how according to the Mamas, epistemologically speaking spiritual entities guided my own sessions for ecological reasons through the ontological order of sacred sites, which cosmologically represent the Sierra. This thesis then, has been an attempt to write 'from within' to show how the Kogi understand their terms as the Sierra's terms, and not only write *about* the Kogi.

9.3. Failing the Mother

9.3.1. A moral system

This sense of a communicating Sierra is linked to the *moral* dimension of the Kogi material. Like knowledge, truth, and thought, in Kogi terms morality is a cosmologically originated principle inherent to the order of being and associated to the function of things in how they should relate. Morality is equally *out there* as a conscious, 'thinking', 'teaching' spiritual force 'in Aluna', and thus *within* things. According to the Mamas, this moral spirit is framed by a set of pragmatic cosmic rules of conduct indicated in the stories, and defined by the Mother as the 'Law of Origin' (or 'Law of the Mother'). In this sense, what should and should not be, what is good and bad, is simultaneously a matter of ontological order, and thus of ecological balance and reciprocity. The moral dimension is therefore intrinsic to the system's structure, which hereby becomes partly coterminous with the Law, given how 'everything [...] arose' from the creational darkness Sé (OGT 2009: 9). Mama Pedro Juan (2009) expresses this concisely when saying that 'the Sierra Nevada is itself the natural law that keeps the world alive, and is fully aware'.

The Mamas' teachings about the cosmos, as delivered through their epistemology (e.g. divinations, stories, being at sacred sites) were essentially about how to behave (ecology), which is derived from how to be (ontology). For the Kogi, *following* cosmological principles, *reproducing* them ontologically, *learning* them through the epistemology, and *maintaining* them ecologically, together constitute a *moral* set of understandings, practices, and institutions directed at the well-being of the world. According to Mama Manuel, the Kogi's insistence on 'not destroying' things by knowing

spiritual principles hence constitutes an *agreement* with the Mother not to harm Her and defend, protect, and sustain Mother Earth (Haba Sénenulang). For this reason, stated Mama Luntana, the Spiritual Fathers left humans with a mental 'writing', a 'knowledge' that guides correct behaviour, a 'truth' that should remind people to think well and not do harm. More widely, leaders of the Four Peoples have stated that the Sierra is a living body 'which we must look after. Under no circumstances can we split it up if we want to continue to function for *the good* of humanity'. Consequently, 'looking after life is our *raison d'être*' (Indigenous Authorities 2006, my emphasis). Eco-political activism then, is considered part of the Mother's 'mandate'. Overall, 'the Law' is a matter of what Robbins' (2013) calls 'the good', but which in Kogi realist terms is not a culturally "constructed" set of aspirations and idealisations (ibid.: 458). For them, it is a cosmologically defined ecological way of being and knowing that combines truth, morality, thought, order, knowledge, and behaviour. This responsibility is perceived to rely especially on the Mamas:

The Mamas are heat. Ma comes from fire, heat. Ma-ma is like double heat. A Mama is like the sun, [which] we call Mamayuisa. [...] The sun never says: 'to this snake I will not give warmth, to this murderer I will not give warmth'; the sun never speaks like that, it is always providing its warmth to snake, murderer, and jaguar alike, no matter who. So, a Mama has to be like the sun. He has to be careful not to kill the snake, not to kill a jaguar, for he cannot. A Mama cannot kill trees. He cannot kill. Because of this, the commitment of a Mama is very sacred, very strong, very deep (Mama Ramón Gil 2009: 49).

9.3.2. Social disorder

In Kogi terms, if the system is their message, and the system is moral, their message conveys environmental damage as a *moral failure*. Harming the environment *is* disregarding the Mother's Law of Origin, which in turn is a sign of social disorder. According to Mama Manuel, Younger Brother has *forgotten* not to harm, 'like the Mother also told him', and has therefore 'changed his thinking'. Especially by destroying 'places of origin [sacred sites]', people 'keep damaging everything, playing like children, [...] a problem that involves the whole of humanity' (Mama Ramón Gil in THT 2008). The Tungeka Mamas therefore said that the Kogi as 'Elder Brothers' are *reminding* people of spiritual origins and the Sierra's importance. 'It is necessary to learn again from the mind of the Mamas and give counsel to Younger Brother about what the Mother determined to be like this, this, and this, and about what they cannot do, so that our messages are not lost when we die'.

