Between the Magic of Magic and the Magic of Money: the Changing Nature of Experience in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta

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ABSTRACT

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When people in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta are gathered around the hearths of their houses, it is common to hear the sound and movement of the women’s spindles whirring on the earth floor as they pull out threads of material, and the rhythm of men’s hardwood rods rubbing continuously against the mouth of their gourd containers. It is at this point of intimacy and flowing vitality at which the familiarity of the indigenous Sierra comes alive.

According to Kogi, Wiwa and Ika cosmology, there is a life force that grows in people, as much as animals and plants, which like the thread of a spindle extends from the center of the cosmos. “It is here where the Universal Mother planted her gigantic spindle across the highest peak,” as she said: “this is Kalusankua, the central post of the world.” This vital thread, like an umbilical cord, holds all living elements as they fulfill their fate on Earth. It is a very different strand from the one that Walter Benjamin mentions in the story of the genie who gave the boy a ball of thread and said: “This is the thread of your life. Take it. When you find time heavy on your hands, pull it out; your
days will pass quick or slow, according as you unwind the ball rapidly or little by little. So long as you leave the thread alone, you will remain stationary at the same hour of your existence.” But the boy started pulling the thread and before he knew it he became a man, married the girl he loved, saw his children grow up, passed over his anxieties, lived honors and profits, and then cut short his old age, all in four months and six days.

Pre-Columbian materials -many times sonorous and full of detailed expressions; made of gold and copper, ceramic, jade and stone quartz of different luster and color- are said to be the medium through which people, plants and animals are able to concentrate the necessary life force to fulfill their fate on Earth. Buried all around the vast mountainous terrain of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, these ancient materials sustain the interconnections to the creative energies in the cosmos. However, as these materials are looted and pulled out of ancient indigenous grounds, they cease to hold together the center from which this vital force grows. As they are sold as commodities, they appear in the international art market, independent of their place of origin and devoid of any life force.

With the new modes of industrial production, observes Karl Marx, the creative energy or central force of people disappears in the things that they produce. Matter severed from its producer acquires a second life independent of its source of energy and equivalent to all other things in the form of commodities. As capitalist societies begin to measure the output of energy in terms of this second life of things, individual skills and creative energies become irrelevant to the process of growth. “The individuals are now subordinated to social production, which exists externally to them, as a sort of fate,” notes Marx in the Grundrisse in 1857. Walter Benjamin then extends this idea and points
out: “In ‘fate’ is concealed the concept of ‘total experience.’” He quotes the following passage in The Arcades Project: “It is not a question of ‘the triumph of mind over matter’…; rather, it represents the triumph of the rational and general principles of things over the energy and qualities proper to the living organism.”

Even though Pre-Columbian materials are not produced in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta today, they are believed to mediate the energies and qualities proper to living beings. These energies are lost as they are dug out, and as the holes in the Mother Land of the Ika, Wiwa and Kogi people grow, so does the value of these pieces in the market. It is only in the realm of the inorganic that we can begin to fathom this concept of value. Walter Benjamin’s notion of a “new kind of 20th C fate” helps us observe this vast contradiction now lived in the native Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, whereby the threads that like umbilical cords connect living beings throughout their life to the sources of energy around their territory, no longer seem to be growing out of experience but rather out of money.

Benjamin points out “a new field force,” which opens up in the form of planning… To ‘plan’ is henceforth possible only on a large scale, no longer on an individual scale – and this means neither for the individual nor by the individual.” Property is depersonalized in such a way that it is caught up in a whirlpool, lost by one and won by another. Successes and failures arise from causes that are unanticipated, generally unintelligible, and seemingly dependent on chance. He observes this new fate as it plays out in the experience of figures like the gambler, the private collector, the student and the flaneur, that are not completely subordinated to the labor process, but are idlers residing both within and outside the marketplace, between the worlds of magic
and money. He observes how “Fortuna” in the double sense of chance and riches is always on the side of these figures. When a gambler wins for example, we don’t say it is a consequence of his work activity but it is a matter of luck or chance: “Fortuna” that is on his side. It is this “total experience” as Benjamin calls it, concealed in the form of “Fortuna” which feeds the gambling instincts and animates the myths that consume “guaqueros,” people who dig out ancient indigenous burial sites in search of Pre-Columbian treasures, looting enchanted and dangerous places all around the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. Even though guaqueros climb a mountainous terrain as high as 19,000 feet, and traverse rain forests inhabited by wild animals and plants, these treasure hunters are not so much at the mercy of the mysterious forces of nature, as at the hands of the “inexplicable” in bourgeois society. “The ‘inexplicable’ is enthroned in bourgeois society as in a gambling hall…” notes Benjamin.

Like gamblers, guaqueros are risking a hand-to-hand encounter with fate, where the stake is money. They can lose or win immediate and infinite possibilities: money equivalent to anything. Only in response to such fate, like the boy with the ball of thread, is it possible to pull out the material from the place where the earth has been gestating it for centuries and bring it into a new inorganic existence. The guaqueros, like the gamblers, produce in a second, the changes that fate ordinarily effects only in the course of many years. “Isn’t there a certain structure of money that can be recognized only in fate, and a certain structure of fate that can be recognized only in money?” asks Benjamin. Such encounter with this new kind of fate occurs as “immediate experience” or das Erlebnis, which comes in the form of shock and discontinuity, points out Benjamin, as opposed to “connected experience” or die Erfahrung which presupposes
tradition and continuity. Idlers, like the guaqueros are open to this type of experience. They are not so much following a sequence, as attentively tracing a dynamic that leads them through the excitement of their chase, step by step from one coincidence to the next. They “follow nothing but the whim of the moment.”

The Ika Mamos, as much as the Kogi and Wiwa Mamas or high priests who inherit the places where these Pre-Columbian materials are buried, along with the knowledge necessary nourish and connect to the cosmic life force in them, ask: if this is the new fate of the world, then what will happen to these creative energies which need to be sustained in order for the threads of life to continue growing? Will there come a point, they ponder, when the threads of life will cease to grow and all the rivers, as much as the streams in human, plant and animal veins, will dry up? According to Ika, Wiwa and Kogi cosmology, only the ancestors can feed on these ancient materials, so the Mamas and Mamos wonder: is it that people believe they can eat gold too? It is only in terms of this “new kind of 20th Century fate,” that we can begin to understand the fantastic transformations and disjunctions of the value of these materials as they move from the native sites where they are buried and nurtured, to the hands of guaqueros who dig them out and sell them. By following this passage between experience and money, Between the Magic of Magic and the Magic of Money, rather like the flaneur that moves in between spaces, inside and outside the marketplace, I want to inquire: what is the fate of these ancient materials and forces, and how does “Fortuna” in the double sense of chance and riches, then reflect back upon current Ika, Kogi and Wiwa existence?
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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to Fanny Umaña, my mother, who laid out the foundation from where I fathom the intimacy of the sacred
Figure 1. A white thread growing on Jaba Catalina’s spindle, like the Universal Mother’s gigantic spindle planted across the highest peak
Chapter One. The Intimacy of the Sacred

“If one of the most ‘sacred’ aims that man can set for himself is to acquire as exact and intense an understanding of himself as possible, it seems desirable that each one, scrutinizing his memories with the greatest possible honesty, examine whether he can discover there some sign permitting him to discern the color for him of the very notion of sacred.”

Section 1.1

There had been a full moon the night before. This is usually the time when there’s most activity in Windiwa, when everyone takes advantage of the luminosity and fresh air to visit neighbors, sit around stitch bags, converse and sometimes eat past midnight, as if it were daytime. Despite this, that evening had been dead silent in Zati’s house. The only thing I heard was the deep breathing of her sleeping grandchildren crowded around her on the earth floor. There are so many kids living with her that one constantly feels endless little hands sticking to one’s body or pulling at one’s clothes, in the hope that they’ll get something delicious out of one’s pocket. I also heard the rattling of a plastic bag, as Zati felt her way inside it with the tip of her fingers. It was the one I had used to wrap a few gifts so as to keep them from getting soaked with the rain and humidity on my way to Windiwa, an Ika town in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. I wanted to give her “makruma,” meaning a little something that I could carry with me and share, a gift that

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2 The town of Windiwa is approximately at an altitude of 3,900 feet above sea level on the Fundacion River Basin
3 There is currently a population of 46,000 Ika people in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. Ika means “people.” They have been commonly referred to as Arhuaco” which according to the anthropologist Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff is a mispronunciation of the term Aluaka, which comes from Father “Aldahuiku” in Kogi or in Ika Father “Aluaviku.” De la Rosa interprets it as a merging of the terms “Auro” meaning gold and “Huaca” in reference to an ancient burial site. The Ika today refer to specific family lines called “tana.” Each tana has its place of origin in the sacred sites that include landmarks like ceremonial stones, ancient drawings or specific peaks. Gunkuku tana has its origin in Nabusimake, it’s the umbilical cord of all Ika people. Gunkuku tana then mixed with Bunachi people brought about Busintana. Gunkuku tana with Umasi tana, otherwise known as Chimila or Ette in their language, brought about Chukayn tana, and so on. Each is said to have its specific connection, function and power
“warms someone’s heart” as I often heard people comment when I first lived there in 1994. My makruma included bread, two red and two green apples, condensed sweet milk, a bag of cobalt blue Czech beads and a blanket. As I handed it over to her she clasped it joyfully with both hands and continued to sit around, curved over the heat of the crackling fire, embracing her bag, at times talking whether any person was listening to her or not. If she had to move away from the hearth of the hut, she dragged herself and her belongings from one side to the other, so that no one would take anything away.

From my hammock, I saw Zati wide-awake all night. It was like seeing a vision. Her figure lit by the glow of the fire as if she were sitting by a portal waiting for something unknown to appear around the bend. In the morning she said she couldn’t sleep because she saw an army of ikanusi approaching. If one asks an Ika-speaking person what ikanusi is, they will translate it as “devil” in Spanish: “es diablo.” As I understand it, ikanusi are spirits that rise and move about the territory; energies like winds that connect sites and mark thresholds between the living and the dead. These thresholds are growing and waning zones depending on how satisfied they are with the offerings received. If they are not satisfied they can take over a person, a house, an entire terrain and erupt in violence, confusion, illness, scarcity or even death. Ikanusi are powerful. They’re everywhere. Their music is one that when played, moves everyone’s spirit, whether young or old, men or women, to sing and dance. The song of the Ikanusi is in fact, Zati’s favorite in what is known as “chicote,” the traditional Ika music, adapted in the 20th C to the accordion. But one thing is to acknowledge the power of ikanusi by

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dancing and singing to them, and another is for ikanusi to manifest their power and claim what is owed to them by sending armies of envoys, as Zati described them that morning: “rising and coming like a wind at night; blue people, with huge shoes, leaving footprints like those of the jaguar.”

Figure 2. Zati in 2011

Zati has become tiny. Seeing her in the hands of her grandchildren makes me think of Ursula in Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s “One Hundred Years of Solitude.” Ursula was so small that now, somewhere between 115 and 122 years old, she turned into the toy doll of her great great grand children. They carried her “back and forth from one corner to another wrapped in colored cloth and with her face painted with soot and annatto.” They covered her hair with ashes, hung lizards, desiccated frogs and ancient Arab necklaces on her. They pulled her by a string around the corners of their house in Macondo, a place that in Garcia Marquez’s imagination laid near his hometown in

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Aracataca, not far from the foothills of the Fundacion River basin, 4,900 feet below from where Zati sat in her house.

The distance that separates the towns of the foothills from the highlands of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta feels as if it were decreasing as the families living in the Ika reserve increasingly desire the luxuries of urban centers. Most of them get a surplus out of crops, just like the neighboring “bunachi”7 peasants at the frontier of the indigenous reserve. In 1995, it was often pointed out in the meetings that when too many “bunachi” visitors appeared, specially armed groups that walked through Windiwa, it was a sign that the spirit of the place was unwell, for the sites where the ancestors lay can call troubled spirits as much as they can call peaceful ones. I didn’t spot any armed groups this time, but it didn’t take me long to notice that instead of visitors like the ones I was used to seeing when Cheichi was alive: Ika people from surrounding areas searching for healing and advice, there are now wanderers looking for money and yearning a profit. They’ll do anything from selling random cheap stuff to seeking a day’s wage for their labor. I ran into a couple of lonely and beaten down men like this: soiled second hand clothes, few teeth in their mouth, uncouth choice of words like “fuck this”, “no joda hijueputa!” to fill in time. They had a distinct Spanish accent, the kind that one recognizes in the street corners of overgrown urban centers. Zati’s grandchildren imitated their accent to such an extent, one would think they had either grown up in the city and their fate would be to beg for money in traffic lights as is common in the big metropolis of Colombia, or to earn a wage for labor wherever single crop plantations were extending. This constitutes a sharp contrast with Zati herself, whom like many people of

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7 “Bunachi” is how the Ika refer to non-indigenous people
her generation, speaks no Spanish, remembers the time when she saw a bunachi for the first time and now seems like someone from another world.

On the day of my return in February of 2011, Zati was happy when I took out some arepas\(^8\) made of cheese from my bag and told her that my “cheirua”\(^9\) sent them to her. She smiled mischievously and said that if she ate them, she would be ingesting the heart of my man. I said I was glad because his heart would be stored in a good place. We both laughed. She commented that I have reason to be happy since I have my cheirua with me and I can enjoy his company. The degree to which Zati misses Cheichi has not dwindled since his death in 1995. Cheichi is an affectionate way of saying “father” in ika, and Zati or “eldest sister” is a warm way of naming an older, wise woman. Cheichi however, was not only father but also mamu. As mamu or high priest he was a mediator between the world of the living and that of the ancestors. He carried out divination, healed people and nature, delivered offerings all around the territory and was constantly sought out for his counsel.

Mamu in Ika is one of the names used to refer to the sun. People comment that like the sun, a mamu enlightens his surroundings even amidst darkness. However, it’s also said that a mamu cannot bring about the full strength of his anugwe, his thought and spirit, without a wife who ideally lays out the ground like fertile soil, for her husband to plant the seed of his anugwe, as he delivers his work. A saxa or mamu’s wife is often consulted for her knowledge of materials, such as stones and plants used for offerings and healing. Many times it’s the wives of the mamus whom like receptacles of knowledge, remember certain ancestral names found in traditional stories, as much as useful

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\(^8\) Arepa is a flat maize dough, sometimes filled with cheese
\(^9\) “Cheirua” is husband
information that circulates in conversations as much as rumors. Furthermore, it’s usually
the saxas whose dreams as well as intuition enlighten the circumstances that the mamus
are trying to clarify.

I distinctly remember Zati’s negative premonition a few months before Cheichi’s
death. It got worse when a week before, an owl repeatedly flew into their place at day
time, and stood there staring while Zati frantically tried to push it out with a broom, as if
trying to get rid of any possible harm. Zati comments she likes my visits because they
remind her of the time when Cheichi was still alive sixteen years ago. When her son H
came by her house a few hours after I gave her my gifts, she offered him a piece of arepa,
repeating whom it came from. Zati always keeps something tempting to offer, some
makruma in the fold of her white cotton robe: a maize bundle, an egg, a piece of sugar
cane brick, and as is often the case with wise old women, she knows exactly when to pull
it out and make one relish the gift. The makruma that I brought her was a confirmation
that her “anugwe:” the strength and spirit of her thoughts still holds the power to come
alive for as she claimed, it was her anugwe that like an invisible thread pulled me all the
way there.

The following evening I saw Zati’s silhouette once again illumined by the light of
the amber as she sat wide-awake stitching a bag in the middle of the night. This time I
decided to get up and sit by her side. She asked me if I was going to leave the next day, I
replied I would remain a while longer. She smiled, leaned back and fell asleep.
Sometimes I think that what the elders need most is to feel acknowledged by one’s
anugwe. People say that one should do the same with the sacred sites: remember the
ancestors in their dwellings, feed them through offerings imbued with the strength and
spirit of one’s thought, and continue to visit them in order to keep them satisfied. I
thought about depositing an offering in Cheichi’s site. The next afternoon I visited H to
see if he could help me deliver it.

H, who had been living for years with his wife and children in another Ika
settlement, returned to Windiwa upon Cheichi’s death and established his own “kaduku”
or place for concentration not far from his father’s site. It’s here where I now found
myself, sitting by the bonfire that H lit to help drive away the cloud of mosquitoes
attracted by the coffee trees growing all around us. I told him that I had been past
Cheichi’s kaduku that morning and noticed that the vegetation had fully invaded it.
“Cheichi’s kaduku was transgressed by people who envied him,” he replied. “At the
moment of his death a liquid seeped out of his pores, a venom that was planted there and
that had to be blocked. The best way to deter this was to let nature take over.”

I had seen Cheichi’s kaduku on other occasions after his death, but for some reason his absence
felt more pungent to me now. His death came as a shock to all of us. The day after, his
family searched around his site and found a small black doll, a heart with something
penetrating it, and other objects of black magic “that littered the place,” as H put it. The
house where he died has since become the pigs’ shelter, and the surroundings that were
once overwhelming with the sense of place, feel desolate. “A major mamu like Cheichi,
would have easily arrested this black magic,” continued H. “But he was too trusting and
didn’t suspect that anyone would want to harm him like this. Cheichi’s site is no longer
used as kaduku, but one can still deliver nourishment there: food for the ikanusi,”
affirmed H, implying that Cheichi is now ikanusi himself. “There are snakes protecting

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10 Field notes from Diary of 2011
the site and one must know how to deliver the offerings,” he continued. H knows how “to connect there” as if they were telephone lines, “like a mobile phone that communicates through both points of contact,” he explained, meaning the town of Windiwa and Nabusimake. The former is where Cheichi lived most of his life and the latter, which is the center of the Ika heartland, is where he received his “powers” as mamu; powers embedded in materials that are referred to as his “marunsama.”

A marunsama can comprise ancient stones, quartz stones and precious metals, as well as more recently fabricated crystal and plastic beads that together make up a code for both protection and identity in the world of ancestors. Cheichi’s marunsama is now buried in a miniature dwelling, no bigger than the size of a peccary, near the house where he grew up in Nabusimake. “Cheichi said to us that one day he would not have a mouth to speak, nor hands to do things with,” affirmed H, “so he taught us some methods to communicate with him when he would no longer be around.” As our conversation carried on, I perceived part of Cheichi’s anugwe, the strength and spirit of his thought, manifested in H today. I was stirred by how much he looked like his father. The manner in which he held up his hands in deep concentration with his head slightly tilted towards one side, his pause, the furrows that marked his expression and the way his face lit up when he spoke, transported me back to the time when Cheichi was around.

I remember how Cheichi used to surface out of the forest just before sunset and turn on lively music on his 8x5 inch black radio, carefully clutched upon the wooden beam that held the adobe walls of the house together, in such a way that it was easy to

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11 Field notes from Diary of 2011
turn the dial and search for the station that was playing Vallenato\textsuperscript{12} songs. Since Windiwa is on the border between the Magdalen and the Cesar Departments, his radio would pick up the best from both regions. He would then settle into his small dense wooden stool as if he were sinking in the midst of a prairie by Zati. She would most likely be by the hearth of the fire, her cheerfulness filling the space like the crackling sound and light of the flames.

As they talked, he would take out his “poporo”, a pear shaped gourd container used by many Ika men as they chew roasted coca leaves. “Poporear” or using a poporo is an ongoing activity, almost like breathing, from the moment that a man comes of age. Poporo containers grow on gourd trees and are filled with lime extracted from burnt and crushed seashells found in the beaches. The coca leaves which the men carry in bags stitched especially for that, are picked from coca bushes and then roasted in ceramic pots. They extract a handful of them out of their bag and tuck them in a wad against one side of their cheek. Meanwhile, a wooden rod is tipped inside the gourd container to draw out the lime which is then wiped onto the ball of leaves. After the tip of the rod is sucked with the coca and lime-impregnated saliva, it’s circled around the opening of the gourd container in small rotations that leave traces of a yellow substance which solidifies and gradually accumulates as a crust. This opening of the poporo is said to be the mouth or vagina of the womb where all thought that is planted, whether positive or negative, grows. As the initiated receive their poporo, they are made sure to understand that whatever thought or anugwe they process as they use their poporos, will be felt in the Earth’s womb. As the men release the spittle, they say the Earth is lubricated and

\textsuperscript{12} Vallenato is a popular form of Colombian music that is usually sung with an accordion, a type of drum known as caja, and a guacharaca or cane-like percussion instrument. It originated in the valley between the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta and the Serrania de Perija.
satisfied as if she were being fertilized. Hence, it’s important to concentrate refreshing thought that nourishes the life force of the Earth, instead of burning her with rage and heat. The initiates are advised not to feel depressed, angry or drink alcohol as they use their poporos. If they do so, they are recommended to put them away and “clean” their anugwe in spirit with a mamu’s help before resuming this activity.

Figure 3. Cheichi in 1995 with his poporo in his hands and his granddaughter in the background

It’s so common to see and hear men in the indigenous Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta with their poporos that one quickly assumes them to be a natural part of life, almost like an extension of the body. One becomes sensitive to the sound of the rods rotating around the mouth of the poporos. As I converse I feel encouraged by the sound
of my interlocutor’s poporo concentrated in my words as much as my anugwe, as I articulate my ideas. I can hear the circling of the rod against the mouth of the poporo, increasing or decreasing around the dialogue, sometimes at a full stop when there is intent listening, and then reinitiating with an ongoing swooshing sound like the wind. It’s said that as men are continually planting their thought in their poporos and nourishing the life force on Earth, the women are inspired to conceive it as they draw out threads of materials such as cotton, wool or yarn in their spindles. The spindle is a pointed wooden shaft with a central whorl to keep it rotating. As the shaft is spun with one hand on the floor, the growing thread is pulled and sustained with the other while it expands from the whorl as if embracing everything in its path. Then it closes up again and accumulates around the shaft. As the spinner keeps drawing out the thread and winding it up in regular rhythm, she seems to be accompanying all the other activities around her, whether it’s at daytime when the sun is above the apex of the thatched roof, or at night when the sun is below the three stones where the fire is burning. It’s amidst these quotidian activities that I remember Cheichi and Zati chatting away into nighttime. Often as Cheichi listened to Zati’s accounts, he would lay his poporo against his foot in order to reach out for his “a’buru,” a collection of stones nested in a small woven bag, used to carry out his divination. I can still picture Cheichi with his head slightly tilted to one side, attentively listening to his “a’buru,” releasing it onto the curved wooden surface of his stool, and drawing a bridge with the ancestors listening all around. It was as if the “a’buru” were his anugwe, his thoughts and spirit spreading out and resonating on the fine polished hardwood, echoing in a place that we couldn’t see with our eyes but we could feel in our bodies.
Next to where H now sat, I could see his sturdy mamu’s baton made of pitch-black wood and his own a’buru whispering in his ears as he shook it while he tuned in, listening intently throughout his divination, just like Cheichi did. On the other hand, there’s a certain hygienic delicacy to H, the technical refinement of a professionally trained nurse, which wrenched me out of the fantasy of thinking he could be Cheichi. H is a nurse as well as “mamito” or a “little high priest,” as many refer to those who know a bit of the work that mamus do but not the full scope. It’s pointed out that in order for a mamu’s anugwe to cover the whole range of spiritual work and reach the sites where the most ancient ancestors dwell, he needs the strength and concentration that his wife can help him attain. However, in H’s wife’s opinion, it’s much more important to defeat their scarce material conditions and “progress,” than to follow the life and practice of a mamu. H’s wife has left him to accomplish his sense of mission as mamu all by himself. Whether it’s because of this or for some other reason, the fact is that as of today, H has not been generally acknowledged to have the full mamu status that his father did, but remains mamito.

As the moon climbed all the way up in the sky and the sun plunged into the womb of the Earth, H’s wife and girls remained tucked away in their sleep, under the tin roof of their house made of concrete, bunachi style. Unlike the traditional thatched roof with adobe walls like Cheichi’s and Zati’s home, this one has no fire in the center to connect to the ancestral Father and Mother of the place, nor a view of the stars and the slopes of

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13 It used to be that the mamus had so much strength that they could journey through all the spheres, up and down the rungs of the central spinning force, which is like a giant spindle. The inhabitants of the earth live in the central whorl. A full scope mamu can journey to spheres above the central whorl, and to spheres below it. Each realm has its own inhabitants with particular characteristics: some are giant or tiny, some have an eye, others don’t, some have feet, others are just heads, and so on. But it’s only in our sphere that the life force or energy manifests itself materially
the mountains surrounding them. H wore a tutusoma, one of the white-coiled sisal hats in the shape of a trapezoidal prism that many Ika men wear when they come of age. But instead of the sturdy and tightly woven ones, H’s looks a bit awkward with a dropped shape as a consequence of its loose knitting. Unlike Cheichi’s thick white tunic woven on a loom, H’s white Ika gear is made out of a thin white cotton fabric that’s sold in the city. H must have sensed some of the thoughts that were engulfing me at the moment, for he began talking about his eldest daughter who is now living in Bavaria, one of the most luxurious neighborhoods in the city of Santa Marta where “a patrona,” as he says referring to a bunachi sponsor, is giving her education by paying for her school and allowing her to stay in her house. In exchange, the girl keeps her company and helps her with house keeping chores. H’s family’s efforts are engaged in satisfying the “patrona.” They gift her with stitched bags and follow whatever instruction she thinks best for the girl. “She never lets her go out on her own,” affirmed H proudly for he and his wife have faith that this kind of education will help their whole household “overcome themselves,” “nos vamos a superar” he said in Spanish.

Immersed amidst the ocean of needs and desires expanding around us, I was struck by the excess coffee trees that far outnumbered what Cheichi would have grown twenty years ago. His crops of coffee were intertwined with others such as maize, yucca, beans, cacao, sugar cane and plantain. I thought about how profuse the food had been when Cheichi was around. There was material and spiritual nourishment growing hand in

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14 Bavaria was a neighborhood originally built for the employees of a Colombian brewery company known as Bavaria S.A. Together with Santa Marta’s bay side where many local privileged families originally built their private homes which are turning into buildings, and the neighborhood of El Prado which was founded by the United Fruit Company, Bavaria is now one of the most privileged neighborhoods in the city of Santa Marta.

15 “Nos vamos a superar” literally translates to “we are going to overcome ourselves”
hand, and one could feel its abundance. The kids would run about playfully, sturdy and full, their bellies as satisfied as their spirit. There were always visitors coming and going with bananas, yucca, mangos, maize bundles, meat, eggs and others that would arrive from neighboring settlements or further up the mountain, all the way from the tundra region, bringing sheep skins, onions and potatoes. I remembered how Zati used to sit placidly on the earthen floor of the open courtyard in front of the house, spinning wool with chicks cuddling by the warmth of her body, as her dog, Mariachi, would comically chase the chickens and roosters around the open courtyard. Cheichi didn’t appear to feel the eminent pressure for money that currently seems to be the epicenter of most people’s minds and conversations in Windiwa, longing each time for the bare amount that will get them through the next crisis, whether it’s urgent medical needs, circumstances regarding the increasing demand for education of their children, or simply new agricultural requirements amidst an increasingly distressed environment. Now Zati’s courtyard is filled with coffee trees all the way up to the doorstep, a single crop closing in everywhere as if the family could not spare to “waste” an inch of space. At the same time, the shortage of food stirs one of her older grandsons, empowered by politics and the wealth of the city, to send her three mules full of groceries every month. He has no time in his hands and consequently, dispatches the load instead of visiting her. People comment this is not really makruma, for makruma comes with company. “Why would an old woman need so much?” gossip Windiwa’s inhabitants whenever they see the muleteer descending around the bend of the Fundacion River, hauling the mules all the way from Nabusimake which is about an eight hour walk away. The rumor says that half of it is taken from her.

16 Nabusimake is at an altitude of approximately 6,500 feet above sea level on the Fundacion River Basin
Cheichi would often comment that in order to live in Windiwa, below the boulder of Kochukwa, a site that is about a four hour climb from Windiwa towards Nabusimake, it was necessary to pay many offerings to the “real” owners of that land: the ancestors. He would point out that it’s to the ancestors that this place belongs, and it’s from them that one needs to obtain permission to live, to breath, to bathe, to cure, to eat, to defecate there. The site of Kochukwa, would note Cheichi, is a threshold that separates the living from the dead. Before the coming of the sun, the dead would always pick on the living, until the Father of materiality on earth, Father Serankua, marked that point beyond which each had to keep to their own confines. After the rising of the sun, it was essential to respect that threshold. Windiwa’s current mamu, Mamu Mundo, coincides with this and says, “one needs to continue paying in spirit” because to live below that point “is to sell your anugwe,” your thought and spirit, in the realm which belongs to the dead.

Another one of Cheichi and Zati’s sons: JA told me that despite the threshold between the living and the dead at the site of Kochukwa, in the 1960s around ten people who felt the need to escape the pressure of the missionaries living in Nabusimake descended below that point under the guidance of Mamu Delfin. Since 1916, the Capuchin missionaries had been entrusted to “educate” the indigenous community as part of the civilizing mission of the new Republic of Colombia. They built a boarding

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17 Like many boulders in and around the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, the boulder of Kochukwa is a place carved with figures that according to the Ika, were left there by the ancestors
18 The Ika often refer to the time of origin, before the sun was born. In his book Donald Tayler refers to this period as “the coming of the sun”
19 Father Serankua or Kake Serankua is the ancestor that heated the womb of the earth and sowed life as we know it today
20 Field notes from Diary of 2011
21 For more on the history of the missions please see Juan Friede, La explotacion indigena en Colombia. Bogota: Punta de Lanza, 1973
school in Nabusimake, the Ika center, where they would confine children from all around the Ika territory. By 1963, Juan Friede who condemned the way in which the Mission had imposed itself in Ika territory, pointed out the enormous extensions of land that they appropriated with growing herds of cattle, sheep and horses.\textsuperscript{22} JA describes how Mamu Delfin and his group looked for a place where they could grow their crops and live apart peacefully. They opened a path through the forest with their machetes and finally came upon a flat area by the main Fundacion River, where they found a stone that was the center of this land. It was here where Mamu Delfin, Cheichi’s father in law, concentrated for two years “paying”\textsuperscript{23} plenty of offerings to the rightful owners of that place until they obtained the “spiritual permission” to settle there for a few months and then return to Nabusimake for the rest of the year. This settlement was named Windiwameina, meaning the land of the temple of Windiwa, which is a mountain and guards that place. But shortly afterwards, the missionaries felled the forest and pushed their animals through people’s lands all the way to Windiwa, where they built a summerhouse by Mamu Delfin’s stone, which is where a schoolhouse stands today. They named the place “Santo Domingo” in Spanish. Very few people spoke Spanish, pointed out JA, and so “there was no way to reason with the missionaries.”\textsuperscript{24} Mamu Delfin’s son who spoke a little Spanish, travelled to Santa Marta to report to the civil authorities that the missionaries were invading their lands. However, as JA recounts it, “no one paid any attention to him.” Instead the priest who spent his vacation in Santo Domingo sued him in the Police Inspection in

\textsuperscript{22} Friede, Juan. Op. cit., p. 106
\textsuperscript{23} Terms such as “ pagar” and “cobrar” or paying and charging a due, are commonly used to refer to the relationship with the ancestral Fathers and Mothers of the sites all around the territory
\textsuperscript{24} Ferro, Maria del Rosario. Informe de Campo: Concepto de Dialogo, Los Ika de la Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. Bogota, Universidad de los Andes, 1994, p. 70
Nabusimake, an institution that defended the interests of the Mission. Consequently, Mamu Delfin’s son was ordered to leave Windiwa for good.