Reichel-Dolmatoff (1950c, 1951d) and others before him reported a Kogi sense of cultural decline over time, noting complaints about infringing and neglecting traditions that caused 'great despair' (de Brettes 1903: 335). From my experience, this is a cosmological understanding of

practices and especially knowledge (*shibuldama*) having been perfect ‘at the beginning’ and then decreasing in quality, profoundness, and power over the generations. As indicated in Chapter 2, this is opposed to the “Western” notion of ever-increasing knowledge. As I also heard during fieldwork, ‘we Kogi’ are ‘forgetting’ more the ‘ways and teachings of the ancestors’, and ‘following less the spiritual indications of the Zhátukua [divining bowl]’. Instead, ‘we are adopting’ more ‘negative and impure thoughts’ (*aluna nusegatsé*), ‘improper behaviour’ and even ‘bad knowledge’ (*shibuldama shane*). Mama Shibulata and José Manuel echoed the frequent statement that ‘we are becoming and behaving more like Younger Brother’. Often compared to a relatively recent better past, I witnessed how many Kogi perceive their own society as also starting to fail the Mother by decreasing in tradition, discipline, values, knowledge and spirituality. The holistic effects of environmental destruction on the Kogi (Chapter 8) are considered the main cause of what is called social ‘disorder’. Additionally, demographic, cultural, and political pressures and influences around the Sierra (Introduction, Chapter 1) are also perceived to be slowly destabilising Kogi life. For my informants, these forces deviate the Kogi from their traditions, rightful living patterns, and ecological duties.

Reichel-Dolmatoff (1950c, 1951d, 1990f) emphasised that discipline, order, austerity, purpose, and rectitude are highly valued social traits, being strict social norms that serve to adhere to the cosmological laws, felt as a great, constant moral pressure. He and others before him (e.g. Espinosa [1691] in Langebaek 2007, de Brettes 1903) consequently described various harsh punishments, such as kneeling on broken pottery, that enforce this obligation. Nowadays, some regret that the severity of corrective measures has been decreasing, yet I still witnessed various ones being carried out¹¹⁴. In Kogi terms, just as damage to the Sierra destabilises Kogi society (Chapter 8), so do social disorder, ‘bad thoughts’, and neglect of cosmological principles spiritually affect the Sierra. Consequently, disorder *is* immorality, and social imbalance *is* onto-ecological imbalance, which has to be controlled.

Kogi failings are nevertheless understood to be mostly matters of *degree*; ‘we’re still here’. In the opinion of Mama Pedro Juan (2009): ‘we know clearly what we learned from the Elders, but nowadays we do not have the [amount of] knowledge they possessed, and this is a source of weakness’. However, ‘we have not given up living in the way of right and wrong that the Mother told us. We still live by her teaching’, the late Mama Valencio stated. ‘We have not forgotten it to this day’ (THT 2008). Mama Luntana also said that ‘we Elder Brothers are always maintaining the ancestral processes established in the Law of Origin, taking care of the world we inherited’. More

¹¹⁴ For example, spending a couple of sleepless nights, publicly receiving hits on the back by a *Cabo* in the centre of the *nuhué*, or ‘being sent’ to the Mama to confess for days under hot sunshine.

than 'articulating a vision' of the 'present and the future' to 'reconstruct' the world from a new perspective (Escobar 1998: 72, 76), Kogi eco-politics are about recovering a definite existential *past*. This is considered the *sine qua non* to their 'cultural revitalization' (Rappaport 2005: 44)

9.3.3. Renovation

When a tremor in Dumingeka was perceived to come from the wrong cardinal direction, two Kogi men told me separately that it was a response to social indiscipline and a warning of coming consequences, later confirmed by the Mamas' divinations. A worried-looking Kogi teacher at the school called Andrés, claimed that the messenger bird (Shikaka) was equally alerting people about being 'charged' for their unbalancing, 'debt' generating actions. The Mamas would consequently need to guide village members, collected by the *Comisarios* and *Cabos*, in spiritually ameliorating the situation with payments, confessions, and other practices. Similarly, Mama Shibulata once said that thunder was indicating coming death, disease, tempests, erosions, and landslides. 'If he becomes angry', he could 'burn villages with lightning', like recently 'some cows and mules'. 'Thunder will personally charge humans for breaking up hills, which are like houses. The spiritual world is warning us'. As Mama Shibulata had predicted, about three years later during tremendous thunderstorms a bolt of lightning squarely hit a *nuhué* and fully burned it down, killing and injuring many Wiwa men inside. Surviving Mama Ramón Gil told a Colombian journalist that this was both an unprecedented, extremely serious sign about Younger Brother's environmental destruction, *and* a big 'charge' and urgent wake-up call for the Four Peoples' own failures. Consequently, 'we need to get back in order and do significant collective spiritual payments'.