The people who had initially descended with Mamu Delfin from Nabusimake, including Zati and Cheichi, decided to settle the other side of the river, as far away from the missionaries as possible. There were no footbridges connecting one side of the shore to the other, as there are now. And the tide of the river would grow so much that it was risky to cross from one side to the other. Mamu Delfin and his companions would gather regularly to concentrate their anugwe, connect to the ancestors of the place and undertake the necessary cleansing to pay the owners of the sites so as to keep the missionaries from spreading everywhere. It’s here where Cheichi found the opening for his kaduku, a place on a small hill by a creak where he concentrated his anugwe up until his death.

After much coercion from the Mission, the Ika organized a central government or Cabildo in 1972 to defend their cause, and in 1982 Ika “Mestizos” who were educated in the Mission, joined Ika “Traditionals” to take over the Mission’s premises in Nabusimake and ask the missionaries in a peaceful but resolute manner to leave. “Mestizos” as they are currently named, are the descendants of the families that were

25 Much of this struggle persists to this day, like defending the mountain of Alguacil or “Inarwa Tuma,” 2,480 meters above sea level in the Cesar region. It’s one of the major Ika sacred sites, invaded by the Colombian army with communication antennae and a military base. In a newspaper article written by Alfredo Molano, “En Defensa del Alguacil.” In: El Espectador, October 5, 2013, http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/nacional/defensa-del-alguacil-articulo-450609, the author mentions that in 1962, the army erected a strategic communication center in El Alguacil when the US wanted to block Cuba after the triumph of the Revolution. In 1978 the army illegally built a road traversing the mountain and erected communication antennae in this site, despite the fact that it was officially declared part of the indigenous reserve. In 2006, the government continued to violate the indigenous right to their autonomy, territory and sacred sites by constructing a military base there and claiming that it was part of its strategic war against terrorism. Furthermore, they authorized a line of electricity connected to Electricaribe S.A. something that from the perspective of the Mamus, clearly interferes with the harmony of the ancestral connections there. Furthermore, given that anti-personnel mines where placed all around that territory, it’s dangerous for the Mamus to continue delivering their offerings. Far from returning the site of Inarwa Tuma to their rightful owners, in May of 2012, the Ministry of Defense rented 480 communication antennae to private enterprises for which they received $3,800 million pesos in return. Hence, in the eyes of the Ika, the Colombian state is selling one of their most sacred sites in their Reserve.
raised in the Mission’s boarding school, many of which were married to people outside
the Ika “tanas” or lines of descendants. They are also referred to as “de civil” or “of the
civilized” because as many comment, they speak Spanish in their homes and “dress with
the teachings and the clothing of the civilized.” On the other hand, “Tradicionales” or
“Traditionals” are those families who continue following the ancestral inheritance or
“kunsamu,” literally meaning the central stem or trunk that grows from the navel of the
Mother. Donald Tayler translates “kunsamu” as the Ika law,\textsuperscript{26} which is the knowledge
that the mamus and their wives learn and practice. Many elders who witnessed the
withdrawal of the missionaries recount how Ika men, women and children sat around the
Mission’s premises for three days and nights with their poporos, spindles and bags,
talking and playing some of the best chicote music recorded on the accordion. The
missionaries finally accepted to move out of Ika territory in 1983. Cheichi and Zati
remained living on their side of the river in Windiwa, while the Mission’s land around the
schoolhouse was distributed amongst Mestizos and Traditionals who lived in the region
of Nabusimake known as “Mamoneros” because they were of the Mamos. Around the
1980’s the inhabitants of Windiwa appointed Cheichi to be the main Mamu or high
priest, which is how I first came to know him in 1995.\textsuperscript{27}

As we continued talking with H, I told him that I was glad he was taking care of
Cheichi’s site but that I feared the connections and bonds to his kaduku might vanish one
day, something that I could not even have begun to imagine twenty years ago. As I spoke
to him I couldn’t get Zati out of my mind and commented that I was worried for her
because she thinks that someone wants to harm her out of envy, just as they did with

\textsuperscript{26} Tayler, Donald. The Coming of the Sun. Oxford: Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, Monograph
No. 7, 1997, p.111
\textsuperscript{27} I lived in Windiwa for seven months from January to August of 1995
Cheichi. H listened to my concerns about his mother and answered: “it takes a lot to come to understand the elders because they see and feel things that we cannot comprehend without the wisdom of time. They know for example, when death is seeking them and when they have to render themselves to it.” I pictured Zati fixed by the fireplace, weary of her own vision and intuition from where she saw an ever-growing gap between herself and the world that surrounded her. It’s a forewarning she said, and I fear the same, as when one hears the elders worry that instead of the nourishing, life-giving force of anugwe that grows from one generation to the next as it connects the sites of the dead to those of the living through a relationship of exchange, ikanusi will erupt, increasingly charging their due and tricking everyone into seeing and desiring what is not there.

Many elders worry that the growing sense of urgency for money and material resources is diminishing the time and energy necessary to satisfy and nourish the sites of the ancestors with one’s life force. They caution that ikanusi can charge ever-increasing dues that bring confusion, illnesses, barrenness, natural disasters and even death. I thought about my friend O and the fate that awaits the land he inherited in Umake, a few hours below Windiwa within the limits of the Ika forest and reserve. I first met O when he was six years old. My memory of him is of a joyous and playful kid, running excitedly into the house with some animal he would hunt for supper like a squirrel, a bird or an armadillo. Whenever I went walking to the river or to a neighbor’s house, he would take great delight in surprising me as he would unexpectedly jump from one of the branches of the trees. However, he says his fate changed radically when after Cheichi’s death, one of his elder brothers was taken for someone else and shot in a feud of drunken men, most
of whom were cousins. He says that he was so enraged that he felt he either had to leave the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta or he would end up getting involved in bunachi left-wing guerrilla or right-wing armed warfare. O is now in his mid-twenties and moves back and forth between Bogota and Nabusimake. I saw him recently sitting at my kitchen table in Bogota with a green fluorescent money sign stamped on a burgundy shirt, so big that one got lost in the dots that swirl around the “S.” As he finished his morning coffee he would turn the cup upside down and read his luck into the residue left at the bottom, just as the adults did when he was growing up in Windiwa, only the forecast was one and the same now: every breakfast he repeated the omen that envisions a lot of money or “yui”, “I see a lot of yui coming my way,” he affirmed resolutely. Life has proven to him that without money you are doomed. If only he were rich, he repeats every day as he meets bunachi patrons that have made a fortune, which they lend to him whenever he manages to sell his visions and projects of wealth to them.

When O was growing up in Winidwa, I would often hear people saying: “I need yui.” It used to be that if one had a little money in one’s hands, either by selling coffee or a mochila, one could amuse oneself with the inventions of the bunachi, as a way of distraction. I remember for example, how one of O’s eldest brothers was attending a school in Santa Marta. He came home for vacation with a television set, hoping that the batteries would allow him to show his family the programs he discovered in the city. The entertainment industry was set right in the center of the house, by the hearth of the fire. For a whole day he tried to move the antenna around to give life to the activity behind the screen, until he discovered there was no signal. The noise subsided and the skeleton of

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28 Mochila or “tutu” in Ika, is a bag that is commonly stitched with one needle starting at the “the navel” of the bag, as the Ika call the center, and spiraling all the way up to “the mouth” of the bag. The materials used by the Ika include wool, cotton, synthetic yarn and sisal.
the TV ended up lifeless, floating behind the chicken’s den. At that time, people in Windiwa would comment that yui is needed everywhere and then giggle at the double meaning of yui. Yui is the term that the Ika use not only to refer to paper money but also to the sun: “yui,” and its congealed sperm in the form of ore. During the meetings the local authorities would stand up and reiterate the differences with respect to their bunachi neighbors. They would emphasize that bunachi people only think of extracting profit from the earth instead of realizing that it is the other way around: one is living on this earth to give it profit. “You don’t live for the sake of living,” they would advice:

If you have a bottle of lard, then good and if you don’t, then fine. You don’t need batteries for flashlights, the moon can be the flashlight; you don’t even need to sell mochilas for money. But there are people here who are starting to think like bunachi people and need to sell mochilas, coffee, and even cattle to buy buckets of lard and bags of wool to sell more mochilas.29

Twenty years later, the need for yui is no longer a tease. Almost everyone seems absorbed by it. I hear “binzano” everywhere, whether asking for specific measurements in reference to time: “hora binzano?” Or quantity of money: “yui binzano?” I can sense it imbedded in each one of O’s concerns, goals and desires. Since his coming of age and adolescent years in the city, O has had to live, breath and dream money. He commented his eldest sister is sane when she has money, but goes crazy when she doesn’t. “But she’s not the only one,” he continued, as he told me about a young man from Windiwa who was recently stabbed by another young couple, because he didn’t have the money that he was claiming he was going to pay them. “I want to help my people,” he continued in the same unwavering tone, when convincing his bunachi patrons to invest in him. He described his business plan to produce alternative sources of money. His project for graduation in Business involved exporting tons of organic coffee that he wanted to grow

29 Field notes from Diary of 1995
along with rice; in the land he inherited from his parents. He has “the contacts” he says, meaning the right people to facilitate the kind of money he needs to get started. He asserts that with the proper label and packaging that informs bunachi consumers about how organic this product from “an authentic indigenous culture” is, he can turn his inherited land where the last bit of rain forest surrounding the Fundacion River stands below Windiwa, into many pounds of packaged coffee that added up will produce huge quantities of money.

I suggested that before proceeding with his project, he should remember the many Mothers and Fathers of the sacred sites of the dead that the mamus, beginning with his own grandfather, have always pointed out need to grant permission in that territory. He answered abruptly that he knew those sacred places and how he had to proceed, but “I’m jealous of my culture,” he stated, “and I’m not going to discuss this with any bunachi.” Then he added: “I’m not going to prostitute the internal part of my culture. For the spiritual is one thing: that’s apart, private; and another thing is the material aspect, which is what the bunachi know about.”

“So my nightmare will come true!” I replied insistently, and described the nightmare that I had at the time when he was growing up in Windiwa. In it I saw how the whole area around the Fundacion River was urbanized to the point that it was laid over with traffic climbing and descending the mountain. When I told Cheichi about it the next morning, I laughed off the crazy image dismissing something that seemed impossible. Instead he remained pensive all morning, divining as he concentrated his anugwe and released his a’buru. Perhaps this wasn’t just a foolish nightmare that one could easily disregard. Once disrupted, the negative force of ikanusi can overlay the connections to the ancestral sites with disease, conflict or traffic-filled

30 Field notes from Diary of 2013
highways, just like what happened around the bunachi towns at the foothills of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, where there is a highway that traverses from the Magdalena, to the Cesar and the Guajira regions all around the 6,427 square miles surrounding the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta.

The primary lesson when working with Cheichi was that to envision something or gather your attention in thought is to lay the path for something that originates in spirit, to materialize. For this reason, the first step with a dream, an idea or a premonition, was to heal it by returning it to its original owners who live in the world of spirit but have their sites of contact in this world. If you conceive it, Cheichi would point out, it’s because it exists in the material world; and if it exists in the material world it’s because it has a Father and a Mother, an origin in the world of spirit, of anugwe, to which you need to return this material in order to heal it. “Thought is considered to be like a path...” writes Donald Tayler forty years ago as he observes the concentration of Ika men’s thought in the sites of offering. “His thought may be directed to a particular offering site on the peak, or into the very mountain itself. He may also send his thoughts to the highland lakes of even to the snow.” You thus concentrate and clear the vision in your mind, your anugwe, as you gather this energy in a material, such as cotton, thread, maize leaves, beads or stones. Then Cheichi would return this material to the Father and the Mother, the original owners, of the thing envisioned in the form of offering.

However, for O, like many of the new generations growing in the Sierra this equation has turned around. To achieve anything at all, whether it’s a fantasy or an idea, you need to obtain the money that will allow you to proceed. He envisions it not just with

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his first cup of coffee in the morning but throughout the day. Money transformed will allow you to obtain everything that he has seen the members of his family striving for like curing difficult health issues, getting the education that will entitle them to proceed, travel abroad, access technology. This has been his life’s experience. And I now found myself, twenty years later, uncomfortably feeling that it was my duty to remind O that the sacred sites that the mamus so profoundly respect and look after deserve to be heeded even if this implies renouncing profit. After having survived decades of conflict, the little rainforest left and with it the breath from where the anugwe of the ancestors flows through the sacred sites, is now suffocating before an even more destructive force: the unrelenting pursuit of economic progress. To assign the sacred to a separate realm and confine the power of the anugwe to the privacy of one’s life, as O and a new generation of inhabitants of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta were doing, is to release yourself of the fear of breaking taboos and with it an entire social sensibility permeated by the presence of the sacred force of the ancestors. “It’s not just a question of producing something organic and environmentally sustainable by bunachi standards,” I said to him, “that is purely material thought and you can’t just see with bunachi eyes because you have inherited your Ika kunsamu. At least discuss the spiritual aspect of your project with the mamus, pay heed to their advise and their abilities to concentrate their anugwe, connect to the very sites that are nourishing the last bit of life force there, and listen to what they have to say.” Then I added: “not that you should suspend your project entirely,” as I felt the asymmetry of our positions. How easy it was for me to preach to him when I was not under the duress of everyday life in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. But after so many years of listening to what the elders affirm and fear all at once,
the lesson is clear to me: the direction in which our anugwe, our thought and spirit, arises is the direction that we follow. With O and his budding generation it’s clear where this transformation is heading, one that according to him does not exempt the mamus for they too will approve any project that will bring them economic profit. “Then all the more reason to assume the responsibility of your kunsamu,” I said as he turned his back and walked away.

Now that I sat next to H trying to keep my anugwe concentrated in Cheichi’s kaduku or sacred site, I felt the tension of his absence as much as the reach of his presence. “Cheichi’s kaduku is like a bank where you can deposit strength and access it each time you return,” affirmed H. “It is a banco where you can plan your thought to achieve your objectives.” As I heard H talking about individual objectives, I was haunted by the sound of another kind of bank. I felt at the tip of a gap between the life giving energy that converges in the sacred sites and grows throughout nature’s interconnections, and a very different kind of energy that seems to be erupting everywhere and manifested through the individual accumulation of wealth. H interrupted my thoughts: “You can collect your intentions and deliver them to the place, as when one thinks of something one would like to do and then uses that energy to fulfill it.” Then he added: “Sometimes you think of something and then you change midway, something will interrupt that idea, a doubt or ill humor, another energy that does not want that intention to be fulfilled.” I tried to brush away my negative thoughts and instead concentrated in H’s instructions as I traced a path in my offering to Cheichi’s kaduku.

H talked to me about the energy: “zouna” that the ancestors like to feed on. He said it is an energy that is ingested through food and that one can sweep from one’s body.
I had asked my friend G once what zouna was, and I remember that as if awoken from deep slumber by my question, she replied: “zouna guka”, take zouna “is what one says to the Mamus when one is working with them.” She turned around and emphasized that zouna is an energy that dwells in one’s body, “like the body of the Earth that holds mines of resources; each part of one’s body has its mercury, its gold, its silver, its carbon,” she added. Following step by step through the movement of my hands in circles, I closed my eyes and reached into my body in my mind, as I gathered zouna to deliver to Cheichi’s site and followed H’s instructions. Perceiving Cheichi’s influence in my life, H articulated what he referred to as “the message.” “You will always be returning to this place,” he emphasized. “What you delivered with the viejos,” he observed, referring to Cheichi and Zati, “was so well planted, that your anugwe continues to grow here.” I’m moved by his words.

After a while, we felt sleepy. “That’s enough concentration for the moment,” remarked H as we stood up. He returned to where his wife and kids were sleeping as I headed towards Zati’s house. The moon was all the way up; I could see everything clearly without having to use my flashlight; it felt like daylight. Before entering Zati’s place, I spotted Cheichi’s kaduku from a distance. I speak of Cheichi’s site, but what I really mean here is the idea of Cheichi transformed in site: sacred site.

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32 Mi viejo or “my old man” is a friendly term usually used to refer to one’s father. “Los viejos” translates into “the old folks” in plural, which here refers to the parents.
Section 1.2

What is, for me, the sacred? “To be more exact: what does my sacred consist of?”\(^{33}\) is the question that I would like to start out with, embracing Michel Leiris’s inquiry as he reflects upon the Sacred in Everyday Life. In his talk in 1939, Leiris suggests that far from being about huge places, vast objects or grand occasions, the sacred refers to the “humblest things, taken from everyday life”\(^{34}\) that leave a strong emotion. Throughout his lecture it becomes clear that the sacred is not about deciphering universal phenomena. “It is not a question of defining my scale of values – with whatever is of gravest importance to me...” points out Leiris. Instead, “it is the little things that are required to discover what features would allow me to characterize the nature of what is sacred for me, and help establish exactly the point at which I know I am no longer moving on the level of the ordinary (trivial or serious, pleasant or painful) but rather have entered a radically distinct world.”\(^{35}\) In order to think through his sacred, Michel Leiris goes back to the things that captivated him as a child, because, he says, these are the memories that are “the least adulterated.”\(^{36}\) He observes that it’s from this “category of sensitivity”\(^{37}\), as Roger Caillois articulates it, that arise “keys”\(^{38}\) or singularities that unleash the sense of wonder and strong emotion that the sacred produces. He remembers for example, several of his father’s objects that were dangerous and attractive to him, a “sign of his courage and strength”\(^{39}\) like his top hat, a Smith and Wesson revolver kept away in a desk drawer or by his bedside table, and his moneybox where he kept gold

pieces. Leiris also recalls his parents’ bedroom and “the faint glow of the night-light from beneath”\textsuperscript{40} which as he says, “assumed its full meaning only at night”\textsuperscript{41} when his father and mother were sleeping there with the door open. He names this “the right-hand sacred of parental majesty,”\textsuperscript{42} “the one of established authority”\textsuperscript{43} while the left-hand pole tending toward the illicit, was where “the sinister magic of a left-hand sacred took shape,”\textsuperscript{44} such as the bathroom, in which he and one of his brothers would shut themselves in to tell each other fantastic stories and feel intimately bonded in the secrecy of their sessions, “accomplices, fomenting plots and developing quasi-secret mythology,”\textsuperscript{45} surrounded by bathroom stink, behind the bathroom door. It was here where they would feel the most cut off from the rest of the world but also the most bonded to each other as in a kind of secret society where they established contact with “the deepest, darkest subterranean powers.”\textsuperscript{46}

I lay out the ground of my writing around Cheichi’s kaduku: the place where his anugwe is planted and growing, because this is one of the first sites in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta that prompts thoughts and sentiments that awaken in me “that mixture of fear and attachment,” Leiris talks about, “that ambiguous attitude caused by the approach of something simultaneously attractive and dangerous...”\textsuperscript{47} I turn to my first field work diaries in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta to try to capture that one moment, that one time in Windiwa when Cheichi’s site became part of my sacred. But I do not find such a moment right away; it was not like that at the beginning. I was never particularly struck

\textsuperscript{40} Leiris, Michel. Op. cit., p. 25
\textsuperscript{41} Leiris, Michel. Op. cit., p. 25
\textsuperscript{42} Leiris, Michel. Op. cit., p. 26
\textsuperscript{43} Leiris, Michel. Op. cit., p. 25
\textsuperscript{44} Leiris, Michel. Op. cit., p. 26
\textsuperscript{45} Leiris, Michel. Op. cit., p. 25
\textsuperscript{46} Leiris, Michel. Op. cit., p. 26
by the place up in a mound when I serendipitously stumbled upon it during a summer vacation in 1992. In fact, amidst my sense of wonder when I arrived in Windiwa, this place appears almost imperceptible in my writing: a “shadow of a tree.”

The river is a joy. It never stops playing around, appearing and disappearing with its pools and waterfalls, as one climbs up the forest... there is maize and plantain growing all around... and as one approaches Windiwa, the farms increase... We found mostly women and children... The women peeling maize, gathering coca leaves, or simply cooking around the hearths while the children play and stare out of their eyes like owls... At the house where we arrived, I found a family visiting ‘all the way from the snow peaks’ as their hosts said proudly. One could almost feel the cool air still sticking on to their densely woven tunics ... as they all sat under the shadow of a tree, talking.48

Upon my return three years later, I found the same tree around which people sat and talked. The place stood at an eye’s distance from the house where Zati and Cheichi lived. It was on a hill full of mango trees and sisal plant that seemed to spread out like fingers on a wide-open hand. I would often see Cheichi cross-legged in the center of his kaduku, everyone sitting around him for long periods of time, barefoot, engaged in relaxed conversation, often joking around, with all kinds of materials held in between their index finger and thumb as they turned their wrists in circular movement, like a kind of writing in mid air. I remember when we went past it with Cheichi’s granddaughter on our way to the creek, I asked her what all those people were doing sitting around there. She emphasized this was Cheichi’s “oficina” or “office”. It appeared to be a distinct world that was all at once, fascinating and thriving with something mysterious.

The more Cheichi’s grandchildren pointed out that his office was “sacred”, the more foreign it felt to me, as if what they called sacred were beyond my reach. I was surprised to see people gathered around an open area that was an office. “Office” to me

48 Field notes from vacation Diary of July, 1992
was a highly bounded space, like my grandfather’s when I was growing up. I remember what an important issue it was for everyone in my family’s house when my grandfather was in his office working. The aura of the space was regal and left such an imprint in my mind that even though I hardly entertained myself in that room, it stands as a pillar of my childhood. Whenever my cousins and I were playing, we would hold our breath and sneak past his semi-closed door so as not to make any noise for we imagined that we would be seriously reprimanded if we interrupted the concentration that was seeping out from underneath the door. I remember the distinct smell of leather mixed with silence that seemed to have accumulated over many generations of French Empire furniture; the heavy and old looking vases; the carefully drawn charcoal figures of Simon Bolivar el Libertador and Antonio Nariño, both of whom my grandfather admired.\(^{49}\) I remember the many leather bound books, sitting on the shelves all around and the Pre-Columbian ceramic figures that he collected. They appeared to be piercing out from where they sat, not so much as decorations but as guardians in contorted positions, gazing with mysterious expressions. There were also the huge ceramic funeral urns sitting in the hallway next to the paintings of our great great grandparents that stared at us as we were growing up and produced a mix of fear, curiosity and excitement. I especially recall one old woman that went back to the time of the Republic with a finely enhanced black moustache that proudly exhibited their Spanish descent, for it was believed the more facial hair, the less “Indian.” There were other family members in glossy looking photographs framed in silver without so much as a fingerprint on them. Those would never budge from the corner of the shelf or the tabletop where they were placed. One

\(^{49}\) He admired Simon Bolivar for his foresight and perseverance, and Antonio Nariño for his aristocracy and determination in defending his values
great great grandmother fitted in Victorian black clothing, her thin lips as erect as her strict-looking husband standing behind her with his dense white moustache, immaculately combed. Others that we did recognize included my smiling maternal great grandmother sitting on her burgundy velvet couch, as the long white tails of embroidered lace wrapped around one of her newly baptized descendants graciously draped around her lap.

On my grandfather’s Colonial Period desk laid a hefty looking telephone with a round dial, not far from a green glass hooded lamp, next to the gold letter opener and his seal with the family’s coats of arms. Usually there were stacks of envelopes carefully split between those that had yet to be opened and those that were still to be answered. There was always a pile of thick white paper looking so clean that it would have been tempting for any child to fill it up, had it not been for the fact that we would never even have dreamt of touching the surface of my grandfather’s desk, for it was endowed with such order that we knew no matter how carefully we erased the traces, he would know we had transgressed his privacy. Privacy in our conservative, catholic family was so revered; it would have been considered a divine offence to violate it. It was as Emile Durkheim suggests a social sensibility whereby that which is sacred is bounded by prohibitions. To transgress was unthinkable for us; it would have been to irrupt what seemed like godly boundaries of space and time. Right below the papers was a drawer with a wide keyhole that remained locked, except for those extraordinary moments impressed upon my memory, in which having been called into the intimacy of my grandfather’s office, I would see him sitting there with all the prohibited spaces wide open. To be invited into the shared intimacy of the threshold was to be endowed with a power, which I felt when
Cheichi first presented me to the ancestors, the Mothers and Fathers guarding the sites of Windiwa. I remember the sense of wonder that filled me when I found myself sitting in his kaduku, with his mamu’s baton of pitch-black wood and his divination stones next to him. He reached out for the woolen bag that Zati had stitched for him and out came a universe of materials and colors: cotton, powder of crushed stones, colored silk and kite paper, beads, powder, insect’s wings, spider webs, maize leafs, and many others. Materials that would soon become a common part of everyday life in Windiwa as they came and went, flowing as much as the stories and rumors that erupted from one household to another.

It had been the suspicion of transgression that first got me sitting in Cheichi’s kaduku. The locals of Windiwa had been complaining about me, there were rumors everywhere. Words such as “shameful wanderer,” “vagabunda” and “sinverguenza”, began to appear interlaced in the writing of my field notes, as much as in the conversations that arose in the places that I visited. In the eyes of many, I was a trespasser and a wanderer. Cheichi’s eldest son JA who was governor of Windiwa, had to “investigate” all the pieces of evidence to make “the best possible assessment regarding my case” and asked “the Mamu” as he referred to his father, to carry out the divination in order to find out what kind of person I was. Cheichi didn’t find any cause for concern in his divination. I wrote in my diary:

Embedded in a sea of confusion, I feel there were many things that weren’t explained clearly to me. There was no reason why I should have known them. On the other hand, my tough part says to me that I should’ve used my common sense and known better. But there is no common sense that I can use here. I won’t give up. I want to prove to the community that I’m willing to abide by every

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50 “There is something... of the purloined-letter effect in common sense;” points out Clifford Geertz, “it lies so artlessly before our eyes it is almost impossible to see.” In: Geertz, Clifford. Local Knowledge, Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology. New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1983, p. 92
single one of their rules and that I am not a “bad” person, “shameful” they say that others say.\footnote{Field notes from Diary of 1995}

I was invited to the general meeting in Windiwa, and was struck by the mix of shame and awe that was stirred there. The fear, pain, adrenaline, sweat, tears, spit, swelling and shrinking of emotions that rose and then subsided during those couple of nights, like the young girl who had been whipped for adultery or the teacher who had been pushed into the dark cell, “calabozo,” because he disrespected the schoolhouse by committing a sexual offence. Cheichi would point out that this kind of material punishment was inherited from the Spaniards and that it implied more work for the mamus because not only did they have to spiritually cure the offence committed by the offender, but they then had to heal the anugwe of the offender who had been so aggressively reprimanded by the authorities of the community.

I can’t get the thought out of my head of that young woman rendering herself to seven whippings, hanging there after having been in the calabozo for so long. She seemed so tired and so still, all at once, like a river that grows and wanes. Then the teacher running out of the office that night; caught by the semaneros,\footnote{“Calabozo” is a dark cell where offenders are kept without food or sunlight; “Semanero” is the community’s police whose task is to pursuit the offender in order to bring him or her to the community meeting where justice will be implemented} taken back and locked in the calabozo, then walking out the next day as things are reincorporated.\footnote{Field notes from Diary of 1995}

When the time came to discuss my case, everyone confessed his or her thoughts: how I was seen naked in the sacred pool; how I was walking everywhere and whistling like a man; how I was in search of a young Ika man, “a kuima,” and soiling the sacred sites; how I was shaking up the debt with ikanusi, guardians of sacred thresholds, that can react and harm the whole community. As I witnessed these declarations, something
jerked me out of thinking that I was in control of my situation; that even thoughts that I
had not fully articulated could betray me.

The feeling still lingers in my mind. The fire, the eyes, the many poporos sounding, that little bag hanging from the center of the roof, inside the office, always watching. They say that’s ‘el testigo’ or witness, the spirit of the house. The talking never ceased, many hours, many people from far away, sweat, tears, so much came out and then it all just as unexpectedly subsided... How strange it feels to have them say: ‘everywhere people speak of you, the people are displeased with your attitude.’ Goodness! How it sticks inside and hurts... I was thinking all the time that I couldn’t believe I was hearing that, how crazy! It feels unreal ... and yet, in some strange way, it seems part of the order of things here.⁵⁴

I had stepped into a zone, a threshold, in which an entirely unknown sense of
myself opened up for me, a kind of sensitivity in which everything around me seemed
alive, “everything: trees, hills, stones, people, animals, all have their anugwe.”⁵⁵ Spirits
were animating my surroundings. In Leiris’s essay it would be as if I had stepped into a
sort of “threshold as narrow as a razor’s edge,”⁵⁶ an “ill-defined space,”⁵⁷ a “no-man’s
land.”⁵⁸ It is in this taboo area, a place apart, where “mythical adventures and strange
encounters”⁵⁹ begin. The boundaries had been laid out and the outcome of my questions,
my path, and my fate were as much in other people’s hands as in my own. I wrote:
“Despite the fact that everyone warned me that I had to be careful, use the utmost
wisdom and avoid problems, I didn’t understand at all what they were advising me... Lots
of people told me individually that they wanted me to stay, so what happened? I don’t
quite understand.”⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Field notes from Diary of 1995
⁵⁵ Field notes from Diary of 1995
⁶⁰ Field notes from Diary of 1995
This contrasted greatly with the sacred that I had lived in my childhood, as Leiris describes, a “bourgeois world of houses” and parks “where everything was planned, organized, ranked, and where the notices forbidding you to walk on the grass, though signs of taboo, could only endow them with a sacred grow[n cold.” The portal that was opened in this Ika land left me clueless as to what was sacred and what was profane. It was not a sacred that I could delimit with a fence, a wall or a sign. The only thing certain was that I did not know what might come next. It demanded my breath and attention to such an extent that I could not digress to a time and space different from the one in which I found myself, aware of something that I didn’t know beforehand, something completely new, something which could only bring about transformation.

The next morning, I woke up distinctly feeling that I had to learn everything anew, even the most mundane situations: how to walk, how to greet, how to sit, how to eat, how to listen. It was like trekking through the “anugwe” that appeared continually in the Ika dialogues. Whether educated by the missionaries or by the mamus, whether living on the right hand side or on the left hand side of the river, everyone seemed to communicate in phrases such as “my anugwe takes me...” there; or this is the beginning, “anugwe ayusi” of the bag; or beware of “anugwe gina” at this hour; or follow your anugwe sia” and it will clear the path. People would comment that when you’re in the city you think you’re alone because there are walls around you and doors separating your space, but the Fathers and Mothers lying in the earth as much as the ones climbing up above, are constantly listening and seeing everything you are thinking. In short, you are never on your own. I felt fascinated and perplexed all at once. My diary, which seemed to

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be the only haven where I could deposit my most intimate feelings, was no longer free from exposure to the world of thought and spirit.

The day after the closure of the general community meeting I was sitting, stitching a bag as I talked to the mother L and the two sisters of the house where I was staying near the schoolhouse left by the missionaries. L had been educated by the Capuchin missionaries in Nabusimake and was proud of having married into an Ika family with a German ancestor named Richter. Even though she did not follow the laws of the Ika kunsamu, she was devout to Mamus who knew the secrets of mixed descent: both ika and bunachi. One such Mamu was the “Uncle” who had arrived from afar the night before, as she referred to him in a conversation that I noted in my diary:

They say ‘he knows how to spiritually differentiate ika from bunachi’... They talk a lot about ‘the blood.’ For example, the mother asks me if I think maybe it’s the German blood that explains why her children are so good at school, ‘they say Germans are intelligent, you know’. As we continue sitting there all afternoon, I mention to the mother and her daughter that maybe I should consult with the Uncle because things have not turned out so well for me lately and now I’m coming down with a cold. Well, I think it was something they already had in their minds because they immediately insisted that I do ‘el trabajo’ with him right away. By nighttime, I was sitting next to the Uncle as he thoroughly explained the steps to follow: First, I had to get tiny beads of seven different colors that didn’t include white, in each hand. It was a problem that the only ones I had were already strewn into a necklace because I needed ‘virgin’ ones, without a hole. One of the sisters gave me some that she had. Next, I needed threads of different colors. Third, after doing the cleansing at the river, I had to get four pubic hairs from the right side of my vagina, and four from the left side, rolled up in separate pieces of cotton. Finally, I needed some more thread to slide from side to side on my lips.

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63 In: Molano, Alfredo. Aproximacion a una Historia Oral de la Colonizacion de la Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. Santa Marta: Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada, 1988, p. 83, the author notes that Emilio Strauss, a German master shoemaker, who arrived in the region after the end of the First World War, invited other Germans who were living around the Coast to settle down in Pueblo Bello in 1924. The only one who decided to climb further up to Nabusimake, which at that time was called San Sebastian de Rabago, was Richter who built a house at the entrance of this settlement named “La Rana” or “The Frog.”

64 Uncle or “Tegue” is another way to address in Ika someone like a mamu or an authority for whom there is great respect.
After explaining this to me, he said that if I were willing to comply he would do the work for me: ‘trabajarme.’

... We sat on the stone next to the house. He told me he can communicate with the spirits from any place because wherever he is, there’s earth and that earth has a Mother and a Father. The thing is that in a place where many people live, there are certain ‘impurities’ that make things harder. Despite that he can communicate in that OTHER place even from a city like Bogota, simply by cleaning the site where he works.

So we sat next to the house with myriad beads in hand. In my mind I had to brush everything, like brushing off all bad things, the places where I walked, the house where I slept, the meetinghouse which they call the office, the people... I also had to clean myself as if I were taking away all bad feelings and things inside. He instructed: ‘also think about other people who were in the meeting and clean all the feelings and gazes, because if all your surroundings are clean and you’re dirty, or if all your surroundings are dirty and you’re clean, it just spreads and there’s no point in doing this work, so all must be cleaned,’ he insisted.

Then I took the white threads, closed my hands and had to write a letter in my anugwe to all those ‘superior beings.’ He said it is as if I were presenting it to a meeting of very important people, explaining everything that happened, and asking what I wanted or needed, then signing it with my name in my mind. He looked at me straight in the eyes and said: ‘here is where you have to be completely sincere.’ So I thought to myself: ‘okay, have I lied at any point?’

The moment that I asked myself that question, I was trekking in sacred grounds open, as Leiris notes, to that space where one loses one’s footing. A “distinct realm,” observes Leiris as he recalls the enormous attraction that he and his brothers felt to “everything that seemed separated from the ordinary world,” as was the brothel too, “separated by only a threshold, the concrete form of the taboo condemning the den of iniquity.” That night was pitch black by the river. We sat next to a pool where I had to step down onto a stone and wash myself “in a well as cold as ice, thinking that I was leaving all bad things there, cleaning myself as if I were ‘taking off my dirty clothes’.

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65 Meaning to undertake “the job” or spiritual healing.
66 Field notes from Diary of 1995
The Uncle Mamu continued taking sips of rum as he carried out his work. He took out his Mamu’s baton of blue rubber. He called it his divination “companion,” “mi mujer” or his wife in which is deposited the strength he needs to get through the job. “I have no idea what it could be,” I wrote in my diary as I tried to reconstruct the strange course of events I experienced that night until well past midnight.

... he told me to go to my hammock and take the cotton, put it near my vagina and imagine all sorts of beads coming out from the left side first, and then from the right side. Those two sides are always separate... These was to be his protection against all of what might demand debt if nature begins to ‘demand’. He said he would ‘advocate’ for me and thus, he needed the protection that comes out of me. Finally, that night we had to deliver the offering in the river. We all went to a place where the water is full of whirlpools. This was a masculine pool he said, and the feminine one is further down. ‘One must be careful there,’ he said. He delivered the offering with the rum, smoking a cigarette and throwing the thread and beads after the necessary concentration and movements, many levels above and then many levels below where we live... ‘These beings demand a lot,’ he said... There is also something about the person who they advocate for. If there’s good will and strength they will be well received, if not they will simply recognize the person and say: ‘fine, we heard’... The next day, just as he appeared, so he disappeared down the road.70

As one’s anugwe is deposited in the sites, it’s not just the energy that one concentrates in one’s thoughts, but it’s energy wrapped in materiality that is returned to the earth. Cheichi used to point out that just as you step on the earth, so you are stepping in anugwe. It is here, in this threshold between the earth and the spirit of your thoughts that the ancestors follow everything you do. To gather this in materials and return them is to render lived experience. It is like “writing a book,” explain the community leaders whenever they try to translate to curious outsiders what the Mamus are doing, sitting all around these sites surrounded by people who are concentrating their anugwe. As when the ancestors concentrated their anugwe in the beginning, to spiral through the virgin

70 Field notes from Diary of 1995
beads of colored quartz,\textsuperscript{71} piercing through a passage that brought about the fertility of water, of the earth, of thunder, of minerals, of the wind, of the trees. This is the degree of concentration that the ancestors could achieve and we can’t, so they render everything they use back to them. It’s always extraordinary to see how in the indigenous Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, many people seem to spend most of their time doing cleansings with the Mamus, either to pursue an objective; work through worries or nightmares; as part of the rites of passage in one’s life, births, baptisms, coming of age, marriages, death; preparing the earth to sow or the materials to build a house; as a result of a transgression that has been acknowledged; or because a particular site or ancestor is demanding nourishment through some form of human or natural crisis.

I have returned in various occasions, both through my mind and through my diaries, to the beginning of my encounter with the Ika Sierra, when I first rendered my thread of anugwe in the sacred sites. It is like a pivot point or hinge that I now try to invoke, as I write and follow the movement of my wrists to open the dam of my thoughts and release my outflow of anugwe. To deposit this in the earth, in the form of offering, is to open a portal and enter a threshold zone.

The Uncle Mamu asked me not to write anything about ‘el trabajo’ in my work... because it did not belong to me, instead it belonged to the Fathers and the Mothers where these offerings were being delivered and where my thoughts were planted. He said ‘writing is for others to see: it is like penetrating the virgin beads with a thread of anugwe.’ ‘El trabajo’ that he did belongs to the ancestors, it is being used there and thus, an offering must be made before it is taken.\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{71} These tumas are well known all around the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. There are some without holes and others that when one looks inside awaken all kinds of theories about how they were able to pierce through in such perfect spirals that begins narrow at the bottom, widens in the center and then narrows again, see chapter 6.

\textsuperscript{72} Field notes from Diary of 1995
“Is this what diary-writing is all about, too, writing not to yourself but to the spirits?”

inquires Michael Taussig In Law in a Lawless Land. There is in writing “a conversation with the spirits.” It is to whom “the shamans sing... while people like me, who are not shamans, merely writers, have only ghosts of spirits, spirits of spirits we can no longer figure with any confidence.”

The diary form, continues Taussig, makes us aware of just how elusive these spirits can be, like when Roland Barthes observes that it is on rereading his diary that he remembers what was not recorded, more forcefully than what is, like the grayness of the atmosphere in the Rue de Rivoli while waiting for the bus. “All the important ideas and memories occur in flashes,” observes the author, like when he is in the back patio of the house in Colombia, scooping cold water out of the tub and feeling that it runs down his head and shoulders, travelling “for a few seconds to a beautiful faraway place like the seaside of memory...” an image that gets mixed up with childhood memories. “People are quick to deflate” the romance about fieldwork, notes Taussig, “as a result, they come to devalue or even dismiss their afterthoughts and memories. For what I think happens is that being suspended between cultures, one disappears into childhood.” It’s in this threshold zone, “where words and memories evoking other memories collide,” that the intimacy of “my sacred” gives life to the pool of recollections and writing that I gather around Cheichi’s and other ancestors’ sites. Despite what the Mamu Uncle said to me about writing, I like to think that in rendering this experience, in reaching into my

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body to gather a thread of anugwe for others to see, I’m delivering something like an offering that hails to the very being that dwells there in Michel Leiris’s terms. Layers of interwoven thought and material that accrue one on top of the other through lived experience, as the history of the earth grows, is what I begin to imagine and feel around the sacred in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta.

Section 1.3

After my encounter with the Uncle I crossed over the next day bright as daylight, to the other side of the river where Zati and Cheichi were waiting. My cold was gone; everyone greeted me warmly. I followed Cheichi to his office outdoors, near the creek, overflowing with the songs of birds and the flight of animals. Everyone’s attention seemed to be focused on deciphering whether these were signalling approval and support, or negation and warning. We sat and talked with the help of his granddaughter who translated.

Cheichi began by invoking “the first Fathers and Mothers of everything that we see around us, the real owners of this earth.” He asked me to collect the strange mixture of emotions and thoughts that flooded me from the moment of my arrival in Windiwa. He said that as I journeyed through my thought, it was to the ancestors that I had to address myself. Likewise, I was to clean my body in an upward motion as if I were taking off dirty clothes, until I felt it shiny like new; I was to dust the house and all the places where I had been sleeping, sweeping like if I had a broom in hand, wiping all the paths where I had been walking; cleaning all the gazes of the people looking at me, polishing each one of my immediate family members, as well as the big mountains, the trees, the fields
where food was growing, the places where food was being processed; cleaning the rivers, the sea, the lakes, all the sources of water, including the showers in the city, the sacred pools, and the places where I had been sitting on the earth, the large stones, the a’tinkunu or pyramidal stones, sweeping the good and bad wind, the good and bad rain, the atmosphere, and finally, polishing the sun, the moon and the stars because together with the mountains, the pools of water and the stones, he said, they are the ones looking after us. After following each step of the cleansing, I returned the pieces of colored kite paper filled with ground stone and chalk, to Cheichi who received them separately: first the right hand, coupled with “durigan where the sun rises;” then the left hand, linked to “gunsina,” where the sun sets. He tied them up in little bundles and kept them apart, each destined to the site of offering that goes all the way back to the beginning of time when the sun had not yet risen.

We cannot as human beings understand all of nature, there is a part that we cannot grasp and that we can only imagine as we journey in our minds all the way back to the beginning of time when everything was dark and soft. As you sit to acknowledge the ancestors that guard the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, in a stone, next to a well, by a hill or a tree, you hold cotton threads in between your fingertips and you begin to pull an idea that grows from the place where all thought and memory begins. It is here where the anugwe unfolds, like a strand on a moving spindle, all the way from the time before the coming of the sun. It is said that the ancestors were so strong then, they could concentrate their anugwe in moon and materialize it as rock moons; or concentrate their anugwe in temples and congeal in rock houses; or concentrate their anugwe in mobile phones and become rocks shaped in the form of phones; or even concentrate their anugwe into things
that we cannot yet recognize, because they are still to be assimilated. In fact, everything that the ancestors conceived and experienced, is what we evidence today around the entire landscape; “the rocks in the beach” notes Danilo Villafañe, an Ika leader, “are like codes, books where the laws of origin are written, the lakes, the eyes of water, some puddles that never dry up, the peaks up above, the hills below, everything is like a chain and a history in each one of those sites.”

The Mamus point out that the process of congealing one’s anugwe in rock was so long and painful, that the ancestors suffered greatly and spoke to Mamu Serankua, the father of this Earth, so that he could give them life and death instead. This is when Mamu Yui was born. Yui means sun in Ika. And when Mamu Yui heated the earth from inside, everything materialized as we know it today. “The sun used to dwell in his mother’s womb,” said two Ika friends that had just come of age and received their poporos to chew coca leafs. His Mother was gleaming and luminous. She was cradle, niche, serenity, maternity and sweetness. All the beings that lived at that time, wondered what it was that she held inside her. There was much curiosity and many speculations about it. One day the animals decided to play their reeds, harmonicas, flutes, whistles and all sorts of wind instruments. The music’s vibration was so beautiful that the sun, moved deep inside crawled all the way to the mouth of the mother’s womb while she lay placidly asleep. Drawn by that exquisite sound he slipped out of the womb and began to rise. At that moment she awoke. Mamu Yui was only slightly above her, but it was already too late for her to hold him back inside. She felt a great loss while he continued to journey his

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path. As he grew, he rose, and as he rose he heated the sites where the rocks, the earth, the hills and the bodies of water came about.

One can see the place where he was born near the main temple in Nabusimake. Each mountain around that great valley that lays in an east-west axis following the course of the river, marks each passage of his life, such as Sokakurua, the hill that stands unequivocally with its marked peaks, where Mamu Yui got married and where my friends had to deposit their offering to receive their poporos. It is here where he began to climb even further up into the sky. Like the sun, Ika Mamus, as much as Kogi and Wiwa Mamas concentrate to warm the sites that lay deep inside the earth, caves and crevices full of liquids that trickle down the walls, dark, earthy and cold with the freshness of the earth, lakes and swamps filled with fertile substances that keep the womb of the earth alive. It is in places like these that surpass us, where the full scope Mamus learn to sing and traverse the thresholds between the living and the ancestors, from one dimension of time to another, navigating through the spheres of the earth as much as the layers of language that go all the way back to before the birth of the sun.

In this way, step by step, following through the family lines that have been deposited in the sites, seizing upon the anugwe that is growing there from the beginning of time, Cheichi proceeded. He said that I had a spirit too, and even though I am not from Windiwa, I can present myself to the ancestors so that they acknowledge and protect me. My spirit is of the bunachi in Bogota and there is a specific order of colors and materials that corresponds to this, just as each “tana” or line of descent has its own order, some with beads, others with stones or a mix. Out of his bag emerged all sorts of beads and crystal stones of various colors. He carefully gathered the corresponding order of red and
white colored crystals. It was like seeing the body of a miniature person from another time, held together by a red thread, which he sustained in his right hand as he concentrated, paused, then handed it to me and spoke: “This is your marunsama,” he said. “You must carry it with you because it is your protection. It is your companion, your husband in spirit. It is like a person that will accompany you throughout your life. Whatever you do will affect it. If you violate the laws of origin, then this person will feel violated and you must clean it. If you take care of it and nourish it then the energy concentrated here will grow.” A cosmos wound up in this miniature world like an entire life’s existence in a body,

As I held this tiny companion in my hands, I had to walk through my life in thoughts. I trekked a path through my memory and seized upon the things that made me feel fervent and strong as I turned my right hand around my head. It was as if I were catching spinning images that came from when I was born, all the way through my childhood, then my adolescence and youth, to the present. A whole life experience wound up inside my marunsama, like energy tucked inside stories that begin to unfold as they are transmitted. Threading the anugwe or “Seinanugwe”, explains an Ika leader, Alfonso Torres, “is like gathering in one place your whole lived experience, everything.... from when you were conscious, your dreams, your thoughts, your actions... as if you were writing it in a book. You gather your anugwe in one place and you keep it there, or you keep it so that your children can then come and do the offerings where it is gathered... It is like a heritage: this is the wealth that you will leave your children.”

I remember my surprise when at the end of this whole session with Cheichi, I suddenly heard him say in Spanish: “you owe me $10,000 pesos.” In my diary I reflected: “why shouldn’t he charge me for the job since he can use the money and I owe him retribution anyway?” Money in my maternal family was taboo. What my grandparents did with it was a matter of huge privacy. It was deemed inappropriate to talk about it at the dinner table and unless one really needed it, one would never ask for money upfront. On the contrary, one gained social advantage by getting the bill or paying the debt without letting the others know. If someone up in the hierarchy, like my grandfather, were present, no one would discuss his right to take on all issues regarding money. Otherwise, if two equals would discuss payment, they would play out a performance until it was resolved. For example as they tried to get the bill in a restaurant, they would tug on it until one of them surrendered: “I will pay,” “no way, I will”, “there is no discussion here, I will pay”, “why? No! I will.” One of the family traditions, called “Sabadones,” was that my grandparents would keep an envelope with each one of their grandchildren’s name marked on it, and every Saturday they would deposit newly printed out bills in them. When summoned into the privacy of my grandparents’ walk-in closet, where there was “a small cave” or “La Cuevita”, as my grandfather referred to it, about the size of a small child and perfect for hiding material “yui,” we were encouraged by my grandparents to open the drawer that was facing “la cuevita” and take out the envelope with our corresponding name, which of course we readily accepted. Cheichi seemed extremely pleased when I said: “guka Cheichi: yui,” here is your money Cheichi, and handed over two of these brand new bills from my packet.

83 Field notes from Diary of 1995
84 Field notes from Diary of 1995
When I walked back from Cheichi’s kaduku to the house where his family was smiling. They commented: “now you are shining, as if you were brand new”, “ahora esta brillando como nuevecita.”\textsuperscript{85} I felt like I had been given a kind of magical force that everyone around me could recognize, like the mana of the jockeys that Leiris remembers from his childhood “in many-colored silks and on bright-coated horses,”\textsuperscript{86} the paraphernalia, the procession and everything that distinguished them from others. “Better than the father’s top hat, his small-barreled revolver, and his money box, these thin silk tunics would be the sign of our power, the mana.”\textsuperscript{87} I remember when I told Cheichi’s grandchildren that I had my marunsama, one of his grandsons suggested that I keep it away safely because, he said, “it is like your social security card; wherever you go the mountains, the sacred sites and all the natural beings will identify you.”\textsuperscript{88}

The marunsama that Cheichi first prepared for me has grown since. One decade after Cheichi’s death, I was living abroad and summoned when my paternal grandfather was dying. I arrived and found my grandparent’s room full of family and friends. My grandfather was sitting on his bed, by the window with the growing trees and the singing birds. The sun was radiant. By nighttime the numbers of attendants had doubled. His expression carried his wisdom as he looked afar. He seemed to be seeing things that we could not see. He continued touching the top of his small rounded head, as if it weren’t there. Then came that one moment when the breath turns into something greater than itself, an accumulation of energy released and expanding all around the room. My

\textsuperscript{85} Field notes from Diary of 1995
\textsuperscript{86} Leiris, Michel. Op. cit., p. 27
\textsuperscript{87} Leiris, Michel. Op. cit., p. 28
\textsuperscript{88} Field notes from Diary of 1995
grandmother gave me the little medal that he had been wearing as he was dying, with the image of the Virgin and Child on one side, and Jesus on the other.

A week later I narrated this to Mamu Antonio, Cheichi’s nephew who lives in Sirkariu, near Nabusimake where Cheichi grew up. This is “a luck that you inherited” he exclaimed, “that your grandfather waited for you to arrive and then handed over his strength is like an energy that remains with you. It is inheritance that is gold,” “esta herencia es yui” he emphasized, as he added it to my marunsama, just like Mamu Norimako had done eight years before him with the medal that my grandmother had given me. In this way, just like other marunsamas, this miniature figure of crystallized thought and spirit, continues growing step by step through life’s experience until the moment of death.

As I look back, I see that Cheichi’s office turned from being a bounded space in which I felt foreign, to a site where I deposited a whole set of intimate experiences that continue to bond me further to it. It is a place that fills me with wonder, amazement and fear all at once. Shortly after the rumors and comments about me had subsided in Windiwa in 1995, I went past Cheichi’s kaduku on my way to bathe in the creak, and greeted him from a distance. He replied loudly from where he was sitting in his site: “if what you want is a young man, a kuima, take me with you, I can go and bathe!” All the people sitting around him roared in laughter, as did Cheichi himself, while he sat in the center of his kaduku with ripe mangos falling all around him like rain. I laughed too, relieved of all the rumors, suspicions and worries that had emerged around me, and cheered by lively thoughts that made me bubble like the creak, as I giggled now, two
decades later sitting in H’s kaduku, remembering Cheichi’s sense of humor while collecting zouna for him.

I gathered the energy in various colored sparkles: metallic, blue, green, red and purple that H handed over, wrapped in pieces of an orangey cotton. H asked me to think of all the food I had ingested. Once I deposited that thought into the material that I held, I began thinking through all the sites in my body, all the way from the tip of my head to my feet. With that energy I swept myself as well as my surroundings. H then handed over a piece of cotton full of grey threads and black sparkles which I molded into as many coin shapes as I could. With this, H instructed me to clean not only all the yui but the idea of yui that I had spent in the last years in transactions, tickets, sales as well as the money that is delivered in ATMs and that had circulated through many hands, including as H pointed out, “the hands of thieves and people who think negatively.” This part of the cleansing was new to me. I was told that several Mamus are doing this now because there are so many problems related to money. Finally, H gave me a piece of cotton full of blue powder which I rolled into little worm-shaped portions that I held; four in my right hand, durigan; and four in my left, gunsina. With this I travelled in my mind all the way from Windiwa to Santa Marta, then Bogota, and New York that was to be my final destination. I cleaned the whole path so that my body would follow my anugwe as clearly as possible.

I mentioned to H that I was writing about the sacred sites around the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, for it is here where the anugwe grows as it is passed on. I told H that many of the sites that I was taking into account had been plundered by guaqueros. As I described my research to him, I was suddenly struck again by the feeling of loss with respect to Cheichi’s kaduku, for this place that was so mysterious, also became as
intimate and concrete to me as the materials that I now held in my hands. A place where most of Cheichi’s anugwe was deposited for his descendants to access like a written life force, and is now desecrated by black magic, not unlike the raiding that I was describing to H, leaving everyone around this sacred site empty handed. Without thinking twice, H responded: “overturning that order from the roots is to lose everything,” “trastornar ese orden de raiz es acabar con todo.”
Chapter Two. The Fashion Show, a Glimpse into 20th C Fate and Money

Section 2.1

Having just returned from the Kogi reserve in the northern side of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, I was sitting back in my room in Santa Marta mesmerized by the sunset behind “El Morro”, a lighthouse with a colonial fortress, floating off the mainland coast amidst a multitude of blues, reds, oranges and purples enveloping the whole bay, including my room. After a while, I began to distinguish the flickering diamond light emitted by El Morro, pounding as if signaling the way into the Gods.

Figure 4. El Morro

Joseph Conrad saw a similar view, facing the East in the 19th C as he sailed along the coastline in a ship navigating to Panama. He wrote about a place named Santa Marta, capital of Costaguana which was to be connected to a mine in Sulaco, and imagined a landscape that seemed to fit perfectly with his image of a chain of bays, magically rising from the Caribbean Sea, “...within an enormous semi-circular and unroofed temple open to the ocean, with its walls of lofty mountains hung with the mourning draperies of...
It was at the entrance of this great temple that filled with the thought of Zati, I was motivated to journey to the other side of this vast mountainous terrain where she sat in Windiwa.

I found myself on my way there the next day, in a huge air-conditioned bus at full speed, four hours from Santa Marta to its final destination: the city of Valledupar. Next to me was a middle-aged man, big built, wearing sunglasses and repeatedly popping a fresh piece of spearmint gum into his mouth as he chewed without pause throughout the ride. Before I could settle down in my seat, he introduced himself as a Self-Help counselor, enthusiastically pronouncing his name: “Reynaldo!” Throughout the ride, he kept smiling at the screen of his mobile phone as he answered a thread of calls: “and an excellent day to you my angel!” “very good indeed”, “yes, yes, superb, superb”, “super well”, “ha, ha, ha!”, “ahead with it.” The smell of a particular mix of air conditioning and artificial spearmint invaded me. His explosive laugh merged with the gust of firearms in the Bruce Lee film that was bouncing off a TV screen at full volume at the end of the alley. It was strategically placed in such a way that it was hard to avoid getting trapped like all the rest of the passengers by the noisy images of Hong Kong as seen through the eyes of Hollywood, abruptly clashing with the scenic view that surrounded us.

As we continued to move through the Magdalena region, I peered through the dots of the grey mesh screen clutched to the window and saw the reflection of the landscape seeping in: one take rapidly shifting after another, full speed and intermittent.

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90 For more on Zati please see Chapter 1
The words of the Kogi governor, ñ Jose de los Santos, echoed in my mind. He was trying to convey to a group of outsiders his opinion regarding the changes that have overcome this vast mountainous terrain in the past century. “Let us dress the Sierra in her natural clothing,” he said with the full-fledged authority of fifteen Mamas, meaning the Kogi high priests, who had convened around him for three days. He spoke of a well-known Kogi Mama, now dead, who once said to him: “the Sierra has seven pieces of clothing, like seven shirts. Every day we have to tell the Little Younger Brothers 92 to start taking off those clothes.’ It took me a while to understand what this Mama meant,” continued the Kogi governor, “nature must dress its natural clothing. The forest must regenerate. The wells, their springs, must be looked after. The sacred sites and mangroves must be tended. Nature must dress its own clothing. Four or five years ago, one would go to the Guachaca river basin and see that it was fully dressed in coca leaves. The Mama said to me: ‘Why do we have to wear something different? How will that affect everything else?’ That was our worry.” To view satellite images of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta from above, is to picture an organ that pumps life all around, with rivers that look like veins, connecting its golden white heart at its highest summit in the snow peaks, 18,942 feet 93 above sea level, to its base where the breathing waters meet the sea towards its northern coast. As I tried to take in the little that I could see through the dark windows of the bus, I

91 The role of the Governor in the Gonawindua Tayrona Organization, which was established in 1987, is meant to voice the demands of the communities in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta towards the outside and channel the governmental and non-governmental aid towards the inside
92 Little Elder Brothers or “Hermanitos Mayores” is a Spanish term used by the Ika, Kogi, Wiwa and Kankuamu in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, to refer to those indigenous people who are keepers of the knowledge and tools that were inherited from the ancestors all around the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. Little Younger Brothers or “Hermanitos Menores” in turn, refers to the non-indigenous inhabitants, who lost that wisdom and who need to be guided, especially with regard to sustaining the world left by the ancestors for us to look after
93 5,775 meters above sea level, Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. Plan de Desarrollo Sostenible de la Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. Estrategia de Conservacion de la Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. Santa Marta: Departamento de Comunicaciones, 1997
thought to myself: “what would those shirts that have dressed the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta for the past sixty years look like in a fashion show?”

Smoke began to rise in the Fifties, as peasants displaced from all over the country, cut down and burn the forest, searching for terrains where they could settle down and live peacefully. These migrating peasants, known as “colonos,” arrived in endless waves of colonization from diverse regions in Colombia like Santander, Antioquia, Tolima, Cundinamarca and Boyaca where party divisions instigated obscene manifestations of hatred. Everywhere, abuses were being committed in a mostly rural country, illiterate and overrun with economic strife. Lopez de la Roche quotes an illuminating speech pronounced by Alberto Lleras in 1945, as he took charge of the presidency for a year when President Lopez Pumarejo resigned. He referred to the situation of the peasants at that time:

... their work is stolen, their land is taken, they’re obliged to overwhelming hours of labor, their sources of water are diverted, their harvest is bought for less than what it costs... and the local political chiefs of villages and towns have not diminished, but on the contrary, have increased the exercise of their brutal and shrewd power over hundreds of these men and women, as they use them as votes, as workers, as bandits and as pawns to their unyielding feuds.94

These divisions, continued Lleras, are the “favored explosives of our political parties.”95

Then he said: “... to change certain electoral motivations and certain party flags is as hard for the politicians, as it is for any of our miners to accept the unreasonable proposal of abandoning a vein that is not yet depleted.96

95 Lopez de la Roche, Fabio. Op. cit., p. 128
96 Lopez de la Roche, Fabio. Op. cit., p. 128
Upon the assassination of the liberal leader Jorge Eliecer Gaitan in April 9, 1948 a civil war exploded throughout Colombia. Entire families were destroyed for belonging either to the red liberal party or to the blue conservative one. Everyone panicked. As a result, “colonos” climbed the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in escalating numbers between 1948 and 1955. Yucca, plantain, cacao, maize, pumpkin, ñame, malanga, arracacha, rice, beans, coffee and sugar cane began to dress the hills. Eventually they grew the color of lawns: fields of grass in order to graze cows, donkeys, mules, horses and goats, as well as fruit trees like mango, lemon, orange, lulo, tomates de arbol, guava, and medicinal herbs. They also brought domestic animals like chickens, ducks, geese, pigs, dogs and cats. What the family of the Cardona recollect is that they wanted a place “just like home,” and if you climbed high enough you could find the right climate. Colonos perceived the rising slopes all around as “monte” or wild, nobody’s land. A family would declare thousands of hectares as part of their property, using natural boundaries like creeks, rivers and gullies to mark out the divisions without any legal recognition. As time went by, they sold this land to more relatives and friends who desperately wanted to escape the soaring violence that swamped their homelands, and heard by word of mouth that this Sierra was a fertile place in which the only threat were wild animals and snakes.