As Elder Brothers entrusted with the great responsibility and corresponding 'deep' knowledge to protect the 'Heart of the World', the Four Peoples consider their actions and omissions as having proportionately greater consequences and implications than Younger Brother's. This often causes a sense of weight, worry, and guilt among the Kogi, especially the Mamas. Given that in daily life every thought and action already has to be watched (Chapter 6), current circumstances are perceived as immensely consequential. Since in Kogi terms their collective agency is defined by the cosmology and rooted in the ontology, they cannot change or worse lose their way of life. A century ago, de Brettes (1903: 335) similarly was told that if/when 'the Kogi forget' their ways it 'would be the end' of them and the world 'by fire', which 'is close'.

As this indicates, for the Kogi their realism implies a strong eschatological dimension. Until humans stop creating 'debt', the Mamas maintain, the vicious cycle of imbalance will continue.

Moreover, 'the Kalgusha up there are watching us', and 'will not allow us to carry on like this forever', I heard. The Mamas claim that the current rate of destruction is becoming so overwhelming that soon they will not be able to counteract it with their rituals. 'How will we live like this?', Mama Manuel asked, 'could you live without water, earth, trees, and food?' (the Four Topics). He and others predicted that if things continue getting out of hand and people do not react, spiritual powers will have to eventually come to Earth and variously 'wipe the slate clean'. After 'weeding out the bad from the world', they will start life from scratch and instruct a small, new human population to be fully in line with cosmological principles again. 'If [the Younger Brothers] go on like this and they don't change their ways at once, they'll see what will happen' (Mama Valencio 1990).

However, according to Mama Manuel people still have time to avoid this forceful self-renovation (of the system). To not harm the environment, 'there need to be fewer problems among ourselves'. Following him, 'disputes occur between the Mamas, yes, but that is a matter of the flesh, of people's differences and human bickering'. By contrast, 'spirit and knowledge are only one, and what comes from Aluna is truth, even if interpreted differently. A body has different parts, with different needs, but there is only one way of seeing' (*eizua uba*). Mama Shibulata complemented this by saying that we need to recreate the spirit of Seizhankua, who protected and promoted life and order in the Earth's story (Chapter 4). 'The places he touched are therefore plentiful, full of teachings'. Alejo, who was listening, added with pride that in learning from his past mistakes according to Zaldziwê's story and becoming a better person (Chapter 3), he was 'being like Seizhankua'. As organiser of the Earth, Seizhankua is considered an example of leading a good life.

9.4. Realism as ethical principle?

Santos-Granero (1991) describes how among the Amuesha priestly society of Amazonian Peru, cosmogony directly guides moral behaviour and legitimates knowledge. In related fashion, I discussed how Kogi epistemological procedures derive from cosmological *origin*, are inherent to the ontological *order* of being, and teach the *function* of things to *relate* to them ecologically. In light of the discussion above then, for the Kogi knowledge (*shibuldama*) not only gives social standing, but also equals correct behaviour, upholds well-being, and hence implies responsibility. Alejo therefore often compared having knowledge of something to being *respectful* towards it. According to my informants, 'having knowledge' (*shibuldama akué*) means morally and ecologically good judgment, as well as to 'think well' and be 'well-seated' (*giuaba i té*).

In Kogi terms, the compatibility of my project and the Mamas' interest (Chapter 2) rested on this moral purpose of knowledge. The Sierra's spiritual entities agreed that the Mamas reveal this usually well-guarded knowledge to an outsider because it served to clarify the ontology underlying their environmental cause, which for them constituted a good, correct reason. For Favret-Saada (1980), fully engaging French witchcraft meant acknowledging that words inevitably had power. In my case, and contrary to the Western notion of words as 'neutral reference instruments' (Stoller 1984: 97), words constituted cognised knowledge with pragmatic, moral and ecological implications. I was told (Chapter 2) that not fulfilling our spiritual agreement could lead to problems, which the Mamas said happened during through my accident and illness for not making my payments. 'These words are not to be taken lightly, they are deep words, they are the Sierra's words'.

In our last, concluding session, Mama Luntana and Mama Manuel reminded me that my knowledge was delivered to be used to protect things, 'and not simply out of interest to then be stored away and that's it'. Moreover, once my thesis was concluded this knowledge would have to be spiritually 'returned' from England to the Sierra, where it came from and belongs to. Just as the sacred sites 'fed' me their knowledge, so I would fulfil my spiritual agreement by giving back to and reciprocating the Sierra, thus ensuring balance. Among the Kogi then, as with witchcraft in France, one has to take a 'stance' (Favret-Saada 1980: 25).