From the mid-Fifties to the mid-Sixties, the next guise spotted around the foothills of this mountainous terrain was a dense grey stripe of concrete growing throughout the

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97 ñame and malanga are similar to Taro Root; arracacha is similar to yam
98 Solanum quitoense
99 Field notes from Diary of 1998
6,427 square miles\textsuperscript{100} surrounding it from the Magdalena, to the Cesar and the Guajira regions. Slashing through its vast web of natural interconnections, this artery of concrete interrupted passages for animals, forests, cliffs, boulders, winds, creeks, rivers, swamps and wetlands to reach the sea. Especially at that one point between the cities of Riohacha, the capital city of the Guajira, and Santa Marta, the capital city of Magdalena, known in Spanish as “el Paso de los Muchachitos” or “the Passage of the Youngsters.” “Muchachitos” because as Alfredo Molano\textsuperscript{101} observes, the cowmen who followed a dirt road towards Venezuela to smuggle cattle across the border and sell it for higher prices, had to crawl in all fours to reach the other side of the cliff, just like “youngsters.” It is at this point of huge vertical precipices where the snow peaks are in direct contact with the sea, that the eagles were seen flying from the summits to deliver offerings below. In the eyes of the Colombian State in 1954, this passage was the missing link to culminate the plan for progress that made Rojas Pinilla’s government wild with enthusiasm. As a result, President Pinilla traced the Caribbean Highway Project all around the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. Between 1969 and 1970 when the last bridges were erected and the “Passage of the Youngsters” was broken, Santa Marta was now four hours away from Riohacha as opposed to several days following the road through the Cesar region. Then when the whole highway was paved over by 1975, it took two hours to get from one city to the other.

\textsuperscript{100} 16,645 square kilometers, Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. Plan de Desarrollo Sostenible de la Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Estrategia de Conservacion de la Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. Santa Marta: Departamento de Comunicaciones, 1997

\textsuperscript{101} Molano, Aldredo. Diagnostico de la Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Area Social, Contribucion a una Historia Oral de la Sierra Nevada, Recuento Analitico. Santa Marta: Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, 1988.
While the highway project was being built, properties began to increase in value. Elite families from Bogota, Medellin and Santa Marta, began to dig out old titles to properties stowed away by their ancestors for years. From this moment, notes Molano, people began to imagine increased tourism as well as agricultural development. As peasants could now get their harvests out to the cities more easily, they began colonizing terrains ever further up the mountain. Indigenous lands were now either invaded or traded. This immense project of infrastructure demanded labor and with the new wave of opportunity for jobs, a second and bigger upsurge of colonization came about. Furthermore, the road required timber and as the traffic of valuable wood expanded, with the highway now in full use, truckloads of lumber were sold throughout the country.

By the time the Caribbean Highway Project was completed, the Little Younger Brothers managed not only to undress the forest of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, but to dig out the treasures from the underground. When the “caterpilars,” as the bulldozers were referred to in Spanish, were brought in to open the way and dig out the ground, Pre-Columbian materials or “guacas”\(^\text{102}\) began to erupt all over, and with it, the desire for gold that overtook people’s imagination. D and L, both of whom worked in the road when it was being constructed, comment how “there must have been so much gold in one of the ceramic pots hauled by the driver of the bulldozer, that he abandoned it and ran away with the pot.”\(^\text{103}\) Likewise, a local from Santa Marta remembers that the greatest challenge for the engineers who worked in “the Troncal,” as the highway is known, was

\(^{102}\)“Guaca” or huaca is a term used in Spanish to refer to ancient indigenous Pre-Columbian burials as well as hidden treasures. According to sixteenth century chronicles and current archaeologists, “huaca” is where indigenous metals and other precious stones are found. In his chronicle, Santo Tomas gives the basic meaning of huaca as a temple of idols, or the idol itself. Peter Gose affirms that in Andean ideas “they were clearly thought to take form underground and grow upwards toward the sky.” (Gose, Peter. “Segmentary State Formation and the Ritual Control of Water Under the Incas” In: Comparative Studies in Society and History, Vol. 35, No. 3, Jul, 1993, p. 488)

\(^{103}\)Field notes from Diary of 1998
to retain the labor force because when someone cracked open a treasure they would disappear running up the mountain in search of more. The engineer in charge would often find whistles, beads and ceramic pieces. He says they would fill their pockets with those pieces. “There were so many that we didn’t know who to give them away to!”

As guacas were dug out, the grey artery of concrete that drove through the foothills of the mountains, was seen exploding into multi-punctures left everywhere by the groups or “cuadrillas” of four or five men that dug out entire terrains, like bullet holes in a body. Animated by the myths of gold and ancient treasures, guaqueros penetrated the river basins as they climbed and looted enchanted and dangerous places all around the Troncal. They spent days trekking up the mountain and risked their lives in order to reach the most secluded corners, digging out ancient burial sites, as high and deep as they could go. It wasn’t just guacas that were obtained, but also wild animal skins. While 125 kilos of coffee could be sold for $1,800 pesos in 1970, a small tigrillo’s skin would cost from $3,000 to $3,500 Colombian pesos. One of the guaqueros of the Buritaca river basin remembers how he followed the bank of the river to its source:

There you will find a ‘Y’ where two rivers merge. We named one side Tiger because a gold tiger was found there. A little further below that place, a huge boulder with drawings can be found. Between two of us, we tried to dig out the boulder. We found many whistles and ceramic pieces, and just as we were about to reach the gold, the stone moved two markers below the level where we stood. When we heard it blast, we decided to leave it before ending up buried underneath it... Then I found a baby tiger and I killed it. I even waited a long time before I launched my machete because that skin costs a fortune. I knew that if I dragged it the mother would come sniffing me out, so I carried it all the way home on my back. The next day I saw the huge footprints by my house, it was either the father or the mother that had come looking for it.

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106 Field notes from Diary of 1998
By 1970, another unexpected wear came in vogue. “One morning the Sierra appeared dressed in marijuana,”\textsuperscript{107} comments an inhabitant of Santa Marta. Many who experienced it, point out that it’s no exaggeration to say that it practically materialized overnight. The seed was initially imported in the 60s when John F. Kennedy’s government sent armies of young college graduate volunteers to act as missionaries of democracy, and through the Peace Corps, bring about inspiration and technical advice to underdeveloped countries all around the world. As a result, observes Molano, they brought the seed of cannabis from Mexico to Colombia. At first they grew it for self-consumption, but then the demand increased to numbers that were as inconceivable as the devastating consequences of the Vietnam War, continues the author. This tragedy along with hippie communities growing everywhere, exploded in a marijuana boom. Apparently the alkalinity in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta was perfect for this delicacy that came to be known as the “Santa Marta Golden.” As the world’s market demand increased, so did the extensions of the forests demolished. Once pricked by this illegal trade, one that was inevitably going to end up bearing more “greens” as they referred to the dollars, there was no stop. “There were so many greens that people would roll up wads of them and smoke them like cigars” remembers my friend from Santa Marta.\textsuperscript{108} “People went crazy!” affirms the owner of a prestigious hotel:

When I asked one of my acquaintances why he didn’t get involved, since everyone around him did, he answered: ‘because I haven’t been asked.’ To get into one of those networks you had to be invited. They would put together partnerships, join their money and together take the risk: either the drug would arrive at its final destination or it wouldn’t. If it did, they would say they had ‘crowned’ and the money would multiply like a miracle. If not, they would lose it... I had a friend who was the head of the Bank of the Republic in Santa Marta.

\textsuperscript{107} Field notes from Diary of 1999
\textsuperscript{108} Field notes from Diary of 2010
He called me once to tell me that when he was about to close the bank, one of the waiters in my hotel arrived there filled with wads of dollars. “Don’t I know you from the hotel?” asked my friend. And the waiter answered: ‘I have changed a lot since you last saw me, now I am someone of means,’ ‘ahora soy una persona de dinero.’ He told him that a gringo\textsuperscript{109} had arrived at the hotel and asked him if he could get him a little marijuana. When the waiter got him some, he paid him a lot of dollars for it and said that if he got him more, he would pay him even greater amounts. Eventually the waiter left his post in the hotel and worked full time for the gringo.\textsuperscript{110}

Overtaken by the wonders of this plant that grew like weed in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, US dealers brought in money and seeds, as they began to associate with local smugglers who had the experience, the people and the infrastructure to start moving business. There were two main ways to arrange partnerships between the drug lords and the peasants, writes Molano. Either it was assumed that the mafia would bring the seed and the money necessary to maintain the laborers that the colonos, “now managers of marimba,”\textsuperscript{111} hired for the harvest, in which case, they split the profits in half between colonos and drug lords. Or the mafia would pay rent for the peasant’s land and employ others to direct the whole process of production that included growing and transporting it to where it would be shipped abroad. Thousands of mules were organized to carry the marijuana all the way to the sea where it was blissfully shipped. One local remembers that “... up to 1,500 mules that would travel from Rio Frio to Guachaca... with so many pleats of marijuana that if one or two mules fell over the precipice, no one would bother to look for them... Once we arrived at the beach there were motorboats waiting at night with the lights out.”\textsuperscript{112}

\textsuperscript{109}“Gringo” is a term used to refer to foreigners who are English-speaking, especially to those from the United States
\textsuperscript{110}Field notes from Diary of 2009
\textsuperscript{111}Molano, Alfredo, p. 22
\textsuperscript{112}Ferro, Maria del Rosario and Londoño, Juana. Op. cit., Chapter 4. p. 35 (Unpublished)
Countless paths were opened through the mountains everywhere, and as more people were attracted to this illegal enterprise that seemed to have no stop, every inch of land was used to grow marijuana. “The ‘marimba’” as it is commonly referred to, “caused such intense colonization in so few years,” notes Molano, “that more people arrived in those years than in all the previous modes of settlement from the 1920’s to the 1970’s.”\textsuperscript{113} The lands of the indigenous people became even more desired now for their fertility, remoteness and removal from all state surveillance. While from 1950 to 1970, an average of two to ten hectares of land were being settled annually per family, in 1970 the average increased to ten to twenty hectares of land per year, that could reach up to 100 hectares per family.\textsuperscript{114}

The stories describing the sudden affluence of “easy money” and brothels around congregations of local food stores, bars, billiard compounds with clandestine backrooms, and gas stations that erupted almost overnight in settlements that were multiplying all around the Highway, are endless. “Thousands of dollars, millions of pesos circulated from hand to hand,” remembers a local from the settlement of Mingueo. “It became a game with death; hundreds of canteens and almost 1,000 prostitutes were in Mingueo... people would buy themselves a Ranger van, a 9mm handgun, two boxes of ammunition and of course, a box of whisky. They would party for several days and the musicians would be prized with a van.”\textsuperscript{115} These settlements offered small versions of urban life and its conveniences: soap, salt, rice, canned foods, shampoo, oil, alcohol, bread, Coca-Cola, boots, clothing, medicine and electricity. Most of this was part of the flow of contraband brought from the city of Maicao, near the border with Venezuela, where there was an oil

\textsuperscript{113} Molano, Alfredo; Rozo, Fernando; Escobar, Juana; Mendiola, Omayra. Op. cit., p. 10
\textsuperscript{114} Ferro, María del Rosario and Londoño, Juana. Op. cit., Chapter 4. p. 35 (Unpublished)
\textsuperscript{115} Ferro, María del Rosario and Londoño, Juana. Op. cit., Chapter 4. p. 36 (Unpublished)
bonanza. “The agricultural boost predicted by everyone as a result of the new highway disappeared almost completely,” observes Molano. “All the food was brought either from Santa Marta (vegetables) or from Maicao (canned preserves).” As the marimba business grew so did the number of officials involved. “Authorities participated and with them, political leaders. Then, when all else was guaranteed: the capitalists.” The slack interpretation of the law became the means to get a slice of the cake. The money that officers obtained from bribery made up for their scant salaries. Politicians began to finance their campaigns with this money, and win the vote of the hundreds who also profited from this trade. The numbers who didn’t partake of this “illusion,” he continues “... could have been counted with the fingers of one hand, for two hands would have been too many.”

This time it was a different kind of population that was attracted to the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. Not just colono peasants but the unemployed, seekers of fortune and gunmen. Squads would come together to organize and control the surveillance and transportation of the marimba. Since the arrangements were by word of mouth, old gangs would organize themselves for assault, armed robbery, extortion and kidnapping, whenever necessary. In this way, they would get some advantage out of the business. The display of boundless affluence aroused more violence. Molano writes: “Thousands of dead were buried along with their dreams in the Sierra... The North Americans who arrived for their weed were mugged, the drug lords were robbed as they were about to pay, the farmers were executed as they delivered the marijuana, the transporters were shot in their back in any road, the police themselves would shoot those who stood in their

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116 Molano, Alfredo; Rozo, Fernando; Escobar, Juana; Mendiola, Omayra. Op. cit., p. 10
way. A local from the Buritaca river basin remembers: “... this region used to be healthy, but it was spoiled after the marijuana boom. It brought distrust and fear. Many were left with huge debts, knowing that at any moment, someone would come to charge the debt and assassinate them.”

As all limits were overrun, the merciless won. The few war-obsessed characters that managed to organize private armies and impose their own law in the midst of these lawless settlements, dominated. One of them was named Hernan Giraldo. Upon his brother’s assassination in 1977 in the public market of Santa Marta, he decided to establish the group of the “Chamizos” to carry out “limpiezas” or social wipeouts and to “organize the zone.” One local remembers: “The man came riding on his little mule with his machete around his shoulder, felling the forest and growing marijuana. People in the region began to recognize him as a leader. Whoever had a problem would report it to him: ‘my cow was stolen, this and the other,’ and he would impart his own justice.”

Another inhabitant comments: “one could smell the dead on the roadside, two or three corpses would appear daily until Giraldo arrived.” His law was straightforward: “If you lie, steal or kill once, you get a warning. If you do it a second time, you are threatened. But then if you do it the third time, you’re dead.” People in the region started calling him “el Patron” or the Master. In 1982 his group became known as the “Autodefensas Campesinas de la Vereda del Mamey” or the Peasant’s Self-defense Army in the Buritaca river basin.

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123 El Mamey is on the way up the Buritaca river basin
Mamey. As old laws were abandoned, the inhabitants who managed to remain in the region were those loyal to this new law.

In the 1980’s, just as suddenly as the marimba appeared, so it disappeared when the US started growing its own cannabis, and the stream of dollars flowing in came to a halt. However, not without having left its own fashion statement: easy power as a consequence of ruthlessness. The logic and infrastructure around the marijuana production, helped pave the way for more reckless extractions, as well as more intense and chemical fabrications like cocaine. After the marijuana boom, 70% of the forest, approximately 150,000 hectares\textsuperscript{124} of trees were lost. The land was only good now for fields of grass. A local from the Buritaca river basin comments that “the only thing left after the marijuana business, were candles to be lit for the dead.”\textsuperscript{125} People were left jobless, more impoverished than ever, and yet with increasing desires for urban luxuries, electricity, televisions, appliances and in general, the living conditions they strove to attain. Furthermore, while on a hectare of land you could grow yucca, which is one of the most profitable food crops, and get ten bundles that might be sold for $8,000 pesos each, the same amount of land would give you 9 kilos of coca, which you could sell for $1,000,000 pesos. Amidst the distortion of these sums of money, a web of underworld paramilitary figures in charge of the drug manufacturing laboratories hidden along the river basins, gained ever increasing control through affluence, fear and intimidation. Backed up by increasing access to illegal routes of access abroad, this mindset turned the area into one of the most vulnerable regions to clandestine war.

\textsuperscript{124} Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. Op. cit. p. 14
\textsuperscript{125} Ferro, Maria del Rosario and Londoño, Juana. Op. cit., Chapter 4. p. 36 (Unpublished)
On the other hand, without schools, medical centers, proper roads, representatives of justice or state power, notes Molano, there were now inhabitants ready to contest for their rights. Left-wing guerrilla groups arrived, including FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), EPL (Popular Liberation Army) and ELN (National Liberation Army), each trying to find supporters for its own doctrines of liberation. Guerrilla movements installed and concealed military bases in the deepest and highest parts of the mountain as they mobilized from one side of the massif to another, trying to increase arms, seize territory and recruit alliances. The strategy was to launch assaults, kidnap people and make useful regions and prosperous resources inaccessible to their opponents. Meanwhile, like a frail chess piece, the Nation’s army would move in the borderlines, threaten and fearfully withdraw out of the mountain with no effect except that of raising the dreads of peasant settlers who felt ever more insecure and unprotected, and would climb even further into the rain forest.

As the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta became the backstage for armed groups, it was also the perfect platform for the iron curtain to fall on it, replicating the Cold War as chemicals and drugs grew hand in hand with the arms trade. It was the extensive anti-communist atmosphere everywhere, points out Molano, that finally swayed the managers of cattle ranches financed by drug money, as well as the owners of the cocaine production to move away from supporting left-wing guerrilla groups. Their desire for social legitimacy was high, and they needed to guarantee political support, as much as to win over the public force. The ground was laid out for economic, political and territorial expansion that would later culminate in right-wing militia or paramilitary success.
At the end of the Cold War in 1991, the craving for money and control intensified the drug and arms trade amongst left-wing as much as right-wing groups. The worry of Kogi Mamas such as the one voiced by the governor Jose de los Santos is not just the material transformation of the territory but along with it, the spirit that is dressing this vast mountainous terrain. “La Violencia,” which has since stood as one of the darkest episodes of Colombian history, and the crude manifestations of violence that have followed, continue to leave deep imprints in many of the children growing up. When new generations reach adulthood, the violence that affected them proliferates into new expressions of rage and frustration. I remember in November of 1998, when I was driving up the Rio Frio river basin in a car belonging to the Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, a Non-Governmental Organization, I saw the opening of a scene that I thought might not even be close to the kind of events that were experienced during La Violencia, and yet remained inscribed in my mind ever since:

Amidst the splendor of those ancient indigenous ruins breathing with the landscape, I see the armed paramilitary group standing ice cold and undeterred, as the small family mourns the dead man by the road. No one can budge an inch because they know that if they get involved, they’ll be killed that instant. I see the anguish on the little girl’s face as she runs down the road to tell someone: any grown up, that her father’s body is bleeding to death. He was just shot; maybe his heart is still moving? I see his son helpless, mute, leaning against the mountain’s edge, as he watches his mother bent over his father, crying without end. The young boy has surrendered to something worse than death. What will happen to this family? The car cannot stop, we move on.126

Furthermore, despite the enormous environmental damage to human populations and nature, lasting for decades after the anti-narcotics police sprayed the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in 1984, new types of non-selective glyphosate and other herbicides were experimented as part of the US campaign against drugs and terrorism. Hence, the

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126 Field notes from Diary of 1998
international drug control efforts with U.S. weapons, helicopters and assistance packages such as the “Plan Colombia” or “Andean Initiative” was welcomed in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta and its surroundings. President Alvaro Uribe applauded this initiative, which began during President Andres Pastrana’s government with a $7.5 billion Plan Colombia to cut drug production in half. An opportunity to capture finance, hand in hand with increased strategies and technology for warfare is one that Uribe’s administration fixated on the military, would not have missed.

Since Uribe’s government and reelection, from 2002 to 2010, terms involving extreme right-wing groups like “paramilitaries,” “parapolitics” and “parabusiness” circulated as widely as the scandals relating to human rights violations. With the drug money to finance collective massacres, forced displacements and disappearances, murders, kidnappings, sexual abuse and other forms of terror, right-wing militias were able to silence their opponents and increase their influence all around the nation. According to the press, the AUC (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia), the biggest right-wing militia in Colombia, was able to find its way into town halls, city councils, municipal assemblies, governorships, House of Representatives, Congress, police, militaries and other official organs. It was found that they had a strategic plan to consolidate their power starting with the Caribbean region in the North. Regardless of this, Hernan Giraldo who was now the head of the Tayrona Resistance Block, refused to join the AUC and was defeated by their Northern Block. In 2008 he was extradited to the United States, as were other AUC paramilitary leaders charged for drug trafficking. It was projected that after the “limpieza” by the right-wing militias, and following President

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127 “La Para-politica” In: Semana, August 18, 2003, Bogota, Colombia, pp. 30-33
128 “Los despojos que lidero el bloque Resistencia Tayrona” In: El Espectador, August 2, 2013, p. 6
Uribe’s policies, the very wealthy owners of vast extensions of land, many of whom had abandoned the country for fear of being kidnapped by left-wing guerrilla members, could now return safely and unleash their projects and ambitions of progress. One of these plans was to rank high amongst the top oil palm industries in the world. Rows upon rows of African Palm were planted around Colombia, many of which included lands where right-wing militias had massacred and forcefully displaced populations.

As my bus route continued from the Magdalena region to the Cesar, I saw endless extensions of African Palm through the dots of the grey mesh screen on my window. It appeared distributed so neatly and with such precision, that only the dearth of the settlements erupting along the highway interrupted that order. It was like seeing the strange skin disease spreading through the Ette children and adults, that appeared published in 12x9 inch photographs. After having been forcefully displaced from their lowlands by guerrilla, cattlemen and paramilitaries the Ette remained secluded in bounded areas in the Sabanas de San Angel, Magdalena region. “The Ette Ennaka... associate this disease with the disappearance of their group,”129 wrote Margarita Peña under the image. According to Doctors without Borders, continued the article, the only hypothesis that explains this strange eruption is that it’s a result of the glyphosate and pesticides used by the government to combat illegal crops. Unable to remain concealed, I saw the rashes sprouting from within white patches all over their faces and bodies, like the open memory of poverty and violence in these towns by the highway. No matter how effective the cement used to pave over these settlements as part of the State’s plan for progress in zones of conflict, the decline couldn’t be fully masked.

One can sniff out a fragile sense of security in the region, notes Taussig in 2008, “extreme makeover.” He mentions a young Colombian producer who claims that when he offered free plastic surgery to radically alter someone as part of his broadcast show, 20,000 volunteers responded. But it is the state that has been subjected to extreme makeover, points out Taussig in an interview, a “cosmic surgery” in which its face is continually defaced so as to hide the face of paramilitary and drug lord control of councilmen, mayors, governors, assemblies, Congress and the higher governmental bodies. Now devastating agroindustry extends as far as the eye can reach in what “used to be the horizon,” continues Taussig, plastic surgery on the landscape before the human body, stinking rivers, machinery all over, barren land full of pesticides and hormones.

“What does it take to dress the clothes of nature in this Mother Mountain?” wanted to know the fifteen Mamas or high priests that had assembled, as the Kogi governor communicated their inquiries to the elite Little Younger Brothers, also gathered there. The Kogi Mamas were dressed in robes of woven cotton that spoke to the very fluidity of the snow peaks as much as the thought and spirit that arises there, and descends like rivers that are veins, interconnecting the heart of their mountain all the way to the outfalls where these streams of fluid fertility nourish the sea. It is by this metaphor, that when a young Kogi man comes of age, he is taught to weave on a loom, interweaving the warp with the weft, walking his thought through the fluidity of the mountain. The youth learns to nourish his surroundings with refreshing thought, like a strand of snow-white cotton, all the way from his head outwards. When the Kogi Mamas

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130 Taussig, Michael. “La Bella y la Bestia.” In: Antipoda, No. 6, January-June, 2008, Universidad de los Andes, Bogota. p. 30
133 “La desolacion de la belleza.” In: Semana, Arcadia, No. 83, August 16 to September 14, 2012, pp. 14-15
descend from their settlements in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, many of them end up staying at the Kogi governor’s house in Villa Mercedes, a modest neighborhood in the outskirts of the city of Santa Marta. A loom stands at the front porch by the main road, not far from the highway. It is quite a sight to see these elders sitting by the loom next to the governor’s adolescent sons, weaving while the traffic on the road comes and goes, as they pull the yarn in and out, transforming the material into the very fabric that they wear, an acute awareness by which they live and breath the world that we inhabit.

One can well imagine the horror that this Kogi Mama, whom Jose de los Santos referred to, felt upon visiting the Guachaca river basin in 2004. He would’ve seen indigenous people living side by side with peasants, all under the rule of Hernan Giraldo, the “Patron” or Master known to have a strong appetite for teenage virgins. The very age whose menstruation is most cherished by the Kogi, for offerings used to nourish the flowing life force that runs through the sacred sites in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. In the Guachaca river basin, this Mama would’ve felt a kind of heat that is different from other lowlands, a heat that trickles water with chemicals, bloodshed running in the minds of the people living there. Instead of refreshing thought, a strange kind of intensity rises as the snow white fluid that irrigates the earth dries up and burns its body inside. The vegetation withers and the violence expands like fire in the most recondite places: not just the sacred sites around the territory, but the thought and spirit of the young generations growing up in that land fully clothed in laboratories, where the sacred coca leaf that encourages all fluid thought, is transformed into dry white powder. He would’ve observed donkeys and mules loaded with tanks of oil, base and extracted chemicals. He

134 “El Jefe ‘para’ que abuso de al menos 50 niñas.” In: El Tiempo, Bogota, March 6, 2011 and “La Barbarie de Hernan Giraldo en la Sierra Nevada.” In: El Tiempo, Bogota, Nov. 28, 2011
would’ve seen the Wiwa kids that I remember in 2001, coming down with big eyes, red and black protective necklaces and their skins filled with rashes from chemicals, not unlike the ones of the Ette. It is no surprise that as the Kogi governor pointed out, this Mama in dismay asked this simple and profound question: “Why do we have to wear this thought? Let us dress the Sierra in her natural clothes.”

The fashion show continues. The current President Juan Manuel Santos who used to be the Minister of Defense during Uribe’s government, is another great fan of progress and development as he encourages the private sector to participate in strengthening mining, building dams, generating gas and energy, improving port operations, establishing tax free trade zones, developing industry and increasing royalties, as well as goods and services that will generate jobs. As Alexandra Mora writes with respect to the tension that exists between the indigenous communities of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta and the multinational projects,\textsuperscript{135} this strain on the indigenous organizations has been escalating since President Cesar Gaviria’s neoliberal move in 1990 towards free trade, open markets, deregulation and enhanced privatization.\textsuperscript{136} Furthermore, President Santos’s policies have moved hand in hand with the fashionable ecotourism that has come running up the fast lane to this part of the world, setting a trend amongst the owners of centennial titles to properties that are enlisted among the last twenty-two ecological treasures left in the world.\textsuperscript{137} I say world and not earth. But part of the catch to be priced in this vogue is of course, the diversity of this earth, its endemic species of flora and


\textsuperscript{136} Also see Bocarejo, Diana. Reconfiguring the Political Landscape After the Multicultural Turn: Law, Politics and the Spatialization of Difference in Colombia. PhD Dissertation, The University of Chicago, 2008

\textsuperscript{137} Field notes from Diary of 2011
fauna and its archaeological sites with its “original inhabitants” or “living natives,” as the tourist industry stereotypically refers to the indigenous people of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta.

During the three days that the fifteen Mamas spoke to the Little Younger Brothers interested in investment, they didn’t once put away the gourd containers that they used to carry out their divination.

Figure 5. Divination gourd placed by the feet

The Mamas spend almost all their time trying to read and reflect upon the spirit of nature because as physicians of the world, which is how I think I can best describe them, they use their divination gourds in order to catch, “not at all ‘truth,’” as Nietzsche writes in The Gay Science, “... but something else – let us say, health, future, growth, power, life.” Thus, while the investors were speaking of making the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta a “sanctuary”, the Mamas conjured up a different kind of piety. The Kogi governor communicated what they were feeling in the air. “There is something here,” he said.

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“This ‘something,’ when one begins to verbalize it, cannot be known by any one person. This ‘something’ has to be understood by the others: the Mamas, the laws of origin, our tradition... We want people to listen to us, to analyze what we say, and if there is a tool, a fundamental element that will lead to something, then it is welcome, and then we can work together. But if people are seeing the indigenous groups as something to be used, then we aren’t here for that.”

Section 2.2

As we headed onwards in the big Coopetran bus, Reynaldo asked me where I was from. When I said Bogota, he broke out into an emotional account of his trip to the famous Boyaca Bridge in the highlands where the revolutionary Latin-American hero, Simon Bolivar, won the victory of independence from the Spanish Empire in 1819. “Our tour guide made my tears drop as he described the difficulties that brought the Creole army to almost give up their struggle,” he continued excitedly, “until thirteen spearmen surfaced. It was the positive attitude of the last one that changed the course of history one hundred percent. Thanks to this, they found the energy and determination that they needed to win.”

Reynaldo’s reinterpretation of Colombian history as an example of personal success seems to reflect the interests that have overtaken people’s minds as Winfrey Oprah-like television talk shows in Spanish have popularized and multiplied along with self-help centers all over Latin America. Guaranteeing certain trajectories in life, not only to achieve one’s personal goals but also to set them, has become such a fundamental model of “success” in media and culture imported from the United States that it’s spreading to the most remote towns in Colombia. Bowing to the voice of

139 Field notes from Diary of 2010
experience, no matter how different this experience might be. Walter Benjamin refers to this as the “mask of the adult” that “has always already experienced... everything: youth, ideals, hopes, woman. It was an illusion.” The voice of experience speaks in these late 20th C talk shows like the 19th C person wearing the mask of the adult does: asserting his or her knowledge of life’s course. By listening to other people’s personal accounts you learn how to embrace certain incidents in your life and change your attitude when confronted with difficult situations. If you are pragmatic you will abandon your illusion and follow the advice that comes as Walter Benjamin writes, with long experience or “Die Erfahrung.” As the bus pulled into the terminal, Reynaldo stood up, success in mind, wished me luck and continued his path, as he bid me farewell. He was the first one to descend with his gum, mobile phone, positive attitude and a small black suitcase in hand.

Early the next morning I waited in a street corner in the bustling city center of Valledupar, watching out for the car of my Ika friends with whom I was going to climb up to Nabusimake. The sun was beginning to rise and so was the heat. The street vendors crowded with their merchandise, were opening their stands. I noticed that most of them were selling “Chance and Minutos”. “What a contemporary phenomenon,” I thought, “everyone buying luck and time.” I remembered the voice of the mistress of the house back in Santa Marta complaining: “Not those dreams again!” when her housekeeper walked into the big house with a big dream. “All you do is waste your money,” she said. And then turned around to explain to me that she’s always borrowing money to buy “el Chance”, meaning the lottery. But her housekeeper didn’t listen; money for her is

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141 “Chance” or lottery tickets and “Minutos” or Minutes, meaning cellular credit
synonymous of fortune. If only she had two thousand pesos she would be sure to get el Chance, she affirmed, her dream had been loud and clear that night, she could still feel the numbers: 5535. The moment her mistress disappeared into her room, she asked me if I could lend her a little money.

“This is a fantasy world here. People in Santa Marta have a thousand pesos in their hands and they already feel like millionaires” exalted J the guaquero whose dead uncle told him in a dream where to find a guaca near Rio Piedras. The guaqueros’ fate is not solely contingent upon money. Like the idler figures that Walter Benjamin observes in 19th C Europe: the gambler, the private collector, the student and the flaneur, guaqueros have no sequence and no system. They are attracted to chance that comes with “immediate experience” or “Das Erlebnis.” Immediate experience, which entails shock and discontinuity, is open to “Fortuna” in the double sense of chance and riches, writes Benjamin. Unlike the person wearing the mask of the adult that presupposes tradition and continuity, for whom experience “has become... a message about life’s commonness,” idler figures have discovered that “there exists something other than experience, that there are values -inexperienceable- which we serve.” These “result only very remotely from any work activity, or are cut off from such a procedure altogether,” continues Benjamin. Hence, we don’t say that a gambler wins or loses everything as a consequence of his work, but it is a matter of luck or chance: “Fortuna” that is on his side.

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“The problem,” commented Y, “is that you get your hands on any little thing and you already feel like you’re the king of this world.” His eldest brother, F, dared climb all the way up to “El Infierno,” known today as Ciudad Perdida. He invited his brothers: “You can come with me if you have the guts to enter the Green Inferno.” The signs of the dead guided his steps: a bit of carbon here, a piece of ceramic there, a stone pointing to a graveyard. The dead are the great majority in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. Entire armies of them: thousands of ancient men and women buried all around. They are the treasure trove of guaqueros. Y continued: “My brother would then hike back to the city, fill up his pockets with money, buy a nice pair of shoes, a new shirt, ‘here, nena, take this,’ he would say to the chicas, and the bodies of women would wink all around. He could have two sitting on his lap at the same time, and a third one caressing his head: they loved him!”

You are a living man, poor and full of energy. You have suffered long days of trekking, you have put your life at risk, you have endured drenching rain, bad sleep with a piece of black plastic to keep your only change of clothes dry, you have braved howling and hissing animals, withstood clouds of insects and after three weeks you are finally standing on top of your trophy, a burial, covered in vegetation. You know where the entrance is, you see the exit, you have the eye for the underworld and you are able to recognize what is yours. With that treasure you can travel back to the city, certain that everything will smile at you. You buy a new shirt, a pair of leather shoes, a nice belt, you drink cold beer, you grow a bit of stomach and every woman will want you. These riches have empowered you; you can have anything you want. This is for real, as real as the ruffle on the dress of the woman that is in your arms and the warmth of the whisky.

146 Field notes from Diary of 2009
enveloping your body. A week of drinking and when the money runs out you are on your way to another burial, another group of dead waiting for you to find them in the rainforest; how thin and fragile the world that separates the skin of the living from the skin of the dead.

Fortuna is intoxicating to the guaqueros in a similar way in which Walter Benjamin describes the intoxication of the 19th C idler figures: “the student ‘never stops learning’; the gambler ‘never has enough’; for the flaneur, ‘there is always something more to see,’” and the private collector will always need to acquire the piece that is waiting to enter the “magic circle” of his or her collection. Like gamblers, guaqueros are risking a hand-to-hand encounter with fate, where the stake is money. As they seize the chance, they can lose or win immediate and infinite possibilities: money equivalent to anything. P remembers how he would see women parading through the brothels in the towns budding around the highway; it was like going on a pilgrimage of enthronements to the commodity fetish. The most beautiful ones could be admired but not touched, because they were saved for the top mafia men. To suddenly have bulging pockets that could get you one of those young blonds brought from Medellin like the ones that P remembers, now that is pleasure! However, unlike mafia networks that mirror the logic, mechanisms and infrastructure of the established market economy in order to outwit it and thus, guarantee profit, the guaqueros remain freestanding.

P was able to sell his guacas to Mr. Baron. He will never forget the first time he ever sold one. Displaced from the North of Santander during “La Violencia” their family lived in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta when he was growing up. One day his mother,

Doña Otilia, manifested her worry to him, the eldest of her two sons, because there wasn’t any food in the house, not even coffee or sugar. So he went to the store and asked for $20 pesos worth of groceries. He had no idea how he would find the money to pay back the owners of the store, but he was determined to find a way. He heard they were hiring people to gather sacks of maize, and paying $4 per sack. He was tiny but strong and determined to gather five sacks. He spent the whole day without food or drink as he picked corn, and when he was finally ready to load the sacks, they fell over. All the maize he had gathered was ruined. He left everything scattered on the floor and departed enraged. He swore until this day that he would never work for anyone again.

The next day he took a shovel and a pike, and arrived at a sugar cane plantation, which had been entirely dug out. He started digging without much hope of finding anything. Suddenly he hit a ceramic container. When he opened it he found it full of beads and pieces of gold. He heard his brother calling him in the field, so he took off his shirt to cover the pot. He told him to start digging from the other side, and when his brother hit the container he was ecstatic and shouted: “shit! We squared off!” Then he said to him: “but look what I found here” and when he lifted the shirt, wild with excitement, they continued digging for more. They took the prize to a friend, A. He was an old man with plenty of experience in guaqueria for he used to be guaquero in his hometown in Antioquia. As he saw what they had, he exclaimed: “you lucked out!” He showed them how to bead five beautiful necklaces with all the jewels in the pot and suggested selling them to Jaime Baron in Santa Marta. “He is a good man,” he added. P asked him how much he should charge him, and A said $30,000 pesos. He had never heard of that amount of money in his lifetime. He asked: “but what should I do, I don’t

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149 The original term for “we squared off” in Spanish is: “nos cuadramos”
even have money for a bus to Santa Marta?” A told him to go back to the store and ask them to lend him some money. When P arrived, the owner’s wife asked him how much he wanted. He said he needed $10 for the bus ticket, but the woman gave him $20 so that he could return in case he didn’t get paid for his merchandise.

With his fourteen years of age, P departed to bargain with the most well known dealer in Pre-Columbian goods. Jaime Baron was Guillermo Cano’s brother-in-law. Cano was the owner of the Cano Gallery, one of the most prestigious shops of Pre-Columbian merchandise in the country. They had access to a network that could both commercialize and export these valuables. When P took out what he had, Baron commented: “what beautiful pieces,” so he realized that he could ask for more than what A had advised him. He said that he would sell them for $50,000. But Baron said that was too high, he could give him $30,000. He told him there was more where that came from: “a whole village,” he emphasized, even though it was a lie, he added, for these pieces were the leftovers of a site that had been abandoned by guaqueros. So Baron said that he could pay him $38,000 and that he would give him a “compra”, meaning a purchase of goods that would allow him to continue digging: ten sacks of salt, oil, rice, dried fish, everything. He replied that he wasn’t an idiot, that he knew that purchase didn’t cost that much. Finally, he settled for $39,000 without the purchase. And when Baron handed over a piece of paper signed by him, he got pissed off and said: “Do you think I’m going to fall for this, or what? This is nothing but a piece of paper!” “Don’t be silly kid!” replied Baron, “Go to La Puerta de Hierro where you will get your money. I will call in advance to let them know that you’re on your way.” So he sent him off with a taxi driver, a friend of his. As soon as he got there, Baron called them.
P was given a whole bundle of money such as he had never seen, let alone held in his hands before. Empowered by the wad, he crossed the street to the market place in San Francisco where he bought meat, fish, coffee, sugar, bricks of sugar cane... “everything! Even a new pair of shoes for Doña Otilia.” He asked the taxi driver what his fair was. The man replied that Baron would pay for that. “No, but I want to pay you,” he insisted, “is $100 good for you?” And the taxi driver couldn’t believe it: “Wow! Seriously Brother?” He arrived back home, paid off the debt in the shop. He went to his mother and found her worried with the thought that he had become a thief. “Where did you get all that money from, my son?” she asked. He explained to her that it all came out of a single guaca.

Indigenous people in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta do not produce Pre-Columbian pieces today. However, according to the Mama’s cosmology, these materials are believed to be the medium by which the life force and qualities proper to living beings are nourished. As these materials are ripped out of the earth, the organic interconnection is torn, the energies are lost, barrenness takes over and the vast mountainous terrain is jeopardized. By following the passage of guaqueros we observe
the enormous contradiction whereby as the holes of the Mother Land of indigenous people in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta grow, so does the value of these pieces in the market. Guacas embodied as commodities produce a very different kind of consciousness from the awareness of the life force that these ancestral materials mediate when they are nestled in their sites.

“Isn’t there a certain structure of money that can be recognized only in fate, and a certain structure of fate that can be recognized only in money?”\textsuperscript{150} reflects Benjamin. It is idler figures like guaqueros, not completely subordinated to the labor process, which shed light on this new kind of 20\textsuperscript{th} C fate. Residing both within and outside the marketplace, between the worlds of magic and money, they draw on long experience in order to break away from it. It is as Benjamin writes, long experience translated into the language of shock. In the 19\textsuperscript{th} C the intentional correlate of “immediate experience” was “adventure,” in the 20\textsuperscript{th} C it appears as “fate.”\textsuperscript{151} “The one who undergoes an experience can follow the trace that leads there. Whoever follow traces,” continues the author, “must not only pay attention; above all he must have given heed already to a great many things. (The hunter must know about the hoof of the animal whose trail he is on; he must know the hour when the animal goes to drink; he must know the course of the river to which it turns, and the location of the ford by which he himself can get across.)”\textsuperscript{152} Then he adds: “Not for nothing do we speak of ‘fortune hunting’. “\textsuperscript{153} Follow the passage of guaqueros through La Puerta de Hierro, “The Gateway of Iron.” It is here where the guaqueros, with

\textsuperscript{150} Benjamin, Walter. Op. cit., p. 496
guacas in hand, could cross the gateway, do business and with the “little paper of nothing” but Baron’s signature, turn into the rulers of the world for a night or two.

One can still see the La Puerta de Hierro, right across the Square of San Francisco in the city center of Santa Marta. It echoes the heyday of guaqueria. The top of the door ablaze with carved cast iron, a reminiscence of 19th C European steel work. The ornamentation bursts into intricate forms of flowing leafs and flowers that dance around a sign, currently in ruins and announcing the pawnbroker. Mr. Baron’s lover, says Y, was a prostitute from the Guajira that worked near the seaport in Santa Marta. They were a most popular couple because they satisfied every guaquero’s fantasy. When the guaqueros arrived, they would place their merchandise on a table and Baron would start distributing drinks for everyone before negotiating. Baron started adorning his lover’s earth-colored skin with gold. She would come out dressed all the way from her feet to her head in nothing but Pre-Columbian jewels that covered her body. Pretty soon her ugliness became “divine.” She was known as “mujer divina” or “divine woman,” continued Y. At the end, the Medellin mafia assassinated Baron. Up to this day no one knows why. His lover married a well-known pawnbroker in Santa Marta and lives with him near the Stadium.

Section 2.3

“You see that hill over there?” asked S pointing behind me, “that hill paints gold!” he affirmed as his dreamy eyes flickered a light that I now recognize in a guaquero’s gaze. As he meandered in his mind through the hills around us, I could see his imagination merging with the detailed familiarity of his surroundings. Since he moved to
that farm in 1975, these hilltops have become the roof and walls of his house. He told me that not far from there and not too long ago, he dug out a pot. A German man “took the whole thing completico.” He was “just like you” he added, perhaps because he was white and big built, I wonder, or maybe because like a tourist, he had enough money to travel there. “But when he uncovered it and found out that the pot had no gold,” continued S, “he decided to bury it back in the ground by himself.” The dead are so close, the skin of the teeth away. Give them a dash of whisky, start digging and you can start betting: “I will buy everything that is in this pot whether it is gold or bones.”

As S waits for his encounter with Fortuna, his reaction to chance is like the knee’s reaction to “the hammer in the patellar reflex.”154 He is not so much following a sequence, as attentively tracing a dynamic that will lead him through the excitement of his chase, step by step from one coincidence to the next, summoning up in every instance “a completely new, original reaction.”155 Having endured hunger, thirst, mosquitoes, stinging ants, gnats, ticks, scorpions, heat, cold, rain that damps one’s skin and bones, breaking through the ground and digging, bearing the fear of overgrown rivers, precipices, dangerous caves, bats, tigers and snakes, guaqueros are less at the mercy of the mysterious forces of nature, than in the hands of the “inexplicable” in bourgeois society.156 Fortuna, continues Benjamin, is unrepeatable and individual like the child that follows “nothing but the whim of the moment.”157 However, “for an outsider,” he points out, “it is at most an immediate experience that arises.”158

S lives in a run down shack built on a floor of concrete, the tin roof held together with some stones so that it won’t fly away and a few avocado trees growing next to the house. I could see a very long cable wound up on the ground, a toilet basin rolling around in the back yard and a broken down rocking chair where he sat to contemplate his surroundings. S was hired there to take care of an estate abandoned by its owners as they began to fear the presence of left-wing guerrilla groups. The owners are now back and have asked him to retire. S said he had no other place to go because he gave away his house to his wife and son so that they’d “stop bugging” him. He remains there for some of the proprietors believe that he can at least help them keep the place safe.

S’s father, TF, was the foreman of the estate “El Recuerdo,” a few hours above from where he lives. It belonged to a man from Cartagena named Pablo Garcia, whom everyone thought was from Spain. Pablo Garcia exported cashews to Spain and in return brought everything thinkable back from Europe: from linen clothes for the workers, furniture, musical instruments, clocks and delicacies for the ladies, to the bridge of Aladdin with its fairy like corners curled up, which can still be seen on the road that leads past the Quinta de San Pedro Alejandrino, about an hour and a half ride up to

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159 According to Alfredo Molano’s account the Flye family, owners of the Cincinnati farm brought this bridge. For more on this family see: Carriker, Melbourne R. Vista Nieve. Texas: Blue Mantle Press, 2001

160 Every modern schoolbook narrates the story of how after having waged the battle of Independence of Latin America from Spanish rule, General Simon Jose Antonio de la Santisima Trinidad Bolivar Palacios y Blanco ironically died in the house of a Spanish Republican, Don Joaquin de Mier. Bolivar arrived there by chance for he was not thinking of dying. He had tuberculosis and felt the urge to get away from the humidity and heat of the bay of Santa Marta and improve his health by spending a few nights in colder weather near the foothills of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. Thus Joaquin de Mier invited him to his Quinta where they produced bricks of raw sugar cane, a familiar smell from Bolivar’s childhood in Venezuela. In Garcia Marquez’s book on Bolivar’s death, he depicts Bolivar the liberator, dying in 1830 impoverished in his hammock yet caught by the sight of the magnificent Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, bright and blue from his window in San Pedro Alejandrino. This Quinta has become as symbolic for Venezuelans, Ecuadorians and Colombians as it is for the indigenous people of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. Kogi, Ika and Wiwa mamas arrive there every year to deliver offerings. There is a mound where their ancestors were buried long before Bolivar’s death but not far from where he drew his last breath. The belief is that while the Spanish took the gold away, Bolivar joined the ancestors and became part of the
Minca, where S lives at the foothills of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. S’s father was a “cachaco” from the highlands in the interior of the country, “he sailed up the Magdalena River and never returned to his home town in Santander.” His brother Y remembers their father well:

TF always said that being in ‘El Recuerdo’ made him feel closer to Spain than to Bogota. He was tall and white with an imposing nose. He only wore impeccable kaki pants with fine maroon leather boots and belts and a big pocket watch. His white shirts starched to the last inch. In those days San Pedro Alejandrino was four and a half hours away from Santa Marta’s bay and another five riding up the Sierra to the Hacienda… My father would take off for days to fetch the cargo from the bay. He loved markets. There was one in the Square of San Francisco, another one near the Cathedral, and the third one where the Central Market stands today. But in those days they were small and simple: three coconut palms and a few vendors at most. This is where TF found his third wife. The second one who lived near the Bay, gave him six children. He had forty-nine children with five women. My mother, his first wife, would always say to us: ‘your father is a real man... he always kept me happy. He was a master crock and with this cunt I gave birth to seven children.’

“The standards TF set for himself, were also those he demanded from workers under his command,” continued Y. “‘El Recuerdo’ was famous for its extreme order.”

Upon TF’s death a year after Pablo Garcia in 1965, his sons started digging out El Recuerdo. They found two million pesos worth of guacas there. “But that money is damned” commented S. “All those who made a living on guaqueria ended up in ruins,” he repeated, boasting that he is the only one of his brothers who will be able to retire.

S offered to give me a small and beautifully rounded ceramic bowl that he said he extracted from a children’s burial site. When I told him that I couldn’t accept that gift, he suggested that I could give him a bottle of gin in exchange. In the meantime, he affirmed

strength growing in that sacred site. “Bolivar is here because we wanted it that way” claim the Kogi high priests. They believe that as long as they keep nourishing the place by delivering offerings, the spirit there will continue flourishing.

161 Field notes from Diary of 2009
that whenever he got his hands on a little money along with a fifteen-year-old “peladito” or youngster to help him dig out, he would go to those hilltops and find the gold: he can see it. “When the dead are yellow they are plucked,” meaning they have nothing, “instead if they have some green on them, it’s usually a piece of gold.” His waiting time can be as long as it takes for as Benjamin notes, “idleness has in view an unlimited duration.”

It was that feeling of boundlessness that began to invade me as I continued to sit by S that afternoon, surrounded by enchanted hills, which have painted gold forever.

A week’s hike up from where S lives, Julio Cesar Sepulveda is said to be the very man who discovered the well-known archaeological site of Ciudad Perdida, and who probably dug out a great part of Colombia’s famous Pre-Columbian Tairona collection that belongs to the Treasury. From 1944 until the late 1980’s, the state-run Bank of the Republic, the very institution that issues and regulates Colombian currency, generator of capitalism’s vitality, was also the one to finance the theft of indigenous burial sites, as members of the Bank acquired ever more pieces that fed the Nation’s “private collection.” As the desire for these ancestral materials in the form of commodities increased, the Bank of the Republic’s treasure trove expanded and began to surface and grow into one of Colombia’s pride and symbol: The Gold Museum. The exhibition rooms multiplied and so did the windows from where this merchandise could be admired but not touched.

In the meantime, Julio Cesar Sepulveda remained anonymous and buried beneath Ciudad Perdida or “Lost City” until relatively recently, immersed in the tropical rainforest that envelopes it. I remember when I first heard about him, I was sitting in one of the two hundred and more interconnected Pre-Columbian Tairona terraces that

comprise Ciudad Perdida. This particular terrace was the kitchen where I found myself sitting around, talking about life with the cook. All of a sudden F appeared after a three-day hike up the Buritaca river basin, 3,500 feet from the coast, with a group of tourists, a swollen hand and a heavy heart. He walked past us without greeting us and continued climbing up the stairs that lead to ever more terraces. He complained out loud without looking at anyone in particular: “I used to be the one that would dictate orders here, and now they order me around!”

E who was sitting next to me in the kitchen murmured excitedly: “haven’t you heard of F?” I had heard that F was the man who in 1974, informed the officials in Colombia about the existence of this place, a location so remote for city people that they named it “The Lost City,” to which indigenous leaders replied: “lost to whom?” Upon F’s information, the army was sent to protect the site. In 1976 a permanent police station was installed there along with a group of multi-disciplined researchers referred to as “the Doctores” or PhDs since they all had university degrees. F was hired to be the foreman of this archaeological park until the mid-80s when the state neglected the place for lack of funds amidst a tense social conflict.
In 1986 the touristic company Turcol, ran by the right-wing supporters of Hernan Giraldo, “Patron” or Master of the region, as he was known, started organizing its own tours to Ciudad Perdida and hired F as one of its tour guides. F them returned to the kitchen after washing up. I asked him how he thought the place had changed since the time of guaqueria. “There was more shadow then,” he replied. “You couldn’t even dry up your clothes and when the Doctores came dressed in jeans, they had very little left to wear after a couple of days.”¹⁶³ F told us that before the Doctores arrived, the place was filled with guaqueros. It would take them from seven to eight days to climb up the river basin. They would arrive in groups of fifteen men. Sometimes there would be up to one hundred men at once, each with their own cuadrilla. When F left, E suddenly pointed to the terrace near the stove where the cook stood, and eagerly asked me: “Did you know that until his family claimed his remains, Sepulveda laid buried right there, in the same place where he dug out the gold?! Surely he’s the only one who knew the history of this place.”¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Field notes from Diary of 1999
¹⁶⁴ Field notes from Diary of 1999
Before he discovered Ciudad Perdida, Julio Cesar Sepulveda had been treasure hunting for guacas all around the Buritaca river basin, each time abandoning himself to his activity: “If my father didn’t know something he would go right in with his eyes wide open,” comment his daughters A and V. “Nothing frightened him. When he found Ciudad Perdida, he called it ‘La Conquista.’ That was its name for many years.” The memory that Sepulveda’s daughters hold of their father is that of a family man. “In an article in the paper once they described my father as a nomad”, emphasize V and A.

But he was no nomad, he had his house and we lived there. My father was a very dedicated family man. I remember once he brought back a gold guacamaya and he took it out and would say to us: ‘look it’s the size of my hand.’ He would clean the pieces and polish them so that they would shine beautifully and then he would go to Santa Marta to sell them. The jewellers there I am sure took advantage of him and gave him less than they were worth. My father did find enough gold though to get some cows and build a house. I’ll never forget when he took me to a cloth shop and he asked the shopkeeper to find the most beautiful piece of fabric she had. The woman asked him: ‘do you want it stamped or plain?’ And my father turned around and asked me: ‘what can she mean by stamped or plain? Let’s tell her to show us both so we can see for ourselves.’ So he asked the woman to show him and when she took them out, he looked at me, laughed and said to the woman: ‘yes, the stamped ones.’ My mother sewed the dresses.

On the other hand, it’s not surprising that a guaquero’s life should end dramatically with his “Conquista” or Conquest, not for any moral reason but because it is the guaquero who carries pronounced gambling instincts, “constantly raising the stakes, in hopes of getting back what is lost, the gambler steers toward absolute ruin.” The ideal of the shock-engendered experience <Erlebnis>,” observes Walter Benjamin, “is the

165 I would like to thank Juana Londoño for sharing this interview with me as she serendipitously came across Julio Cesar Sepulveda’s daughters, Ana and Veronica, now grown up, married and living in Bogotá. Ferro, Maria del Rosario and Londoño, Juana. Op. cit., Chapter 4, p. 8 (Unpublished)
166 Ferro, Maria del Rosario and Londoño, Juana. Op. cit., Chapter 4, p. 12 (Unpublished)
Everyone would talk about how horrible it was to get there, continued A and V:

The tigers, the snakes... but my father didn’t mind that. It was common for him to suddenly take off, at 1:00, 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning. My mother would wrap up three maize tortillas, and give him a pair of clothes tightly wound up in a black plastic bag so that he could keep dry at night. Black plastic, matches, a pan, a pike... is all he needed to get going. But on that day, after my mom gave him the bag she hugged him very tightly and said: ‘take care Mijo.’ As soon as he left she was so sad and commented: ‘I don’t know why, but I have a bad feeling about this.’ In the afternoon the hens started climbing on the den and as soon as the rooster got up there and sang, my mother broke out in tears. Three days later they came with the news about how they had killed my father while he was arriving at the place. My uncle who was behind him said they had followed them, and when they appeared fully armed my father was kneeling, peeling a wild turkey that he had just caught. He was unarmed and pleaded: ‘please don’t kill me I have many children, please don’t kill me!’ But they had followed him out of envy; they wanted the guaca and they shot him nineteen times.\(^{169}\)

In 1987, MP remembered the story of the Inferno, “El Infierno,” which according to him was how Ciudad Perdida was referred to by guaqueros:

The Sepulveda went journeying and they found El Infierno where they extracted a guaca of 70,000 pesos. After them came the Restrepo. We came in third. I found myself amidst the problem of the dead man when they raided each other with gunshots. One man was left dead and another one was wounded. Later two of the Restrepo were hemmed in a house and shot. We remained in the Inferno guaqueando.\(^ {170}\) This occurred on a Tuesday, more or less around three. The dead man was left lying there for eight days until he was buried. Guaqueros continued exiting and entering El Infierno. They looked like working ants, until a snitch decided to disclose the town so as to win 20,000 pesos and remain as foreman there – you know his name- I was one of the workers in ‘Ciudad Perdida,’ which is how it was called later. Then I left and continued guaqueando in the Valley of the Pots that today is referred to as Tankua, as well as other towns in front of it that are very beautiful, with big, tall walls, like the one named the Town of the Poor One. None of the Doctores know that one. A creek crosses through it. It is very well constructed.\(^ {171}\)

\(^{170}\) Guaqueando is the verb form of guaca
\(^{171}\) I would like to thank Guillermo Rodriguez and Fernando Salazar for sharing this interview of MP in Alto de Mira, Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, in 1987.
“Guaqueria today is not the same as guaqueria thirty years ago,” affirmed P, “even the clouds have changed now.” They used to hover, dense and heavy over the ground, ready to burst open in any minute. There’s a whole generation that still remembers how hard it was to cross over the river basins. P recalled one of those days, when his mother gave birth to his youngest sister all by herself, while his father had to sit and watch from the other side of the river without being able to give her a hand because “he knew damn well that if he challenged mother nature he would drown.”

MP remembered his experiences back then. “Around the year 73 to 74, I invited my partner MB to enter this jungle,”

We left the house at 6AM, and two and a half hours later we ate big fruits from a tree we found. They were wild apples but very tasty. We continued towards the mountain range and unfastened downwards, till we hit a gorge with lots of water. We walked until around 4PM, and gathered palm leaves to make a small shelter where we slept that night by the sandy shore of the creek. We cooked and went to sleep. Around nine thirty at night we heard a noise. The little dog with us started barking, she got scared and hid in between the two of us. So we shot into the air to find out what it could be. We heard an animal run. Then it was dead quiet. The next day when we got up we saw a tiger’s footprints in the sand. I named that creek Coral because there were two serpents castrating themselves there. We shot them. Then we continued towards the other side, crossing over and even bigger gorge, downwards, along the shore. We turned and followed the cliff’s edge upwards until we found an Indian town... we crossed over to the other side, which is all Indian land. We continued downwards and found the town of Julepia where we went through a lot of terraces. Then we returned to the small shelter where we had slept the night before. We didn’t find anyone’s footprints or anyone’s pikes. No one had been in this jungle. Everything was virgin. We invited other partners to the town of Julepia... then another cuadrilla followed us behind, but they couldn’t find the path and had to turn around, walking back during four days as they carried the provisions in their backs. We continued working in this town.172

... One day I decided to journey through the jungle with RA and a little dog that accompanied us everywhere... the manaos173 came and we followed them. They crossed over a gorge and climbed up the mountain where we found some plantain trees that were left by ancient Indians. A little further up we found an Indian trail and terraces. We discovered the town and went through that whole area.

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173 Manaos are animals similar to wild boars
Afterwards, we descended to tell the rest of our partners that we had found it. We went out to sell a guaca in Santa Marta and with that money we got more provisions and returned. I was putting a ranch together, when a pole almost killed me, I was left unconscious… when I recovered my partners had already built the ranch. They were worried for me. We continued working in that town and pretty soon Julepia was full of guaqueros.

Another time, we were in Rancho Quemado. We named it Burnt Ranch because it went on fire. We took out a few pieces that included a guacamaya with two heads and a butterfly with seven buttons. No one knew about this town, until one of my partners revealed it and introduced another cuadrilla there. But we had lots of places to work. We had the Town of the Gourd, the Town of the Chief, the Town of the Caracoli Tree, the Town of the Indian, The Town of the Purgatory, the Town of the Pots and others named the Town of the Monkey, the Town of the Fox and the Town of the Namesake, which we identified like that because there were many with the same name…

A guaquero like MP “names” one site, to turn to another: “el Pueblo del Mate,” “el Pueblo del Cacique,” “el Caracoli,” “el Pueblo del Indio,” “el Purgatorio,” as he moves through the terrain, step by step in his encounter with his own fate, never keeping anything for himself. I asked J why he never saved any of the pieces that his wife recalls with such delight. D, J’s 60-year old wife, will never forget when she used to go to Mr. Baron’s place in Santa Marta, full of Pre-Columbian pieces of all kinds, “a magnificent sight!” she says and sighs, regretting that her husband never allowed her to keep any of them. J replied that if he kept them, someone else would come along and steal it away. “If it is not the bank, it is the State. If it is not the State it is the overflowed river that sweeps everything away. That is why it’s best to spend everything right there and then.”

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175 Field notes from Diary of 2010
Chapter Three. Teyunna: Historia Abscondita, Part I

34. Historia abscondita. - Every great human being exerts a retroactive force: for his sake all of history is placed in the balance again, and a thousand secrets of the past crawl out of their hiding places – into his sunshine. There is no way of telling what may yet become part of history. Perhaps the past is still essentially undiscovered! So many retroactive forces are still needed! 176

Section 3.1

We had arrived in Teyunna a few days back with Mama Luca, his two wives: Catalina and Marina; his nephew; a young girl and a boy learning from him; a few chicks; a couple of piglets; a dog and a parrot; a double decker tape recorder and many sisal bags containing pots, blankets, a hammock, spindles, cotton, some food, coffee, raw cane sugar bricks and his multiple musical instruments that included a drum, a tin whistle and three tortoise shells. We trekked up an ancient path rarely used today by tourists, which followed the course of the Buritaca River.

Figure 8. The way up along the Buritaca river basin

Dazzled by everything I saw, I was informed about animal foot prints, songs of birds, native plantain batches that seemed to have been abandoned hundreds of years ago, and a couple of tiny houses that looked like knee-high Kogi temples or nujues. When I inquired, Mama Luca said they were the houses of “jauja” or ancient people, funny creatures who Mama Luca described as “tiny with feet and very long hair.” They are people that walk, he said, but they don’t talk, “they are Taironas who only think.” “Tairona” is a term commonly used to refer to the complex of ancient cultures that inhabited the north of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in Pre-Columbian times, meaning before Christopher Columbus’s arrival. “But these jauja wear white robes just like mine” said Mama Luca, “except that theirs are striped.”177 He sang their lively music and explained: “now we don’t see jauja around here anymore,” as he gesticulated that they have moved up into the mountain.

Soon I realized that this path had as many remnants of guaquero’s holes as it did of abandoned indigenous habitats. Mama Luca would point out the holes along the way with his staff and in his scant Spanish he would say to me: “Aquí: Diablo” or “Devil here.” As I understood it, these places had ancestral energies, not unlike the Ikanusi,178 that having been disturbed from their dwelling are now rising and moving about the territory, claiming a debt that is owed to them. “We need to heal these holes,” emphasized Mama Luca. “We all used to be Elders. We used to be wise people. We had so much strength in our bodies that we could see in depth and hear the voice of the

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177 Field notes from Diary of 1999 while working with the Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta
178 For more on ikanusi amongst the Ika please see Chapter One
Mother.\textsuperscript{179} We knew how to sing, dance and fill her body. Her body was firm, full of rivers, creaks, animals, forests, and harvests.\textsuperscript{180}

Mother Seinekan had left everything organized. She had given each one of her children, land to grow food and the means to look after it, emphasized Mama Luca. “Shibulama”: the ancestral tools as much as the understanding that grows in them is the medium by which living beings are able to concentrate the necessary life force on Earth and connect with the ancestors. This exchange occurs through the sites where the ancestral materials are nestled. These materials include diverse ceramic pots with precious beads, gold, quartz in the form of tubular stones called tumas, as well as ancient liquids that Mama Luca pointed out, are as necessary as gold. Many of these materials exist in the form of miniature versions of nature as seen by us, such as toucans, guacamayas, parrots, woodpeckers, hummingbirds, güaras, chucho, iguana, monkeys, deer, ocelots, armadillos, jaguars, pumas, pajuil, ñeque, saino, peacccaries, bats, eagles, insects, scorpions, leafs, flowers, butterflies, shrimp, fish, stools, spindles, poporos; to things that our eyes are unable to see, like the connections to the Mother and Father of rain, of clouds, of the wind, of the sun, of thunder who sit in their temples or nujues, many layers above the earth and many layers below it. These treasures “are like microphones” that allow us to communicate with the Mother of each place, explained Mama Luca. However, “some of the Mother’s children... were no longer interested in listening to her council,” he continued

\textsuperscript{179} In this chapter the term “Mother” will come up a lot in indigenous transcription. It refers to that which gives life in the cosmos and comprehends a vast scale that goes all the way from the Universe, to the tiniest gold figures that are nourishing the fertility of each living being on Earth. Mama Luca is speaking here of Mother Seinekan, one of the first names of the Earth.