How could anthropology deal with such a notion of morality as a conscious, cosmologically predetermined force out there, inherent to things and learned from them, and tantamount to ecological awareness and protection? How may this be theorised when presented as part of an organised *whole*, a mountain range that is lived, known, protected, and politically negotiated according to a long-standing Amerindian tradition? What if this morality is said to affect people beyond the local context as a result of environmental destruction through disease, natural catastrophes, and social problems? If Kogi realism, universalism, and essentialism present a problem to anthropological analysis, its underlying moral dimension seems to enhance this difficulty. If anthropology is not so much a study *of*, but a study *with* people whereby we learn to perceive and do things as they do, as Ingold (2008: 82) argues, could taking the Kogi seriously also be an *ethical* consideration? Might letting native reality postulates permeate our own being (Stoller 1984) include the moral aspect? If other (non-human) voices were to 'affect [our] analysis', would this 'make anthropology say something different?' (De la Cadena 2010: 358).

Following Robbins (2013: 458), giving others' notions of 'the good' a place in our accounts is part of permitting that other versions of 'the real' challenge our own. For Nadasdy (2007),

considering a possible literal truth in Indigenous Peoples' claims is also an ethical responsibility as anthropologists. He even argues that if we ignore these reality postulates, anthropological theories may 'legitimate- and, indeed, participate in' the epistemological and ideological distillation of indigenous knowledge by other actors during environmental conflicts (Chapter 8), 'even as we call for their participation and knowledge' (2007: 37). It may even provide 'a powerful justification for their [political and ideological] dismissal'. Ontological understandings are consequently not allowed to 'provide [a] factual basis for development or resource management', which for Nadasdy (2007: 37) also violates 'long-standing anthropological understandings about the holistic [...] nature of knowledge'. Given these implications, recognising different ontological postulates is for Di Giminiani (2013: 541) also 'a political act in itself', through which 'anthropology can offer a decisive contribution' to these environmental scenarios. This contribution might require cooperation and dialogue between anthropology and other disciplines to understand and address ecological issues, as Escobar (1999), and Sillitoe (1998) suggest, particularly given present 'untold levels of ecological destruction' (Escobar 1998: 57).

Contributing to debates over environmental problems and to their solutions can build on the conceptual translation and 'double rapprochement' or 'co-theorization' between academics and indigenous experts (Rappaport and Ramos-Pacho 2005) suggested in Chapter 2. Anthropology can inform mediation by conveying indigenous knowledge in a way that state representatives and policy makers can better appreciate its potential relevance. According to Rodriguez-Navarro (2000: 456, 458), the Sierra's sustainability can only be achieved with the Four People's knowledge, being a 'unique example' of ecological balance which is 'disappearing'. This is especially called for since 'there remains an official bias' against the value of indigenous knowledge (Ellen 2010: 376).

In any case, this requires considering that, as Ingold (2000: 95) suggests, indigenous metaphysics have the power to challenge our own ontological certainties, to tell us something about 'what the world is really like', and to have 'bearing on natural scientific enquiry'. Could we give the Mamas the benefit of doubt and learn something from Kogi knowledge about natural phenomena and damage to the environment? Rodriguez-Navarro (2006) proposes that this would be central in developing a more respectful ecological attitude towards the Sierra Nevada that incorporates moral values. I propose that in this light we may benefit from regaining the ontological sense of 'wonder' normally ousted from science that Scott (2013: 859) proposes, or a curious, open-ended, 'inquisitive mode of being' supported by Ingold (2008: 89) that can 'throw [light] upon the world'. After all, 'anthropology [...] does more than furnish us with knowledge *about* the world – about people and their societies. It rather educates our *perception* of the world, and opens our eyes and minds to other

possibilities of being' (Ingold 2008: 82). As I have attempted to show, putting 'preconceived [ontological] ideas at risk' (De la Cadena 2010: 360) also entails corresponding epistemological considerations (Escobar 1998: 76). Consequently, assuming the ethical implications which Kogi realism and morality invite, may imply adjusting theoretical and methodological procedures to the ethnographic case. Potentially 'renew[ing] our analytical toolkit, vocabulary, and framework' (De la Cadena 2010: 360, Kohn 2013), can include selecting topics, framing questions, types of interpretation, narrative order, how to learn in the field, or even the purpose of the research itself.

All in all, and in light of this thesis, the propositions above may be called an *ethical-realist* initiative. While Robbins' (2013) proposition of 'an anthropology of the good' seems a relevant motivation to address Kogi *cosmo-ecological morality*, in this case contributing to environmental issues would also invoke 'the good of anthropology'. As Mama Pedro Juan (2009) asks:

If our Brothers listen and do not harm us... They could give us so much help.

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