So she decided to send them to the other side of the sea where she gave them land and their own shibulama to connect there. But instead of concentrating, they began to think far, ‘pensar lejos,’ their thought running elsewhere. What was given to them was not enough for them, so they started stealing places that belonged to others, like taking someone else’s wife. They defied the Mother again and crossed over the ocean. That is how they arrived here, carrying that thought. They wanted to take all our shibulama: the Mothers of gold, the masks, and the staffs, without knowing what they were for and how to use them.

Mama Luca’s nephew who was accompanying us on the trip explained to me that it was as if he took all the video devices from the office of the Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, the NGO where I was working at the time. “You would ask me: ‘what use is that to you up here where there is no electricity? You don’t even know how to work that machinery anyway.’ But I’d still take it.”

As these ancestral materials and understanding are pulled out, further chaos, conflict, illness and deterioration is stimulated. The idea of ripping out layer upon layer of this shibulama generates disastrous consequences in the region. It was in response to this fate that in 1987 Ramon Gil, one of the founders of the indigenous political organization of Gonawindua Tayrona and its first governor, summoned Mama Luca along with other Kogi and Wiwa high priests in order to heal the sacred sites that were desecrated all around the Buritaca and Guachaca river basins, and organize the process of resettlement. This went hand in hand with the Incora, the Colombian Institute for Agrarian Reform, that was acquiring allotments from peasants who had arrived since

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181 The sites where the ancestors of the Kogi concentrated in aluna to leave their shibulama or history, folded into rocks, hills, caves, rivers, lakes, swamps, stones, not unlike the ancestors of the Ika who concentrated their thought and spirit to leave their kunsamu. I refer to the Ika kunsamu in Chapter One.
182 I thank the Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta and the spirit that converged at that time in its director, María Camila Diazgranados, whose intuition and foresight motivated us to participate wholly in this unique process of recovery. Before her death she insisted that this story of the Buritaca and Guachaca river basins could not remain unwritten.
183 In 2003 the Ministry of Agriculture turned the INCORA (Instituto Colombiano de Reforma Agraria) into the INCODER (Instituto Colombiano de Desarrollo Rural), in pursuit of rural development.
the 1930’s and were now waiting for the opportunity to sell their land and move closer to
towns and urban centers. Ramon Gil pushed for this process of recovery. His idea was
that as the communities grew and the offerings to the ancestral Mothers and Fathers were
delivered, the spirit of the people would heal alongside the spirit of nature. Many of the
recent settlers that he invited were displaced Wiwa families who fled the armed conflict
of the lower lands in the Cesar region, and had come to live along the Guachaca river
basin. In the meantime, the Buritaca river basin remained mostly Kogi as previous
inhabitants continued to live there, while some new Kogi and Wiwa people arrived. It
was considered that while Wiwa-speaking people would inhabit the Guachaca river basin,
the Buritaca would be mostly Kogi-speaking.184

Figure 9. Previous peasant farm resettled by indigenous families

“It’s true: all the indigenous people used to be wise,” said Mama Chema in
response to Mama Luca. “Our organization was complete before the Little Younger
Brothers185 came,” he pointed out.

184 According to the DANE, the National Administrative Department of Statistics in Colombia, there were
18,000 Kogi people and 10,000 Wiwa in 2005 in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta
185 “Little Younger Brothers” or “Hermanitos Menores” refers to the non-indigenous inhabitants, who lost
the wisdom inherited from the Mother and who need to be guided, especially with regard to sustaining the
world that the ancestors organized before the rising of the sun
We knew how to dance with the mask for rain, the mask for summer, the mask for planting, the mask for seeing... but then when the Little Younger Brothers arrived they said it was bad to dance, and they took away the gold, the masks, they stole and kidnapped our chiefs, then they started taking our women... Our Little Younger Brothers... were not able to figure out how to arrive in Colombia. If they had arrived to understand, then everything would have been different. But they came to conquer. When this happened, hundreds of us fled up the mountain. We were only able to save the gold masks that we use to dialogue with the rain. They were taken to the highest places... so now we have a little shibulama left...
Then our Little Younger Brothers built the highway and broke into the site of Mitamdua. They took the Mother of serpents and butterflies: the gold that was there to give life to the ceramic pots... Following the footsteps of their grandparents, they took it all. We had a place called Mamarongo, something like a person in spirit where one would go to speak, like you would go to the President, asking for guidance. In Cherua too, they took all the people who guided us... Once they had taken all our Presidents, they began to take the smaller ones...

Mama Luca continued:

... Everything has been taken out, from the very top all the way down, all of it taken, where all the illnesses are controlled... There was green gold that controlled the shivers, but this gold is no longer there so how are we going to control now? The lakes too were full of green gold so that the earth would remain cool. It is like a spiritual sprinkle that you can see when the clouds climb up the mountain and release showers that feed the forest. But this gold is no longer there, so now we ask: how are we going to look after the Earth? We have to find the answer together because we weren’t the ones that sold the quartz, the gold, and the ceramic. So how are we going to heal? How are we going to remedy? You tell me.

After several hours walking, we reached the point at which we had to cross over the vast Buritaca River in order to initiate our ascent up the ancient stone staircase of Teyunna, known in Spanish as “Ciudad Perdida.” This implied removing boots, socks, pants, and placing the load on our heads so as to begin to traverse the dense and cold water. I cautiously advanced behind Mama Luca’s nephew, step by step, trying to figure

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187 Transcriptions, 1999 while working with the Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta
out where the shallower parts of the river were, diagonally through what seemed an endless course. Any fall would have led to a loss of belongings and maybe even more, as was often described by guaqueros like W who remembers what that river was like fifty or thirty years ago. He says the currents today are nothing in comparison to what they used to be, and describes how they had to tie themselves with lianas and throw a rope across to the other side of the shore, while someone without a load, had to struggle to get there so that the rest of the cuadrilla could pull themselves and the cargo through the dense currents that came dashing down even when the flow was low. If it was high, he said, one had no other choice than to spend the night on one side of the shore and wait for it to decrease.

When I got to the other side I saw Mama Luca disappear up the 1,300 steps that lead to Teyunna, leaving the rest of us breathless and far behind. “Every stage is stepping there where the Mother sits in the temple,” said his nephew who patiently climbed at my pace. “If you are thinking with the Mother, then you don’t feel the effort.” As I ascended I began to notice three rows of stone steps: a wide slab with two smaller stones on each side, one to the right and the other one to the left. “The wider one was to be trekked by those like the Mamas who knew how to step in material, as they were stepping in spirit,” explained his nephew. At that point I saw Catalina, Mama Luca’s young and agile wife, drifting up the left side. “When you know how to concentrate your thought, this is nothing,” he continued while I struggled to breathe one stage after the other. I finally reached the terrace where Mama Luca was sitting. “Down, down, down, come down,” he said as I sat feeling like I was landing in another plane. He was playing the music of the tortoise shells that he had recorded a few days before in a sacred site further

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188 “Cuadrilla” refers to a team of guaqueros
down along the Buritaca River. “This is where the elders who gather and give council, dwell,” he began to explain.

This is where the Queen Mother is; this is where all the terraces present, gather to listen. This is where you will salute and deliver in your mind everything to the Mother: hammock, blanket, towel, pumpkin, bean, bread, cheese, tape recorder, mango, pineapple, meat, fish, cookies, everything. This, Mother Seinekan, is the grandmother, grandmother, grandmother of all, even of the trees, the fire, of this tape recorder, of the animals, the people, everything. She is also the grandmother of Jaba Juleñi: the mother of quartz where we are now, as well as the grandmother of Jaba Shibuleiyi: the mother of shibulama, the histories. The Mother is Seinekan and the Father is Se. Se, is where all things began before the Sun. They have many, many children, grandchildren, everything oooooh, plenty! And from there came more.

As Mama Luca spoke, I took out my notebook to list the names: Serankua, Ñui, Seinulan... but pretty soon Mama Luca’s words turned into music, and I began to hear the voice of the tortoise, then the song of the guacamayas, then the Mother of squash: “Seineba”, and then the striped frog that calls water; “this was a tiny striped frog,” he pointed out, “before when he was person he used to sing like this...” and a strong vibrant voice would sound. I heard the music of the big dove and the small pigeon, the peccary, the danta, the monkey, the hummingbird, the red bird, then the song of red quartz, then Dugunavi,¹⁸⁹ then the rain shower, then Aluawiko,¹⁹⁰ then the sea with its nine layers, then the song of when the Poporo came, and then the one when the forest came, as well as when the sun arrives at his Mother’s site. I heard howler monkeys breathing so close that I could almost feel their mouths through me like blowing wind: in and out, in and out. So he began to sing to them too, “like rattles” he said, and mimicked them, playing around until they finally moved on.

¹⁸⁹ Dugunavi is the Father of Masks
¹⁹⁰ Aluawiko is the Father of Ceramic pots
Content and feeling rested, I got up, rotated to the right three times as Mama Luca commanded, so as to spiral out of the place that we had just touched in spirit, or as Mama Luca said: “in aluna,” and continued up the stairs to enter a “City” full of beings folded into small and big stones, female and male sites, rocks that looked like frogs, stone books, stone maps, stone guardians, stones where you sit to receive advice and stones that are authorities.

I felt openings in every terrace as if alive. One of them used as a helipad was the biggest terrace of all. Mama Luca pointed out that it’s here where the Mother is breathing. Again we saluted it. Finally, we arrived at the kitchen, where the workers of this Archaeological
Park spent most of their time: S the caretaker of the Park, A the cook, as well as E, her husband. Mama Luca humorously introduced me as his third wife. We were welcomed, we drank warm coffee, some saltine cookies, talked for a while and then headed towards the southern part of the park, where the indigenous people stay in a couple of “nujues” or temples that the institution in charge of this Archaeological Park, the ICANH, gave them permission to build on two terraces.

While living there, I often engaged in long conversations with Mama Luca and Mama Romualdo Lozano\(^\text{191}\) whom Mama Luca was preparing to take spiritual charge of Teyunna. They were dialogues such as the one about “aluna.” Mama Luca wanted me to comprehend that whatever thoughts I held in my mind, would be heard in the places where those terraces were communicating. All of people’s thoughts and acts arise in aluna; they come from there and belong there, he pointed out. “Aluna is of all. Thinking is not restricted to an individual but it is of all. It thunders and the thunder is thinking; the stone is thinking; the animal is thinking; everything is thinking; people are thinking; the bird sings, it is happy, it too is thinking in aluna, in the memory.” This is why it’s important to do alunashiguashi, they said and translated it as “confession” in Spanish, which I then understood to be a rendering of thought, like a thread.\(^\text{192}\) “You shouldn’t let your thoughts run ahead of you,” pointed out Romualdo. This memory walks ahead, so you have to bring it back from where it went. The Mama has come to concentrate that memory in each site as he delivers the offerings around the river basin of Buritaca or Mutainyi, explained Romualdo. “He is gathering each one of the histories, all around Mutainyi,” he continued.

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\(^\text{191}\) Mama Romualdo Lozano and his older brother Mama Jose Maria grew up in the Buritaca river basin where their father, Mama Lorenzo Lozano, was teaching them before his death in 1989

\(^\text{192}\) Not unlike the Ika’s Seinanugwe. See Chapter One, p. 45
When the people living around the river basin of Buritaca come up to render their thoughts in alunashiguashi, we say in the meetings that we are thinking too much in the memory. We think: ‘how will my work turn out, I have to go to the meeting, could it be true that Teyunna will be handed over to the indigenous community?’ We hold too many thoughts in our heart. But Haba Seinekan advised us not to think too much. If there is a fight, an illness, a problem, people undertake alunashiguashi to return what belongs in aluna.

“Thought is like a person that walks,” reiterated Mama Luca. “You must purge it, clean it as soon as you feel something like heat rising inside you because otherwise this thought grows like a person and you feel more rage, more jealousy or a greater desire to fight... Illness is also thought that walks. In order to cure it, it’s necessary to pay an offering to call it back from where it went. It is like a wife or a husband that leaves, it journeys, and then you have to bring it back. It is like your marunsama. Your marunsama is your husband,” he said as he pointed to the protection that was given to me five years earlier by Ika Mamos in the form of stones where I concentrate my thoughts as I journey through life. “You concentrate your thoughts there and your marunsama is strengthened in aluna. This way you are protected,” he continued. “When we do alunashiguashi, we learn to control the idea... This is how we are bringing back the memory in this river basin... because this memory has gone walking too far.”

As I listened to this dialogue, I pictured the Pre-Columbian Tairona materials with a memory of thousands of years, sitting in far away places in New York, in London, in Paris, in Berlin, in Brussels. Memory that has been dispersed and now sits behind windows in the city center of Bogota in the Gold Museum, is what Romualdo described after his visit there. He said he found that everything was chaotically mixed together in

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193 For more on the marunsama see Chapter One
194 As I understand it, alunashiguashi for the Kogi Mamas is something like seinanugwe for the Ika Mamos. For more, see Chapter One.
the display cases without notice of the differences between feminine and masculine, jaguars and snakes and people. “It is impossible to know how those figures where sitting in aluna,” he pointed out, “whether they were facing the bottom to control the heat rising, or whether they were directed above, towards the snow peaks to gather the freshness of spring water.” He continued, “the gold frogs that used to bring the big rain and the small rain, are no longer in Mutainyi, so now the rain can’t dance properly which is why it acts independently of the thunder. The rain used to dance alone until the commissary: the thunder, organized it.” But now the thunder will resound wildly through the walls of the river basin, calling, calling but no rain will come, or the rain unexpectedly storms in, as fast as it dries up.

One day, while helping Romualdo sweep the nujue and the terrace with a broom, I commented: “this must be similar to what Mama Luca is doing in alunashiguashi with the community.” “This is so” he replied, “except that in his case he keeps two sides apart, what he gathers in the left he returns where it belongs, and what he gathers in the right, he delivers there. Each thing has its place in aluna. You have to know where it belongs and this, the Mama knows.” As our conversations carried on, Mama Luca insisted I had to pass on “the words of the Mamas” to my family and my superiors. I told him that four months ago I had travelled to Bogota to talk to the heads of the Nation: the head of the Gold Museum and of the Bank that owns the museum, the head of the Ministry of Culture and the head of the Ministry of the Environment, trying to convey the message about the recovery of these river basins. The most memorable of these encounters was the one with the head of the Nation’s Bank. I find the following excerpt in my field notes:195

195 Field notes from Diary of 1999 while working with the Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta
‘So tell me Maria del Rosario, why are you here and what can I do for you?’ is usually the question at the beginning of each interview, always with an intention and an expectation behind. I wonder what would happen if these appointments developed without a definite purpose, simply allowing something unexpected to arise out of the meeting? I find myself talking in excess; usually of indigenous topics that people either don’t understand or find completely uninteresting. But I can’t stop. I continue to talk and talk, from one interview to the next.

Perhaps the meeting that stands out most in my mind is the one with Mr. Banco de la Republica, BR. The Banco de la Republica looks like a safe deposit box in the very heart of Bogota where the San Francisco River that descends from the sacred mountains of Monserrate\(^{196}\) and Guadalupe, is funneled under layers of concrete and chaotic traffic. I walked into the premises ten minutes late. I sensed that all the heat that I had accumulated was completely out of place in this lifeless atmosphere of iron and frost. Everyone was fully dressed up in dark suits, ironed shirts, polished black shoes, ties and not so much as a hint of sweat or emotion... When I got out of the elevator, a very executive-looking secretary was waiting to show me into the Board’s meeting room. As I walked in, I saw a heavy wooden table that felt a mile long and the most extraordinary Pre-Columbian pieces decorating the sidewalls. The only people present were two handymen trying to fit a painting in one of the partitions on the wall. The secretary asked them to leave it for later while pointing to where I should sit. She closed the door behind her. I felt all the Pre-Columbian pieces around me staring out of their cubicles, when all of a sudden Mr. BR appeared out of nowhere, annoyed and in a hurry. Nervously and clumsily, I started telling him about the process of recovery that the indigenous people had been leading in the river basins of Guachaca and Buritaca for the past decade. I spoke about the Mamas positioned along the sacred sites and sources of water, as the families in the community settled around them like a body trying to find its articulations. People constantly seek spaces for reflection, I pointed out, so as to meditate upon what spiritual, environmental and material recovery implies. The problem, I continued, is that the sacred sites, most of which have been violated because of guaqueria, are demanding offerings to heal the gaps. ‘The Mamas point out that in order to arrest the conflict in the region, it’s not enough for them to pay these offerings but they also need the heads of our society to participate in this quest. I come to you as the head of the Banco de la Republica, because I think you and your wife would be key elements in this process of recovery.’

As I spoke, I felt Mr. BR’s initial irritation transforming into despair. He aligned his multiple telephones in front of him, asked his secretary if any calls had come in, and checked his mobile phone for messages. But no one beckoned him during

\(^{196}\) Despite the fact that Monserrate, Kake Gunguekue, is in Bogotá, it’s a sacred hill for the Ika who have been delivering offerings there at least since the beginning of the 20th C. The Mamos say that “he is liberal,” like the reds vs. the conservative blues. It is from the red of duna, where the sun rises, as opposed to the blue of gunsina, where the sun sets, that offerings are gathered to deliver to that site.
the long half hour in which we sat there. When I finished he replied directly and honestly. ‘Look,’ he said in a grave tone, ‘with so many emergencies urging me at the moment, I must say that the idea of meeting these indigenous people lies completely outside my agenda... this is definitely not one of my priorities...’ As he spoke, I began to envisage the spirits of the massive Pre-Columbian pectorals that were hanging behind him in a window, looking over his shoulders and drawing closer as if trying to overhear the conversation: ‘I have nothing to do with this,’ they heard him say. ‘Spaces for reflection; to stop and meditate where we are heading, sounds to me like you should talk to other people, such as Antanas Mockus’ or maybe Juan Mayr who will understand better. Not to say that this kind of thing isn’t unheard of,’ he went on, ‘these cultural dialogues are common.’ At that point, I thought there was no way out of his labels: the endeavor that the Mamas have been undertaking for more than a decade in those river basins threatened by environmental corrosion and armed conflict is now officially part of the ‘cultural dialogues.’ ‘But frankly,’ continued Mr. BR, ‘I don’t see how a group of indigenous people from the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta could even begin to understand what we do here in the Banco de la Republica, when 90% of the Colombian population that has achieved higher education is unable to assimilate: ‘la magia de los papelitos de colores,’ the magic of the colored papers.’

When I heard Mr. BR say this, I remembered Mama Luca articulating: “It will take 20,000 years, 50,000 years,” as he tried to convey to his Spanish-speaking audience the enormous magnitude of time it would take the earth to renew itself if we continued to destroy it. He bid the highest number he could think of in the pesos system, the Colombian paper money that he has gotten to know well through experience. In order that we should feel the amount in our bodies, he invoked the $20,000 blue looking circle, or even greater: the $50,000 violet sheet, which we value more than all the others. In my diary I continued writing:

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197 At the time this conversation took place in 1999, Antanas Mockus had been mayor of Bogota from 1995-1997 and was widely known for using symbolic acts in politics as a way to increase cultural awareness.

198 At the time this conversation took place in 1999, Juan Mayr, the founder of the Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta and a life time enthusiast of the Mamas’ work, had been named Minister of the Environment during President Andres Pastrana’s government, 1998-2002.

199 Paper money in Colombian Pesos is printed in different colors. Each color corresponds to a different denomination.
I wanted to say to Mr. BR that if anyone, it’s precisely the Mamas who could comprehend this ‘magic’ in depth. But given that his despair was escalating, I opted not to say any more and thanked him for his sincerity. Mr. BR decided to change to a more agreeable topic and commented: ‘I just bought a book in the Book Fair that might be of interest to you. Honestly, I don’t recommend the Book Fair one bit this year, but I do recommend this book by March Bloch, published by the Cambridge University Press.’ When I replied that I quite liked the work of the Annales School, he seemed surprised. It was hard to tell what he was thinking exactly; perhaps that this irrational anthropologist sitting before him should be familiar with the author of his newly acquired book might have fallen outside his classifications. On the other hand, this was trivial and time was running out. With an ambiguous smile fixed on his face, he got up, his poise tall and refined. Possibly now trying to play to a sense of humor, he shook my hand as he said: ‘If I were you, I would be careful with your energies: you never know what they might produce.’ He turned around and disappeared behind the walls of the Board’s meeting room. I ran out of the silver safe box with my silver necklace that had fallen during the meeting, held tightly in my fist. Once outside, I felt myself catching my breath again.

As I described these encounters to Mama Luca and Romualdo, I commented that whatever it was that moved these governing authorities was incomprehensible to me. Mama Luca replied that for fifteen years the Mamas had been trying to ask that they return some of the Mothers that are missing, until the divination of all the Mamas coincided in indicating that they aren’t going to return any gold or quartz. “So now that time is over,” he pointed out. “Instead of concentrating on the holes, we have to concentrate our thought in enveloping new earth.”

During the month I remained in Teyunna, I became aware of very specific terraces that we visited frequently with Mama Luca and his two wives. He would put on his black Machita\textsuperscript{200} boots; his two Kogi bags, one towards the right, the other one towards the left, crossed over his shoulders; his Mama’s staff with a red tassel and bells hanging from the tip; his white cap that made him look like he was carrying the snow

\textsuperscript{200} Machita are common rubber boots.
peaks on his head; and he would take his poporo in one hand, and his double decker tape recorder to enliven the sites with music in the other.

One day we visited the big stone map that sits in one of the terraces. “It’s placed the wrong side up” he commented as we approached. The paths carved in the stone were ascending instead of descending, the cutting edges of the cliffs were directed towards the west instead of the east. He sang four times to that site and then we continued to descend the stone stairs to a place with a sign that read: “La Gallera” or the Cockpit.

Mama Luca began to sing to Jate Teyunna. I saw him standing in almost static motion with the world beneath him, holding the balance of the universe under his wooden staff as he danced on the tip of his foot, rotating from where the sun sets to where it rises. What is evil? What is good? I saw the red tassel at the tip of his pole turning with his inhaling breath and then releasing: eeeeeeiiii, left, eeeeeeiiii, right. A profound voice rising high: Jateeeeee201 Te-yu-nnnaaaaaa, then low: Jateee Te-yu-nnnaaaaa. Speaking and singing out to the gods listening below and above. His voice was trekking a path and growing first in aluna, then the sea, then the stones at the time that they were people and finally, each one of the animals: the children of Jate Teyunna, which came to life through his shibulama.202

I was profoundly moved. He told me a Mama with white hair in Avingue203 was the one who taught him to sing to Teyunna. He told me about a gold fish that was by the sea there until the guaqueros dug it out. “Ajo! Guaquero siiii” he said, “Gosh these

201 “Jaba” in Kogi means Mother and “Jate” means Father
202 Field notes from Diary of 1999 while working with the Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta
203 As I understand it, it’s in Avingue where the first Teyunna began. For more, please see the story in Section 3.3
guaqueros!” The Mother Seinekan began to organize all the ancient terraces in the temple of Noaka, the temple in the Snow Peaks, continued Mama Luca.

When they finished concentrating everything in their thought, they said to the sun: Mama Nui, 204 ‘everything is already organized in aluna, now you have to heat the earth.’ So Mama Nui began to rise and when the sun rose, his life force went running through Mother Seinekan. At that point, all the people in the terraces hardened. The quartz, the gold, the ceramic are all people that are moving in aluna. They are all dwelling in these terraces. From here everything began to grow: the maize, the yucca, the beans, the forest and people, plants, fruit, this is where everything materialized when the sun rose. It took thousands of years to get here. 205

At that point of the story I raised my head and saw a vast grouping of dense white clouds strolling slowly through the riverbed as if they were pregnant with water and light. The myriad trees beneath them, trembling in frenzy, holding their tops wide open while the clouds showered them with cool refreshing droplets of mist. “Maouí” stated Mama Luca as he saw me observing the clouds. It is from here that the whole forest eats, he said, “trees, animals, river, everything eats.”

“Maouí too has a Mother and a Father on Earth,” continued Mama Luca. “It is like a big puddle of water with ñikuitsi,” or white quartz. These tubular beads of white quartz were organized by the ancestors in such a way that their thought continues rising so that the clouds can ascend from the sea all the way up to the snow peaks. I see their thought in the form of mist that sprinkles and feeds the rainforest here, which is no small task for this Biosphere Reserve of Man and Humanity as declared by the UNESCO in 1979. “This is where the Father and the Mother sit. Everything has its Mother and its Father, like Maouí,” he repeated. “They are speaking to each other as through a wire.”

204 “Mama Nui” in Kogi is “Mamo Yui” in Ika, meaning Sun or as Ramon Gil points out in the transcriptions, double sun for Mama and for Nui.
205 Transcriptions, 1999 while working with the Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta
Without that communication, pointed out Mama Luca, the connections below and above are cut off and the clouds cannot travel the whole way, which is why the grounds in the lower parts are drying up.

All of a sudden, an adolescent girl who had been sent up by Mama Jose Maria Lozano from the lower settlements of the river basin arrived to complete her alunashiguashi in Teyunna. Romualdo also appeared with one of his two wives, Isabel, bringing with them some sisal to make bags. The girl distributed some yucca and plantain that she had brought with her as a gift, while Catalina took out some cookies to share. There was an exchange of goodies circulating.

Mama Luca asked the girl to sit on a stone that was curved with a hole in the middle. He referred to it as the “stone document.” While the young girl sat there with the cotton threads in her hand, facing west and recounting everything that had happened, as if pulling her thought, climbing through a spindle that is spun all the way in aluna, Romualdo told me that the stone where she was sitting was recording all her thoughts from ancient times to the present. It is here where our ancestors: Jate Mukuexe, Jate Aluawiko, Jate Serankua, Jate Sintana, Jate Dugunavi, rendered their advice, said Mama Romualdo; history converging and materializing through “aluna-shi-gua-shi.” I remembered Ramon Gil’s explanation as he traced the term. It is in aluna, where the Mother planted her gigantic spindle, he said. As it spun, a gold thread began to grow, the first thread shi: alunashi, but this thread only existed in spirit. Then as the Mother continued to concentrate her thought, it grew until she conceived it: this is gua, meaning

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206 Mama Jose Maria Lozano who lives further down the Buritaca river basin in Shibuleyi, was working in coordination with Mama Luca and his younger brother Mama Romualdo
when something is materialized on earth. It is here that the second thread, shi, began to grow. This is the thread that we can see when alunashiguashi is complete.

As I sat on that terrace and heard Kogi spoken all around, I felt I was travelling into another time and space, until I realized that a group of tourists had arrived and were as transported by the scene as I was, taking pictures while their tour guide enthusiastically explained that this place here: La Gallera, in the time of the ancient Tairona people had been used as a round for cock fighting.

Section 3.2

Mama Luca was picking a few flowers of bright yellow and white chamomile next to the nujue, when a helicopter began to hover over us, perhaps looking for a clearing beneath the clouds where it could slip in and enter. But the clouds were too dense that day. It left. We spent the rest of the morning talking shibulama as we drank chamomile tea sweetened with raw cane sugar. The next day the helicopter came back again, unsettling the wind, the forest and the birds, as if penetrating everything around us. “What astounding material display,” I thought. I’ve been told that whoever is able to land in Teyunna, can fly anywhere else in the world for it’s one of the hardest places to reach. This time the pilot found a clearing, entered the clouds, and reached the terrace where the Mother breathes. Mama Luca, Romualdo and I remained sitting next to the nujues.

It wasn’t long before a group of tourists appeared with new clothes, cameras, sunglasses, lipstick and the smell of perfume mixed with mosquito repellant. They asked Mama Luca and Mama Romualdo if they could film. They accepted and began to talk about “how the Little Younger Brothers have taken all the gold away, how it’s time to
think about what thoughts we’re feeding the Earth because the Mother is suffering: she is ill… In the meantime, the tourists were intently focusing on the best possible shots they could get as they drew near and then withdrew with their eyes looking through screens. When they finished talking, they thanked them and said that in return they would send them a lot of medicine. Mama Luca replied: ‘not a lot, a little is enough.’”

S, the caretaker of Teyunna, said to me that he admired the indigenous people because “they are fine with what they possess… So here we have these people,” he continued, “who are the real guardians of this place” and they don’t get anything in exchange for it. “Tourism is supposed to leave them $2,000 pesos per tourist, but when will they ever get to see that money?” Later I said to Romualdo that I doubted whether those tourists were listening at all to what they had said. He replied: “They must have learnt something because they were nodding and saying ‘yes.’ Anyone who comes to Teyunna must learn something.” Then he added: “they left with a happy heart and that is important.”

A few days later, the son of F arrived at the footsteps of the nujue with a newshound and a cameraman dressed in the uniform of Señal Colombia: a national public television channel. Romualdo talked as the cameraman accomplished his job. In the meantime, the tour guide told me about his first climb to Ciudad Perdida. He was unemployed in Santa Marta and his father asked him if he wanted to carry the loads for tourists. So he did and realized that “climbing up here is no big deal.” Now that he has been promoted to guide, he gets “good money. You know, he continued, “you try to

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207 Field notes from Diary of 1999 while working with the Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta
208 Field notes from Diary of 1999 while working with the Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta
209 For more on F please see Chapter Two, p. 87

113
survive whatever way you can,” and then he added a term that one often hears in Santa Marta: “el rebusque,” or rummaging to get by. As I continued to hear the echo of Romualdo’s voice in the background speaking about the loss of the Mother of the coati and how we have to think about the warnings of nature, I wondered what was going through this guide’s mind. Perhaps he was simply looking forward to getting back one night to the city and drinking some nice cold beers before the next round of tourists would come. Or maybe he was planning where to take these two men once this session was over. Meanwhile, the newsmen bombarded Romualdo with questions as he made a great effort to concentrate his thought and speak from his heart. But these visitors didn’t respond to anything he said, they were too engrossed in searching for the best possible shots, the more convenient positions, the more beautiful images, as they manipulated Romualdo with speed.

Another time a tour guide arrived with two women who confirmed to Romualdo that people indeed sell what they film, “and not just thousands, but millions,” he said as he came back to the nujue with the information that he had gathered in the kitchen of Teyunna. “The photographs are sold too,” he commented. “You see! If I hadn’t asked, I would have never have found out.” Wherever I travel around Colombia, I find that Romualdo’s image has journeyed into magazines in the back pockets of airplanes, posters in the walls of airports, tourist agencies promoting a journey into The Lost City and television snips of Presidents and world leaders that visit the place. One could say he has become a kind of Ambassadorial image to this Archaeological Park.

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210 Field notes from Diary of 1999 while working with the Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta
211 A native species similar to the skunk
212 Field notes from Diary of 1999 while working with the Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta
Curiosity about Pre-Columbian times and archaeological sites; myths about Kogi culture and its mystical powers; the pursuit of personal achievements; the desire for a couple of good images on Facebook; the need for adventure and distraction from everyday life, amongst other things, brings thousands of tourists to this Lost City of the Tairona people. Each tourist represents several thousand pesos for the touring agencies. Tour guides know this is comparatively cheap for foreigners who are willing to disburse dollars for an adventure.

As visitors flowed in and out, I realized that touring to Teyunna felt closer to the rides in city buses, than a journey through the rain forest. As I described this state of affairs to Peter Rawitscher, an anthropologist who has been working in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta for decades, he replied “it’s la guerra del centavo,” each one battling for the extra penny. As the guides waged their feud, the trackers would compete to targets insinuated by the guides. This was my experience in 2007 when no one could enter this river basin without the endorsement of the right wing ringleader Hernan Giraldo, known as the boss or “El Patron,” whose associates held the monopoly of tourism. I sent word to Mama Romualdo and his elder brother Mama Jose Maria, and set off with my friend Don Miguel to visit them. On our way up, I heard the tour guides speaking of packages of US $300 instead of people. “How many packages are you carrying? I am carrying ten and you? I have a package of fifteen this time.” \(^{213}\)

After a three-day hike we arrived at the stone staircase at the bottom of Teyunna. Don Miguel remarked upon the incredible amount of passion needed to cut such perfect fitting slabs and carry them there. Once we reached the terraces up on top he was in shock to see them so meticulously groomed. “My god, this looks like a golf course!” he

\(^{213}\) Field notes from Diary of 2007
exclaimed. Through his eyes I saw each stone terrace transformed into a proudly kept lawn, with pitch holes for an entire round. I even envisioned the golf carts and the caddies roaming around the stone stairs that connected one pitch hole to the next. As jarring as this image of the gulf club sounded, it portrayed with great intuition what was to come: a modernization of the nation’s Archaeological Park that could only come about with the participation of private capital.

![Figure 11. Don Miguel’s “golf course”](image)

Don Miguel and I were far from seeing the forest cover of the times that the “Doctores” or the researchers would have experienced when they first arrived there in 1976. They would have found terraces full of trees with great roots and vines growing all over, such as the profound roots of the tree that our guide pointed out had saved “La Gallera” or the Cockpit terrace from being looted because the guaqueros couldn’t cut through it with an ax to reach the gold. As archaeologist Santiago Giraldo, who now runs
the Park notes in the English guidebook for tourists: the archaeologists who came on a rescue mission from 1976 to 1986, would have found numerous settlements and terraces along the trail, protected by forest cover and thus, invisible to most visitors. As the caretaker of Teyunna at the time, F, commented “there was more shadow then” and everyone was subject to the laws of the rainforest, “there was no place to hide from the rain.”

The first thing these “Doctores” had to do was to clear the terraces and then restore them. It was “disastrous,” remembers Luisa Fernanda Herrera, who participated in that endeavor. She described the lack of rigor in the whole process and the extreme isolation in which they found themselves. The “Doctores” were completely segregated from the workers, many of whom had been guaqueros and were helping restore the stone masonry. Another archaeologist Guillermo Rodriguez remembers how F, the caretaker, didn’t allow the “Doctores” to talk to anyone outside their circle, not even the indigenous people who visited. “The indigenous people would come and go on their own,” adds Rodriguez. F had around fifty workers under his command, continues Rodriguez. Some would fetch wood and others would clean the terraces. When they excavated the terraces, they would divide the ring in four, he explains. They wouldn’t dig out the whole thing but rather one quadrant and then the other in front. “It was more like excavations for guacas,” he comments. “It was like looking for the burial and if nothing came out they would get

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214 I thank Santiago Giraldo for sharing this information with me, as well as his PhD dissertation: Giraldo, Santiago. Lords of the Snowy Ranges: Politics, Place, and Landscape Transformation in Two Tairona Towns in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, PhD Dissertation, The University of Chicago, 2010
215 Field notes from Diary of 1999 while working with the Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta
216 Interview with Luisa Fernanda Herrera in 2000 while working with the Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta
217 I thank Guillermo Rodriguez and Fernando Salazar for this interview.
angry: shit, this Indian was a poor man! They would say. So they’d cover it up again and move on to the next terrace.” Around midday there would be torrential rains. This was the time in which people were most controlled. “We would all remain put,” he said because every time it rained, Tairona beads and materials would come running out of the earth. F would collect the beads in cans of Saltines. There was a laboratory where they deposited the ceramic urns. The laboratory then turned into a small museum, until the Institute of Culture that was part of the Ministry of Culture, took all of that away. For decades, Ciudad Perdida was abandoned by the Government and its situation remained unresolved. By 1985 the Ministry of Culture’s project went broke and research was cut off as tourism began.

Our tour guide told Don Miguel and I that he didn’t especially care for the tourists but he knew that he held a big responsibility because if something happened to them their governments would “come right in to claim, and what a mess that would be! That is why it’s necessary to have them under control,” he pointed out. It was exactly that unsettling feeling of control and surveillance that one felt permeating the whole atmosphere. “Look at them” he continued. “They look like such little angels: some good, some less good, some want drugs, others don’t.” He seemed to be able to predict repeated patterns in each group: “there are the fast ones, the slow ones, the good ones, the charming ones, the difficult ones...” The guide’s success consisted in being entertaining and time efficient: “it should take us approximately two hours and a half from here to the next point,” he would say to posit the challenge, “though I do remember that one time when a young man from Israel came and made it in two hours. But that’s rare, I doubt any of us could beat that record.” In this way, “the competitive ones” would be set off

218 Field notes from Diary of 2007
racing on the track like the buses honking along the East-West axis of the Libertador Avenue in Santa Marta, trying to beat the route that was three minutes ahead of them, while the slow ones trailed behind.

Once we reached the kitchen of Ciudad Perdida, our guide decided to tell us a story so that we could further understand the situation in Colombia. “I’m going to tell you a story that will last one hour,” he began. “But this will only include one part of the history of this country because if I tried to describe the whole thing to you, we would remain here all night and we would still not understand.” As he spoke in short broken Spanish sentences so that all the tourists could understand, he turned the story about eight tourists that had been kidnapped in Teyunna in September of 2003, into an adventure that involved “two fat Australians, one German, Three Israelis, One British and a revolutionary Spaniard.”

The ELN came and said they were right wing militias but everyone knew they were guerrilla because they weren’t cleanly shaved and you could tell they had been in the jungle for a long time. They said they were there to protect the region. They moved all of them to the kitchen. They tied everyone up: the cook, the guides, myself included, with shoelaces. They also tied up Romualdo and left him in his house. They kidnapped the tourists and divided them into two groups: the fast ones and the slow ones. They held them in captivity for 72, 111, 130 days. When they were released each one of them spoke in the news. The revolutionary Spanish said that the problem had begun when the Spaniards arrived in America; the Brit conveyed a message of peace; the German asked her government to protect her even thought they hadn’t done anything bad to her; and the Israelis said they were happy because they had spent all those days getting free marijuana and free food. I escaped across the river, down the old Indian path and got to Santa Marta in three days. When I arrived there I had to render accounts to ‘Noventa,’ the military commander of the region. No one knows what really happened.

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219 Field notes from Diary of 2007
220 ELN, Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional, or National Liberation Army is a left wing guerrilla group
221 Field notes from Diary of 2007
Romualdo tells us that they stole his Mama’s cap, $700,000 Pesos\textsuperscript{222} that he had saved up, a pair of binoculars and a radio. The Editorial in the national press remarked upon the 30,000 indigenous Kogui, Kankuamo, Wiwa and Ika people that are being fenced in battlegrounds, “a sad confirmation that should help call the attention of our Government, because in addition to these eight recent victims, it is the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta that is being literally high jacked.”\textsuperscript{223}

I was told that after this event, Alvaro Uribe\textsuperscript{224} held a security counsel session in Santa Marta where he talked about the urgency to act and bring about security and development to the region. I remembered my conversation with the wife of an Ika authority in Nabusimake’s main Kankurua.\textsuperscript{225} She complained about the amount of projects that were arriving with everything predefined: time, budget and objectives. There is no space for reflection, articulation or agreement, she pointed out. “As we accept these projects, our bodies begin to transform. When I eat bunachi\textsuperscript{226} food, I need to pay for this in anugwe\textsuperscript{227} so that the Mother can recognize it. But if I consume it without acknowledgement in anugwe, my body starts to weaken and my Mother no longer knows me. ‘Who are these children?’ she will say, as she begins to feel isolated and abandoned.”\textsuperscript{228} She tells me that the Earth Mother has been feeling increasingly frail, “so fragile that not even the music of Carrizo\textsuperscript{229} will get her dancing.” Before she would get up and dance with her beads around her: kernels of seeds, quartz, cornelian, beads strung around her body, kernels of beaded history dancing like the memory that Mama Luca was

\textsuperscript{222} Approximately US $350
\textsuperscript{223} El Tiempo, La Sierra, Secuestrada, 16 de Septiembre, 2003, p. 1-16
\textsuperscript{224} President of Colombia from 2002 to 2010
\textsuperscript{225} Kankurua in Ika is a sacred house where people gather; it is equivalent to what the Kogi refer to as Nujue
\textsuperscript{226} Bunachi is how the Ika refer to non-indigenous people
\textsuperscript{227} In anugwe or in thought and spirit
\textsuperscript{228} Field notes from Diary of 2007
\textsuperscript{229} Carrizo is traditional Ika music played on the flute.
interconnecting, one site speaking to the other along the body of Mutainyi’s river basin, as he danced and sang in the sacred sites, while the Mother listened and assented: “oh yes, here are my children.”

Section 3.3

In December of 2003 the army spread throughout the tourist path in the Buritaca river basin, leading all the way up to Teyunna. It became imperative for the Kogi inhabitants to have a social security card, because otherwise the army assumed that they were involved in left-wing guerrilla activity. In the meantime, the coca crops continued to increase all around the region. In 2005 Trino Luna, the governor of the Magdalena region proposed a “megaproject” to erect a cable car transportation system 24 km long that would carry people from Minca to Cerro Kennedy, 230 4,000 meters above sea level. A trajectory worth $22 million dollars that would be magically financed by “international firms.” 231 The same ones, says Luna to the journalist, that bring Europeans over to Santa Marta in big cruisers. According to him, this would also benefit the production of coffee that could be more easily transported up and down the mountain. Their plan was that after completing this trajectory they would then erect another cable car that would go from Pueblito, another archaeological site at sea level in the Tayrona Park, all the way up to Ciudad Perdida. Luna along with a group of people from the Magdalena, Cesar and Guajira regions, petitioned Alvaro Uribe’s government for exclusive management of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta so as to handle the safety in the region. When it was revealed that this group was in the hands of North Block right wing militias, the project

230 Minca is a small town at 2,132 feet above the city of Santa Marta
collapsed. This situation lead to reflections and opinions published in the national newspapers about the dangers and consequences of privatizing national parks such as the one in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. To allow individuals to unleash their personal desires, while undertaking certain activities that would have been previously prohibited did not seem like the most promising situation.

In contrast, public institutions such as the ICANH, Institute of Colombian Anthropology and History, were counting with meager state budgets. Despite the trial of being in a zone run by right-wing militias, threatened by left-wing guerrillas, with illicit crops growing all around, and a highly menaced rain forest, it was according to the ICANH officials the “derisory” budget of $4 million pesos per year, that represented the greatest challenge of all. Hence, in 2009 they made an alliance with the Global Heritage Fund, a non-profit organization, along with private donors, which raised the budget to more than $300 million pesos that have since allowed them to meet what they consider the most pressing needs. These include improving the infrastructure for several thousand tourists per year, restoring the terraces, maintaining the paths, evaluating the biodiversity, pursuing further archaeological investigation, building a bridge and treating the sewage system. A mindset that from the point of view of Kogi Mamas, favors material recovery first.

Recovery in the eyes of someone like Mama Luca is a breathing process that takes as long as it takes for nature to grow. It begins with psychological, emotional, historical healing around the sacred sites, acknowledging the strength and wisdom of the ancestors who dwell there: the Fathers and Mothers of hills, terraces, stones, trees, rivers, wells,

\[\text{Approximately US } $2,000 \text{ per year}\]
\[\text{Approximately US } $150,000\]
waterfalls, animals, of the breeze, of the sun, of the rain, whose imagination and thought is evidenced every day and yet surpasses our own, not only because they have lived longer but because they have reached more distant places. Listening for years and attentively to those beings, acknowledging that they came before us, and then allowing their wisdom to grow all around the territory is in the eyes of this indigenous cosmology, what allows for both physical and spiritual healing to thrive hand in hand.

Archaeological reports from the early 1980’s, note how twenty thousand inhabitants around A.D. 1000 were able to survive alongside the rainforest without destroying it; a whole city of slabs of stone carefully fit in such a way that 4,000 mm of rain per year could flow naturally without deteriorating the surroundings. These facts have impressed us ever since the “discovery” of Teyunna. Recent archeological excavations taken up by Santiago Giraldo in the sector of “La Gallera” or the Cockpit, proved that the oldest residential dates go back even further in time with a “date range of A.D.560 to 710 and A.D 750 to 760 with curve intercept at A.D 650,”234 and were still in use until A.D. 1100 or 1200.235 Even if we compare it to the constructions of other Pre-Columbian societies, such as the Inca, the Maya or the Aztec, he writes in the official English guidebook for tourists today, huge differences stand out for these other cultures use “rectangular forms, straight lines and partition walls,”236 while the Tairona architecture “highlights and emphasizes sinuosity, the use of circles and circularity as formal elements, open spaces between buildings and the constant management and

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236 Giraldo, Santiago. Teyuna-Ciudad Perdida Archaeological Park, Instituto Colombiano de Antropología e Historia y Global Heritage Fund, 2009, p. 27
direction of circulation and movement, both within and between settlements." He notes this is also what makes it difficult "to determine where a settlement begins or ends."

As I continued reading this information, I wondered whether this winding and flowing that characterizes the river basin of Buritaca, could help us break through the linear walls of space and time that in our understanding severs the relationship between the Kogi people living there today and the sacred sites all around the territory, including those in neighboring river basins. It is through this organic web of interconnections, in which dance, song, dialogue, concentration and dreams take over our minds and bodies, that we can privilege zones, passages, thresholds and empathize with ancestral human and nonhuman sensitivity, voice and mindset. We can begin to journey in “the memory” here and reach the many sites where Teyunna has left his traces inside and outside the dwellings, between places above and below ground, that can be as tiny as a bead and as big as the universe, thousands of years ago and thousands more to come.

I take the liberty of using the accounts of Mama Luca, Romualdo Lozano and his father Mama Lorenzo Lozano, in order to articulate the following story:

The result of Teyunna’s wisdom, intelligence and astounding ability to think in depth, to concentrate thought, is expressed in the multitude of quartz beads and stones, angled in pyramidal shapes, tubular tumas, rounded buttons, and the variety of red, black, green, brown, white, orange, dark green and crystal clear beads, some with stripes and veins, and all of which have been organized perfectly. One can see the result of this reflected in the enormous diversity of flora and fauna growing all around the Buritaca river basin, meaning Mutainyi.

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237 Op. cit., p. 27
238 Op. cit., p. 27
239 Diary Notes and Transcriptions in 1999 while working with the Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta
240 Diary Notes and Transcriptions in 1999 while working with the Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta
There have been many Teyunnas throughout the ages. Romualdo Lozano speaks of six Teyunnas like six centuries through which he transformed until he became person, as we know him today. Each of his names corresponds to a different stage, before the rising of the sun when everything remained in darkness, and then afterwards, at daytime, when everything materialized on Earth.

When Teyunna first rose, said Mama Luca, the trees weren’t fully grown. The land was going to be a desert of sand and snow, until he began to concentrate the green tuma that holds the strength of trees in the forest, the white tuma that sustains the spirit of water in the rivers, the red tuma that embraces the vitality of blood in the veins, the black tuma that maintains the force of the soul, as well as the ones that hold the energy of plantain, yucca, pumpkin, and each one of the animals that we see there. But then Teyunna said: ‘now that I have planted everything in spirit, I need a body to sow these energies.’ This is when the Mother Primitive, as Mama Lorenzo Lozano referred to her, taught Teyunna.

When he came of age he had already received that whole power from her. He knew how to assemble the ceramic urn, the tuma and the gold in such a way that he could concentrate the energy of the person there. But the sun had not yet risen and the sexual energy had not yet run through the body of the earth; the tuma didn’t have any holes then, it was virgin, said Mama Luca, everything stood in aluna. Before the coming of the sun, each Mama would bring about light whenever he stepped outside his nujue and concentrated in his site of divination, but then when he returned back into his temple, darkness would fall again.

Teyunna went to visit each one of the Mamas, meaning each sun guarding his river basin in the North of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. First he went to the Mama in Avingue, in a site between the Cesar and Guajira regions. He explained to him that if he stepped into his ceramic urn and stayed there for nine spiritual days, meaning 9,000 years, he could turn to gold and quartz in this dwelling, rise and shine everywhere, not just inside his home. But the Mama exclaimed: ‘why do you want to turn me into gold? We don’t like that idea around here, go somewhere else.’ From there Teyunna rose to San Miguel. However, no Mama wanted to die there either for they said that they had to continue looking after their sites. So he rose to Palomino, and again he was rejected: ‘why do you want to finish us off?’ he was asked. So then he rose to the river basin of Don Diego. He said to the Mama there: Mama Kasigui, that he could organize him in such a way that he would rise and light his surroundings. But Mama Kasigui replied: ‘if I rise then who is going to deliver divinations here? If I abandon this place, no one will be able to survive. I think you are a bad man and it’s best that you leave.’ This is how, in each place that Teyunna offered to organize day and night, he was rejected, until he rose to the Buritaca river basin.


\[^{243}\] Mama in Kogi means sun; Mama in Wiwa means sun; Mamo in Ika means sun.

\[^{244}\] This is the Mama that many centuries later, taught the song of Teyunna to Mama Luca

There lived an old woman here. She was a wise Saxa. She had all sorts of animals like the danta, peccary, saino, bird, frog, wild turkey, fish, pajuil, monkey, jaguar, armadillo, bat, squirrel, and anteater. Whenever she called them they would come. She said to Teyunna that he could stay there. Teyunna asked her what animals she was going to give him. She replied: “I’m going to give you the shibulama of every animal here.” So she rendered the Father and Mother of each animal, meaning the power to conceive every single one of them.

When Teyunna received this strength, he thought: ‘if I don’t organize day and night then all these animals are going to die.’ He asked the Saxa where he could stay, and she gave him a place near Shibuleiyi. Nine days later he told her that the Mother Primitive had given him a power. ‘What kind of power?’ She asked. He explained that he could organize her body in a ceramic urn. The quartz was going to be something like her veins, the gold was her motor, the urn would be her body and there would be greenish water inside that would be the energy running through her. In this way she could rise and allow the sun to shine from above. ‘You shouldn’t feel sorry or think that you are going to die,’ he said to her, ‘you should just think that you will be helping your children and grandchildren: all the descendants of animals.’ So Teyunna arranged her in a pot. This is when the tumas were pierced, after the first sexual intercourse. Teyunna left her there for nine days. Then when he uncovered the urn, he found that she remained undamaged, sleeping deeply.

Teyunna then organized each one of the sites around the river basin with the Mother of the saino, the danta, the peccary, the pajuil, the bat, the worm, the rain, the clouds, and so on in a pot with quartz and gold so that each element could reproduce and nature could continue breeding. First he planted the tumas for each animal, then he began to seed the tumas for each tree. There were tiny trees before, but with daylight everything started to develop. Teyunna also sowed the water that began to spring everywhere. Now the forest was feeding the water and the water was feeding the forest. The crops too, acquired strength and yucca, plantain, malanga, pumpkin and beans began to grow.

It is amidst such crops that Mama Jose Maria’s family lives in Shibuleiyi today. A place that is on the way up the path to Teyunna at least since Mama Jose Maria, aged around fifty, remembers. He has learnt to keep his family home well protected from the main path where the tourists walk by, without for that reason, missing the opportunity of making some money at the hours that they do go by, usually before the rain falls. This is

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246 While a boy can be trained to become a Mama or sun; a girl can learn to become a Saxa or moon.
247 Shibuleiyi is further below Teyunna, along the Buritaca river basin.
248 One of the most astonishing characteristics of these tumas that archaeologists, guaqueros and collectors remark upon is the perfect holes of the tumas: spiraling up in such a way that you can follow the circling with your eyes and fingers. This is one of the aspects that give away a tuma when it’s not original.
why he and his brother Romualdo, built a little cabin along the tourist’s path where they could sell drinks and snacks for the tourists. When I saw him in 1999, he told me that vandals had come breaking and stealing a whole box of purchases, so they decided to reduce the offer to cans of Coca-Cola for $1,000 pesos, when at that time, he commented, it was sold for $2,000 pesos in Teyunna.

Once within the domains of Jate Jose Maria’s and Jaba Catalina, his eldest wife’s nujue, it’s mind-boggling to feel how remote the tourist path appears to be despite its physical proximity. I remember distinctly the engulfing feeling I had the first time I lived in an indigenous home of being in a house-world. Staying with them brought back that feeling. Rumors and stories come and go. The children too, sit around and listen to every little detail they can catch. At times they help around with chores in the garden, getting water, stitching or helping to cook and at night time the house will be lively with music. The girls learn to play the drum, sing and dance the little fish: yiyu, the bat which is where the Mother of menstruation lives, the koloksha: a vegetable that grows in Teyunna, and the vulture, which is one of my favorite songs. The vulture’s song involves running and swaying from one side of the nujue to the other as one scratches each side of the woven palm walls with long claws that go “shshshshshsh,” and then swoosh around to the other side: “shshshshshshs.” In the meantime, I’m always surprised to see how the little ones sleep cozily amidst the sound and movement, as if lulled by the nujue. As the house livens with music and laughter, one is able to hear the murmuring and gargling of grave masculine voices across the yard, in the men’s nujue, as if they were announcing: “we are here!” Likewise, one overhears the beating of the drum, kongi, enveloped by the elongation of Mama Jose Maria’s melodic voice. “We have to speak a lot to the Mother
to keep her satisfied,” he comments. “That is why it’s important to wake up in the middle of the night and talk. It’s also important to sing and dance, she likes that a lot.” Mama Luca pointed out that even though it’s important to sing and speak at daytime, it’s at nighttime when the Fathers and Mothers of everything around us, are heeding from their most profound dwellings in Se. These are the places that are listening when everyone is speaking and singing shibulama in their nujue.

There are two main houses or nujues with woven thatched palm roofs facing each other in Shibuleiyi, one for the men and the other one for the women and children. Apart from a few hard wood stools, the stones on the hearth of the fire, and a couple of drums there is not that much more in the men’s nujue. As Mama Jose Maria and the adult men sit around the hearth of the fire, they hold their poporos like wombs in their hands. These gourd containers are filled with lime extracted from burnt and crushed seashells. The small rods are tipped into the lime, then sucked with coca impregnated saliva and rubbed against the mouth of the gourd container in small rotations that leave a trace of yellow substance that solidifies around the ring of the mouth.

As the men gather in the nujue in front of ours, concentrate their thought and plant it in their poporos, one hears a constant sound like wind swooshing, the voices rising and waning and the spitting that goes with it. This is in turn an inspiration to continue talking and conceiving thought in the women’s nujue, as the spindles turn. The spindles that are received at marriage, help converge thought that is coming all the way from aluna. As the spindle turns and the thread grows, it vibrates like the fluttering wings of a hummingbird. Wind swooshing and hummingbirds vibrating, thought that is planted and conceived is what I hear as shibulama rises in the nujues of Jate Jose Maria and Jaba Catalina.
On the other hand, the women’s nujue is a veritable center of material production. Baskets, corn that is drying up, bananas that are desiccating, game or fish that is being smoked or roasted, pots, calabash containers, spindles, machetes, knifes, blankets, hammocks, necklaces with all sorts of beads, mochilas,⁴⁹ cotton, sisal and all kinds of supplies for weaving, stitching and making offerings, hang everywhere. Energy is constantly materialized in the form of cotton that is spun on the spindle, sisal that is turned into bags, food that is brought out in a pot where the whole family gathers to eat, materials that are used for offerings. Jaba Catalina never ceases her activity. She comes and goes with bags full of “bastimento”, provisions of food that include plantain, yucca, beans, coca leafs, malanga, pumpkin, in addition to guara, ñeque, armadillo or any game that has been caught, wrapped in huge green leafs so as to cook it over the fire. As the crops grow, plants of tobacco and beans climb up, the pumpkin spreads along with the

⁴⁹ Mochila is a hand-stitched bag
sugar cane, the plantain and the yucca spring, so do their children, which are not just hers but also her daughter’s, Nancy. As is common amongst the Kogi, both Catalina and Nancy married Mama Jose Maria after the death of Catalina’s husband and both of them raise the whole family.

The dynamic is well defined in their home. “As long as there is a group of men and women, shibulama will continue growing here,” I wrote in my field notes. As the elders, the Jate and the Jaba, work the hardest, providing all the material and spiritual nourishment for the family, the rest of them: the sons, Naskuas, and daughters, Nabunyis, trail behind them. Each step of their lives is marked in the sacred sites. As the family develops so the sacred sites receive nourishment: the first and second menstruation of the girls, the sex dreams of the boys, the first sexual relationships, the baptisms, the marriages, the deaths, the thoughts gathered in alunashiguashi. “As long as the Jabas and Jates of nature are satisfied, the children grow healthy,” comments Mama Jose Maria. All around Shibuleiyi there are places where one can sit and connect to aluna. As the Mamas take out their yatukuas for divination, they concentrate and give advice, make decisions, prepare for changes in the lives of their children that flourish hand in hand with the place.

“My father would explain each of the sacred Mothers and Fathers that were here,” pointed out Romualdo Lozano. As each child finds his or her power: one learns shibulama for building houses, shibulama for growing crops, shibulama for talking and playing music to each element on earth, shibulama for divination, shibulama for weaving, shibulama for stitching, shibulama for making baskets, and so on, each one is a power that is acquired like Teyunna who inherited the shibulama of every single animal. As I

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250 Gourd container used for divination
write this Jaba Catalina looks over my field notes. I read them out loud to her: “shibulama for making houses, shibulama for weaving, shibulama for singing...” as she turns my notebook 360 degrees, clockwise, then 90 degrees counterclockwise, and again in the other direction, but the scribbles remain undecipherable, like a terrace in Teyunna would be to me: where is the entrance? Where is the exit? What direction is it facing? What is it communicating?

I was sitting there, writing in my notebook on day, when I noticed a lot of running, playing, laughing and screaming around me until one of the younger kids broke out crying. I observed that Jose Maria and Catalina were absent. “Naskua, where is Jaba?” I asked one of the boys. “They are in the house of armadillo” he replied. The rain was about to break out and before I even saw them descending down the cliff with quick short footsteps, all the children scrambled back to their chores: one got her stitching, the other went to boost the fire that was almost out, the other took up the baby that was crying, the boys went to fill the pot with water and when Jate and Jaba got home, everything was in perfect order. Once they settled down, Mama Jose Maria decided to finish a belt that he was weaving on his loom. I sat next to him on a little bench outside the men’s nujue. I had my tape recorder on as he started telling me the story about the time when he and his younger brother Romualdo, first came to this river basin with their father Mama Lorenzo Lozano.251 Their father and mother used to live in Rio Molio, in Ulueyi252 where “Mama Julian and Mama Saio were teaching their father. “Then one day

252 Ulueyi meaning the Don Diego river basin
my father said: ‘let us go to Mutainyi.’

They set off with nothing but some food, two dogs, a piglet, his children and his yatukua, continued Mama Jose Maria’s story as his children started gathering around, listening to his story in Spanish. Pretty soon he had a full audience laughing at the anecdotes.

We... were little boys and girls. We saw that there were lots of fish and the river was abundant. So we started fishing. We were eating when all of a sudden an alligator took us by surprise. My father got scared and said that perhaps the jaguars would come and eat us up. So we got lots of wood to burn all night. We made two hearths. This would surely keep them away. We spent the night by the fire. At dawn I heard my father shooting his chispun so we got up and started trekking until we arrived at Shibuleiyi.

Then they climbed back up to Makumesihi, continued Jose Maria’s account:

We made a house and tied the piglet inside because my father said that if we left it outside the jaguars would eat him. ‘Don’t fall asleep,’ my dad would say to us, ‘don’t sleep because the jaguar will come!’ But we were kids and fell deeply asleep. At nighttime the jaguar came to watch us. I got scared and cried out: ‘jaguar!’ Another time a jaguar came and ate the piglet and all the clothes we had inside a ceramic pot... So we said to our parents: ‘let us leave this place and go back to Ulueyi. There are too many jaguars here, instead there aren’t any there.’ We didn’t have bastimento, plantain or yucca, so we ate palm and wild malanga. But that plant will sting you. We went to look for a plant in the river and we cooked it and ate it. We didn’t have salt or raw cane sugar. All we ate was peccary that my father caught with his chispun. Another time he got a guartinaja with a trap.

At some point, two jaguars appeared, one in front of the other. Jose Maria remembers how their father took out his chispun. When he tried to shoot he realized he had no shots left and got scared. I can see Romualdo’s body mimicking the arrival of the jaguars. He was conveying their power; they were the authorities in this forest. They wanted to cry but their father commanded them to be silent. He ordered that no matter what, they

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253 Mutainyi meaning the Buritaca river basin
254 The jaguar is referred to by Mama Jose Maria as the tiger or “tigre” in Spanish. This is how the inhabitants of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta denote the jaguars. In Kogi it is “nebi.” Both terms: “tigre” and “nebi” have the connotation of a legendary and fierce figure.
255 Chispun is a muzzle loader rifle
should not budge an inch, nor look at them. They grounded their eyes on the floor and the jaguars held them trapped under their gaze the whole day. When nighttime came the jaguars started moving away, one behind the other. As soon as the atmosphere relaxed tiny Romualdo, turned around to look outside. He saw one of the jaguars turning his face upon him, so he bowed his head, and the jaguar continued his path. “We were so scared we peed right there,” said Jose Maria. “We thought they would eat us that instant. But they left so we decided to build a nujue there.”

My father complained about not having coca or shells to grind for lime. He missed his coca leafs. But we were kids so we didn’t understand what he was missing. He replaced them for leafs of another kind of tree that looks like coca. He toasted it and chewed that. Then he took the trunk of another tree that we call ‘muka,’ he let it dry out, then burnt it until it became ashes. This replaced the lime from seashells.

While we descended again to Shibuleiyi, we left the pig outside and the jaguar came and ate it. So we said: ‘what can we do now?’ There were no colonos then, nor other Elder Brothers to help us. Around one o’clock, the rain would come crashing down. It would rain and rain for two hours straight, big rain. Then when it stopped we looked to the other side and saw some people passing by. Those people are called ‘jauja.’ They only have feet, no eyes. They went by here and continued climbing towards Tankua. My father explained to us that they were called jauja. They live in Teyunna. I thought: ‘could this be so?’

Jose Maria recalls how Lorenzo made a nujue in the place where he saw the jauja cross over.

He took out his yatukua to figure out what we should do next, where we should live? He said: ‘the yatukua says we won’t be eaten by jaguars, we will live well here.’ Soon the jaguars left. ‘When you are a bit older,’ he said to us, ‘the jaguar will come so we shall marry into their family, we shall in-law them.’ He said it like that: ‘vamos a yernar,’ so I thought, ‘what will he do? Does it mean he will turn them into indians, or what can this mean?’

At this point of the story, Jose Maria’s sons who were about to come of age and had to start finding a wife, could not stop laughing at the thought of their father thinking that

256 “Yerno” in Spanish is son-in-law
“yernar” was to turn jaguars into people. Romualdo Lozano’s wife for example, wears the striped robe of the Dingula jaguar family, while Romualdo and Jose Maria wear white robes characteristic of the Lozano saino and peccary family. After a couple is established they build their own house.

The architect Juana Londoño points out how the convergence of the structure represents: “An agreement: not only with history, but also with the site and the stones of that a place; with the sun; with the forest; with the other indigenous towns...; with the people and the animals; with the negative (the devil), with the head and its body; and finally, with the heart of the Earth.”257 Her trajectory with indigenous people, helping amongst other things to build nujues in Kogi, Wiwa and Ika towns, has lead her to understand that the rods placed all around are like the arms of people that help sustain the animals of each family, “animals of four legs, of two, that fly or that live under water,”258 she notes. Then lianas are wound around the structure where the palm leafs will be threaded through. At the apex there is a cross that’s sustained by the lianas and helps keep the whole structure from collapsing on top. This also represents the heart of the animals, continues Londoño, it protects the house from negative influences. In addition, at the very top of the roof, two horns are placed to keep the whole structure from twisting. Usually a piece of woven cloth is inserted here, she says, which represents the bat that helps secure the fertility of both, family and harvest. Sometimes ceramic pots are also laid upside down between the horns. This is nourishment for the animals in spirit, which helps keep the connections to those ancestors alive.

257 Londoño Niño, Juana. Arquitectura & Bosque en la Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. Santa Marta, Colombia: Juana Londoño, 2013, p. 7
In a river basin like Mutainyi, that remained mostly unoccupied by humans, these connections to the ancestors along with the yatukuas, would have been essential for Mama Lorenzo Lozano’s family to continue as he said, “living well here.” Mama Jose Maria and Mama Romualdo will often take out their yatukuas for divination, just as they learnt from their father. “Yatukua is like a leader, like a President, it is where all our laws are,” points out Mama Romualdo. It is what informs them of everything, he says: where to make the offering, what to do when preventing and illness from growing or when avoiding the death of mountain animals. “Tengo que ir a la loma” or “I have to go and sit in the hill” they’ll say. These places many times in flat areas surrounded by crops or forest will often face a particular direction, like a mountain or a body of water.

It was here where I sat in Shibuleiyi when after Mama Luca’s divination, I was confirming with Mama Jose Maria whether to leave the country for my studies abroad or not. I arrived at midday. The wild forest birds were madly singing, announcing the rush of rain that was to come that afternoon. The Mama asked me to sit next to him and talk in alunashiguashi. I told him about events in my life from the last time I had seen him a year back. He closely followed everything that came out of me with the greatest attention and listened as if he could touch each one of the words that I articulated.

Imagine if you will, this man dressed up in woven white cotton with a pointed hat that sits on him like the deep, cleansing and refreshing thought of the snow peaks. He is sitting in the middle of a circle of stones with a gourd container filled with water from a sacred well. He is holding a red tuma in between his fingers in absolute concentration as I continue speaking: thought coming and going in reflections, moving like the breathing womb of the Earth. All of a sudden, a connection is established in deepest thought, in
aluna. He drops the stone and bubbles surge in the water with a reflection of colors that carry the response of my living thought. He looks at the colors, the movement, the light in the bubbles and reads the answer: “you must travel there, to the other side and sow your thoughts in that land, then you will see words will begin to grow.” The water was now completely still. The whole forest was sitting in the vessel. Everything was concentrated in that one instant, in that sacred place where my thought or spirit was seen… growing in your reflection.
Chapter Four. Teyunna: Historia Abscondita, Part II

Section 4.1

The dangers felt by the Lozano family in the Buritaca river basin did not end with the jaguars. As Mama Jose Maria recalls in his story\(^{259}\): after the jaguars followed the guaqueros.

There were no colonos or machetes at that time. We climbed up to Jaba Juishigaxa, a little bit further up. That is where the Mother of peccary was. Then one day, coming down, we saw a civilian. We thought he could be a Mother or a Father of some kind but this civilian spoke: ‘Hey compadre,\(^{260}\) we have salt.’ When I heard him I got very scared, rolled down the crag, fell into the creak and hid behind it. I went to my father and told him what had happened. So my father went to check this out and returned. ‘Oh no! There’s a devil there. Oh no, no, what are we going to do? Let us descend to the river’ he said. So we went down, down, down until we reached the river. Then up, up, up until we got to the nujue. We sat there for a while and he appeared again. We called him M Kalabangaga. That is where this man lived.\(^{261}\)

Mama Jose Maria says that following M Kalabangaga there was no stop to guaqueros. He lists their names: “after him came others named L, then G, then J.”

They came offering: ‘Hey compadre! We have salt’ But my father didn’t take it. He just sat there and said: ‘maybe now I will die. It might kill me.’ I got really scared: ‘oh no, no, no’ I thought, ‘they are coming like the jaguar.’ They left the salt there. My father didn’t say anything. So they went away. When they were gone, my father took the salt and threw it down the river. ‘We won’t eat that’ he said, and I thought: ‘he’s speaking the truth.’ But after four days they came back with a little goat. My father exclaimed: ‘oh no, they came back! What are we going to do?’

\(^{259}\) The other part of Mama Jose Maria Lozano’s story is in Chapter Three, Section 3.3

\(^{260}\) “Compadre” and “comadre” in Spanish is someone with whom you establish strong social bonds because they are the godfather and godmother, respectively, of your children, or you are the godparent of their children. In the coastal region, however, the term has been extended to someone who is a friend, which is how the guaqueros and other non-indigenous people, commonly address indigenous people and vice versa.

\(^{261}\) Kalabangaga is a settlement along the Guachaca river basin
My father told us that this wasn’t a devil, but a yalyi. So I thought: ‘what could that be: a yalyi?’ One day we climbed up the Guandeque creak, and found twenty of them. Then another twenty came here. Then another fifteen appeared on the other side. They carried something like black plastic, but huge and long, enough to make a house. They were living in Mother Nixagakui. Then twenty more made a house here in Jaba Shibuleiyi. Then they brought a shovel, a rod, everything for guaqueria. My father was frightened and hid inside a cave with us. We just sat there without a fire or anything for a whole day. My mother said: ‘we already have our garden here, our malanga growing. I don’t want to leave it.’ So my father took out his yatukua to search, and the yatukua said that we would live in peace. So we stayed.

My mother tried to convince my father to talk to them but he refused. ‘I’d rather hang myself with a rope,’ he replied. We said to him: ‘but if you die what shall we do? In that case, it’s best that you hang us too.’ So we decided to return to Shibuleiyi and climbed further up into the woods.

That’s when something like forty peccaries raided them. Those who lived the times when the peccaries would appear in stampedes, describe a kind of trembling of the ground and a very strong smell of urine that invades the atmosphere. Jose Maria thought

262 “Searching” here implies searching in aluna which is what they do in divination
that would be the end of them. They had to tie themselves and their dogs up to the highest beams of the house. Even their mother was hanging there with all her bags. The peccaries walked around their house all night. “Then the guaqueros came and killed about ten of them. They also killed a monkey, sheared it and fried it, and guartinaja too, guara, everything. They wouldn’t kill just one, they killed by the dozen. They would eat all day, there were wild turkeys and they would shoot and shoot, they ate about forty wild turkeys, everything, everything, everything!”

As the Lozano family saw the large rodents or “guartinaja”, tapirs or “danta”, peccaries or “manaos”, jaguar, wild turkeys or “pavas”, “everything” disappearing, their father said: “my goodness, why are they taking so much? I have to scold these guaqueros and ask them why they are doing this.” But then Jose Maria thought: “how will he say that to them? So he went up there and firmly said: ‘no guaca, no digging, that’s mine.’”

‘Don’t come and tell us what to do you revolting Indian, you are a savage,’ they said. And they sent two shots in his direction screaming: ‘don’t you say that to us, you’re a devil!’ So we both descended and they shot four times. I got scared and returned home. Then the guaqueros came to us and said: ‘you are worthless! That does not belong to you. It’s for us. You’re lost.’ So what could we do? They remained digging there for about five days.

In an interview that the archaeologist Guillermo Rodriguez and the biologist Fernando Salazar recorded in “Murallas del Oriente” or Shumnanyi in 1987, the guaquero MP refers to the Plan de Ollas. He declares that when the army arrived, he left Ciudad Perdida and went to Plan de Ollas, which today he says, is called Tankua. He says these are beautiful towns: tall walls and big, with lots of flat regions to dig out. “We were very friendly with the Indian Lorenzo,” he continues.

263 Digging out the figures, for example the gold tapirs, means that they were taking the Mother and the Father of the tapir and thus, keeping them from reproducing.
Once the Restrepos decided to scare them by firing shots. They fled to their ranch that day. So we decided to go there and found them in shock. They said: ‘compadre, guaquero matando.’ So we explained that it had been the Restrepo who were shooting.

We went everywhere and they never intervened. They were very good friends, and still are. Not like some of my partners with whom I’ve had to settle my differences more than once. In those days, we had three different clearings in the town of Julepia with a good amount of plantain growing. We would come every so often to dig out. Then I came to work hard in the Murallas del Oriente, where the government wanted to push me out but they didn’t manage... I’m still here in this jungle working hard because ‘lazy men can’t enjoy beautiful women:’ ‘hombre flojo no goza mujer bonita...’

Mama Jose Maria says the invasion of guaqueros decreased when “a gringo from Bogota” whose name was Francisco arrived here.”

He came and my father tried to explain to him about the guaqueros, but we didn’t know how to communicate in Spanish so we explained as much as we could. This Francisco said: ‘okay I will help. I live in Bogota so I will ask the President to bring an army of two hundred men.’ But we didn’t know what this was, ‘an army, an army, what can that be?’ I thought. He wrote something like a map: they are digging here and here. This Francisco spent the whole day taking notes of everything they had removed: the Mother of the avocados, the Mother of malanga... He said when the army comes you show them there and there. He said: “copter” and showed us what it was like, so we thought ‘could it be a bird? What kind of bird?’ Tell them they are taking everything away, he said. This way you will have a few Mothers left for yourselves. This Francisco said: ‘could this be true?’ I was sitting on the other side of my father’s nujue for a week, when I saw a big bird. My father saw it and pointed: ‘it’s the bird, there it went flying past us.’ But I thought: ‘what could it be?’ And then five copters appeared, slowly, rising and descending in the sky. When I observed I saw that it was full of people. My grandfather had told us that when big creatures come flying in the sky that will be the end of people. So I got scared and hid in the woods, ‘okay this is the end now’ I thought.

We went with my parents to a place where there is a big caracoli tree and stayed there while my father searched in his yatukua for a whole day. Then he said: ‘these are friends, we shall help each other.’

After about five days the army appeared. They said: “don’t be afraid, we are friends, we shall kill the guaqueros,” but despite this Jose Maria says he felt scared. They brought sacks of sardines, dried milk, lentils, fish and rice, but Lorenzo said they didn’t eat any of

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264 The Restrepo family of guaqueros
265 “Gringo from Bogota” refers to a foreigner from Bogota
that. “We don’t eat, we don’t eat that, we don’t eat,” he said. “We shall throw that away as soon as they leave.”

Four times they came and four times he threw it away. When they returned, we gave them a piglet. They killed it right there and started drinking its blood, raw. I thought they were like jaguars. Again they brought another sack full of food. So my father said: ‘okay, let us eat that and die quicker.’ Romualdo and I opened the sack with an ax and something like ten sardines came flying out. Then the army came and said: ‘no, you open it with a knife.’ They climbed up and returned fifteen days later with Doctor Jose Luis and Ana Maria. They said: ‘whenever you see guaqueros go up there to Ciudad Perdida and tell us, then we will take them back to Santa Marta.’

As soon as Jose Maria saw ten guaqueros below Shibuleiyi, he ran to tell his father. He said: “okay go up there and say ‘please jercito, do me the favor, there are guaqueros there.’”

So we went up to Teyunna with Romualdo and said they were there… They said: ‘what did you see down there?’ We answered: ‘yalyi’ but they couldn’t understand. The army would say: ‘what is yalyi?’ A yalyi! A yalyi! I repeated. But they didn’t understand my word. So I saw a shovel and a stick, and showed them. ‘Oh! Guaquero’ said the army. Ana Maria said: ‘maybe it’s guaquero, but if it’s not guaquero then what could it be? Maybe it’s guaquero.’ I repeated with the shovel and the stick.’ Oh yes!’ She said. ‘So the army will come down with you.’

As Mama Jose Maria continued to tickle all of us with the animation of his story, his sons rolled with laughter. By this point, even his two wives had joined in the amusement. He continued:

Then they asked: ‘how many are there?’ So I said: ‘uwa.’ But they didn’t understand. So I showed them with my hand: eizua, mojua, maiwa, makeiwa, chiwa, teyuwa... ugu... uwa. ‘What does uwa mean?’ they said. ‘Yalyi’ I said, then: ‘Uwa!’ I repeated and again I took the shovel and pointed down there. Maybe it’s guaquero they said. Then they gave me milk, sardines and other things in a bag and came down with me.
Down, down, down, down, down, down, down we went: there! In Mutainyi we saw them. So they whispered: ‘compadre there they are, lie down here.’ They took my hand and sat me there. So I thought: ‘I must be careful they don’t kill me.’ I got up and they said: ‘no, no, be silent, sit!’ The guaqueros were nearby and I saw the army lie down. Again they said to us: ‘compadre, lie down like this, don’t get up.’ So we stayed there and the army walked over and caught them. The guaqueros reached for their weapons and the army threw themselves to the ground.

They shot twice and then the army caught all of them. ‘You can’t do that’ they said, ‘it’s prohibited,’ they told them. With a stick they started hitting them: ‘noooooo, no, no, I will leave!’ cried out the guaqueros.

We got scared and fled down to the river, as the sardines, chocolate, everything that Ana Maria had given us, even our clothes, went with the current. I was hit and cut by sticks and stones. When we finally got out, we returned to Shibuleiyi with nothing on. When my father saw us he asked: “what happened?” So I told him that the army had killed the guaqueros.

The next day the army came and said to my father: ‘compadre we lost your children. We told them to lie down and when we went to get them they had fallen down the gully. No, no, no, we’re so sorry!’ So my father said: ‘no, compadre, they’re here!’

Off the top of his head, Mama Jose Maria lists some of the Mothers that were dug out of the places where their family lived: the Mother of avocado when they lived in Nixagakui; the mother of coca leafs when they lived in Tankua; the Mother of peccaries when they lived in Juishigaxa; the Mother of rain when they lived in Mutainyi; the Mother of a big well a little below there which he says has since dried up; the Mother of cotton and the Mother of malanga when they lived in Shibuleiyi. “We would find twenty, then ten, then fifteen, then thirty… Oh so many guaqueros! Then up there we caught a hundred… they took so many guacas, so much gold: the Mother of bird, the Mother of peccary, the

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266 Kogi, Ika and Wiwa storytelling journeys through words and thought as if wondering through the body of a person, as in the case of Teyunna, who was searching with his vision through the body of Mukuexe from the head all the way to the feet, to see if he was telling him the truth, or through the body of a riverbasin, from the top down, as in this case, searching, searching, searching: until they found the guaqueros, there!
Mother of armadillo, the Mother of mouse, the Mother of guartinaja, the Mother of the wild turkey, the Mother of pajuil.”

Ana Maria tried to feed and teach Romualdo and Jose Maria in Teyunna “as if we were her children,” remembers Mama Jose Maria. However, learning to read and write Spanish was not his thing. So one day he got bored and descended to where his father was. When he arrived his father said: “fine my son, then stay and come and help me gather the manioc.” He agreed that Romualdo should stay with “Doctor Jose Luis, Doctor Ana Maria and Doctor Cadavid for two to thee years while learning Spanish.” So Romualdo would come and go from Shibuleyi to Teyunna and back. Their mother died in Selurulua: the Mother of the Monkey. They went off to Mamarongo in the Palomino river basin where Mama Lorenzo found another wife. Mama Lorenzo returned to live next to Shibuleyi in Koskungena: the Mother of snakes, while Romualdo and Jose Maria remained in Ulueyi, the Don Diego river basin. Other Kogi people arrived in the 1980’s to live in the Buritaca river basin, and in 1990 the town of Mutainyi was built below Koskungena.

A problematic Kogi inhabitant arrived from Ulueyi to settle down in Koskungena. He grew sugar cane and produced guarapo, so many would gather to get drunk, and men and women would fight constantly. He lied all the time, says Romualdo, so Mama Lorenzo Lozano and five others who lived in Mutainyi and were also concerned about this chaos, went over to talk to Ramon Gil who by this time had arrived as authority of the Guachaca river basin. He agreed that it was necessary to close down that center of disorder, heal it and in exchange, offer land in Guachaca where Ramon Gil could more closely instruct this complicated man. But he continued to get drunk until he was sent
back to Ulueyi where Mama Francisco and Julian Gil, who were the authorities there, assumed the situation.

In the meantime, Romualdo and Jose Maria returned to live in the Buritaca river basin. Nine years later, in 1998, Mama Lorenzo died. Mama Luca was the one who fulfilled his death ritual and buried him. He succeeded him as the head priest. The Kogi inhabitants made various nujues for him in different sites. As Mama Romualdo explained to me, Mama Luca was healing each place. He was working where each hole was to “bring the person back from aluna, healing the Mothers again” and gathering the ancestral energy of that site. “This is how he envelopes new earth by concentrating thought there and tying it like an aseguranza.”\(^{267}\) With an aseguranza you bring back the energy from aluna and tie it in the stones, the tuma, the threaded cotton, the wooden staff or whatever material is being used.

“The world is walking far so we are going to gather it again…” continued Mama Romualdo. “In this river basin we have much, much, much thought to recover,” he said.

Our word used to be one. It was a God that walked with the ants. People would turn to gold instead of dying. It was doing mortuary. In Kogi we call this ‘nujuna.’ Nujuna wouldn’t rise then. It remained inside the womb of the earth. But now nujuna rises and the word rises. Now we don’t speak one single word but many. So we must learn: when winter was a person, how did it speak? When mist was a person how did it speak? This is what we are recovering, like pulling back the memory…

“Each one in this river basin has a body where its memory sits”, said Mama Luca.

The thought of plantain, the thought of malanga, the thought of yucca, the thought of trees, the thought of water, the thought of each animal, each bird, each bug, each worm, the thought of the blood had its place to sit, like a stool in the temple. If we don’t have a stool, a “banco,” we cannot sit and concentrate. If we don’t have the base to think then it all falls apart.

\(^{267}\) Aseguranza or protection is a marunsama
Where do we gather the history? There where the stool is. That is where the Mother dwells. She is there. Who are we going to sing to without this? Who is going to listen? We have to bring back the memory. Nine memories. We cannot think in one single memory, we must hold nine memories: nine memories to the left and nine memories to the right, coming from the base, from Se, before the sun rose.

“Without the Mother of thought” notes Mama Jose Maria we cannot live in peace. My father said to me that without them, illness would come. It’s hard to recover the Mother in thought... to bring back the quartz, the gold where it sits, Kulkulda, the forest; Nixalda, the rain; Kagi, the earth, it’s hard and the Mamas don’t hold the whole history. This is what my father told me. So now the Mamas have to fix each terrace.... Mama Lorenzo always looked after the terraces. When he was older he had less will to do so. He said to us that we had to start looking after them, the animals, the rivers and the creaks that were beginning to dry out. He said to us: ‘you have the right to learn. If I teach you that history when I die you will remain in my place. Without that history illness and war will take over. The Little Younger Brothers engage in war, they kill themselves and there is no place to control. Without that history how will we control?’

Throughout the process of healing, Mama Luca and Romualdo pointed out that it was necessary to find the interconnections of these sites all along the river basin, because as Mama Luca said: “one place is speaking to the other.” The interconnections have characterized this river basin, ever since Teyunna finished organizing the sites. Mama Romualdo recounts the following story:

When Teyunna finished organizing all of Mutainyi, the Mamas began to visit from all the other towns in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta: San Miguel, Makutama, Taminaka... Whenever anyone arrived here, they would speak to Teyunna and say: ‘I need a woman’ full of life and color like quartz itself. So Teyunna would give him the most beautiful one and the Mama would leave blissfully. He would walk up, up, up, up, up and when he reached the last terrace, the woman would turn into a tuma: the blue one for the strength of the sky, or the green stone for the energy of the forest, or the red tuma for the vigor of blood, or the yellow tuma for the influence of the fever, or the white tuma for the vitality of water, or the black one for the power of the spirit, or even the gold bead that controls the sun and all metallic tools. The Mama would continue with the bead in his mochila for he knew that if he planted this tuma, its strength would grow in his river basin.
But then when the Mama got to the stone bridge and crossed over to the other side, his mochila would start wiggling. He would reach inside with his hand and instead of a bead he would find a venomous snake: the red coral, or the green or yellow mapana, or the black cuatro narices that would instantly kill him.

Mama Luca comments that these snakes are like arrows of the Mother, protecting her treasures. “In this way,” continues Romualdo, “seven suitors died and seven arrived again.”

‘Why are you here?’ Teyunna would ask. ‘I’m looking for a woman,’ he would reply, and each time the Mama crossing back over the stone bridge would die, and Teyunna’s daughters would return home.

Something like five hundred men died, so Teyunna and his wife were left with plenty of widows. Until one day Jate Serankua and Jate Mukuexe\(^\text{268}\) saw that if they didn’t do something, there wouldn’t be forests or animals anywhere else but in Mutainyi.\(^\text{269}\)

Jate Mukuexe removed his staff, robe and gold cap. In this way, he rose and arrived like a modest man at Teyunna’s, stripped of everything: not a single power or thought in his body.

Jate Mukuexe found Teyunna and his wife sitting in their place. They asked: ‘why are you here?’ He replied that he simply wanted to accompany them for seven days. ‘He might be fooling me,’ thought Teyunna, ‘can it be that he came looking for a woman like all the other suitors that arrived here?’ But Teyunna searched him up and down, through the memory and he didn’t see anything.

Mama Romualdo showed me how Teyunna searched him, as if scanning from the bottom of the feet, all the way up to the top of the head with the power in his hands, “but nothing was there,” he explained.

Father Mukuexe knew how to concentrate without thinking of women or showing any signs of wanting one. He proved to them that instead he wanted to stay and learn. So Teyunna thought: ‘it’s true, this man simply wants some guidance.’ He asked him a second time: ‘why did you come?’ and added: ‘if you want I can give you a beautiful widow. There are plenty here.’ Again Mukuexe replied: ‘No. I came here to accompany you for a while.’ So he stayed.

Father Mukuexe worked very hard around their place. As he gained their trust, they would give him more tasks. He would cut wood, help build the nujues, hunt for animals and tend the crops.

Teyunna’s wife had a young girl in her arms. When Mukuexe looked at her, Teyunna asked: ‘why would you notice this child when I have plenty of beautiful grown women around here?’ Mukuexe knew that if he took a full-grown woman, he wouldn’t have quartz, gold, forests or anything because they had already planted it in this place. Instead once grown up, this child would begin to sow.

\(^{268}\) Jate Serankua is the Father of material life and Jate Mukuexe is the Father of history

\(^{269}\) Mutainyi is a river basin that is still valued for having the greatest percentage of rain forest in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta
So Mukuexe offered to help carry her and take her around for walks. But he didn’t stop there for as he walked with the girl, he began to register everything he saw, every single one of the sites in the place, not unlike a tape recorder that you can play back exactly, word by word, song by song, rising one step at a time. He recorded each turn, each image of butterflies, guara, ñeque, squirrel, bird, armadillo, ant, fish and tree. ‘There is so much here!’ he thought. ‘I’m going to buy it in aluna,’ he said, and in this way he was able to record everything like a perfect mental map.

After seven days, meaning seven years, Father Mukuexe had not only registered everything but he also managed to win over the little girl’s heart as she grew up. He looked after her and brought her tasty food and gifts that he knew would please her, like singing birds, beautiful feathers and deliciously perfumed flowers, until she not only got used to him being around her parent’s home, but pretty soon she started longing for him to appear. He announced to Teyunna and his wife that the time had come for him to walk to another river basin.

Mukuexe left with the girl who was now a young woman and when he crossed over Sukuingaxa, nothing happened, she didn’t turn into any kind of tuma. Then when he went past the owner of quartz, Zelatawinaka, again she didn’t transform into any kind of snake.

Jate Mukuexe arrived at San Miguel. He looked for a flat land and reproduced the mental map he had recorded. He was able to erect every turn, rising step by step through each terrace, then the house, then the stool, then the gold hammock, and so on. He then made another nujue, exactly like his mother in law’s. He wanted to bring his parents in law to visit them. By now, he knew how to carry them over there. So they went from Sukuingaxa to Kamalagui.

When they saw the place, they were dazed to find that it was exactly like theirs. He found his own stool, his hammock, everything exactly as he knew it and thought: ‘how was my son-in-law able to record this perfect mental map?’ Teyunna announced that he would remain there seven days. After seven days he thought that he was now ready to return home. But then another seven days went by, and seven more, and then he said: ‘okay now we are going to rise.’ But seven times he rose. He crossed through the doorway to the North, then the one to the South, then the doorway to the East, then the West, and each time he got lost because the place was exactly like his, but it wasn’t his.

So Teyunna went to Mukuexe and said: ‘Please my son-in-law, I need you to carry me home.’ Mukuexe replied: ‘Well your bag is very heavy so I will carry it.’ This is how Teyunna was able to return from San Miguel. Some people say that on his way back, he stayed in Ulueyi. Others say that he left his bag there.

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270 “To buy in aluna” is an expression that is commonly used when paying offerings to materialize or conceive something that already exists in spirit, in aluna.

271 As I understand it, “carrying them over” means that you are able to bring them in spirit so that they can more easily arrive materially. For example, if I want to visit Mama Jose Maria I would say to him: “please clean my path in aluna so that you can carry me over there.”
Teyunna’s bag was heavy like a Mama’s bag would be. Hefty with the thought growing around the poporo used to chew coca leaves. In Teyunna’s case it would have probably been one of gold. He would have also carried aseguranzas embedded with shibulama and heavy with the powers of each one of the animals, the springs of water as well as the trees all over Mutainyi. Likewise, it would’ve had his yatukua or gourd container for divination. All of these are powers.

If Teyunna had left his bag in Ulueyi, then it would’ve been necessary to learn and receive this power in order to obtain permission to step in Mutainyi, not just materially but also in aluna. “Some believe that after Teyunna built his place in Mutainyi, he stayed in Ulueyi,” says an authority of Ulueyi, Julian Gil, to Juana Londoño who interviewed him in 1999:

They say that Teyunna left the town, the gold and the sites organized, but that he’s no longer there. However, others affirm that he’s still there. People would go from Ulueyi to the sea and then up to Mutainyi. They would walk there to pay offerings of a’buru. They would remain there about four days, two weeks, or three months, taking something like spiritual food without consuming anything there, without eating salt or sweet, and then they would return to concentrate in a place called Cacique. They would come from above Koskungena... to that place where there was a nujue and think with God, because this is where the head was. This is where they left the shibulama... They wouldn’t abandon that place. It used to be like that.

Before Mitamuse: the father of Fire; Jate Sankua: the Father of Teyunna; Jaba Ñineija: the Mother of water and Jate Ñimaku: the Father of water, used to live in Teyunna... Teyunna was their head and he would grant them permission... they would ask for permission... to travel to Ulueyi... This is very sacred. It’s the place where Mama Francisco would deliver aseguranzas for Ulueyi.

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272 I thank Juana Londoño for sharing this interview with me as part of our work for the Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta

273 A’buru refers to packs of offerings wrapped in cotton, in maize husks, in leafs, and so on

274 “Cacique” in Spanish translates as “Chief”

275 Julian Gil is referring to powers here. “Aseguranzas” or “Protections” is what in Chapter One I refer to as marunsama. There are many different types of marunsama made of different materials: threads, quartz, stones, beads, ancient tumas, that along with protection, grant permissions to carry out certain tasks whose power comes from where the ancestors sit in anugwe (in Ika) or in aluna (in Kogi)
Like the passion expressed in Teyunna’s fantastic work of stone masonry that Don Miguel pointed out, it’s extraordinary to imagine the zeal needed to walk the vast distances that people, today as much as the ancestors hundreds of years ago travelled, as they went from one river basin to the next, tending the sites and acquiring the marunsama that inspired the course of their lives. Arriving at a sacred site where there would be a particular nujue, whether natural or made by man; entering that house or cave and talking all night during various nights, sometimes even for years. As they deposited their knowledge, experience and thought there, they received advice, counsel, wisdom and power. “It was in the site of Cacique,” continues Julian Gil, “where people would be given permission to live in Mutainyi.”

Mama Francisco says that as long as this site isn’t spoiled, we can continue to live well because there is still power there. But if they abandon it, he says there will be no strength left. Back in that time people could not make fire in Mutainyi. People had to walk without fire, without poporo in order to deliver the offerings because they said it was too sacred. They would take a little gourd with ember inside. But then when Mama Francisco came, people began to use fire and poporo... Mama Francisco’s great grandmother left him the inheritance to do it. Mama Francisco says that he used to walk to Teyunna before, but now he just sends his grandchildren to build nujues there. There was a lot of power in Mutainyi... Then when the guaqueros came people in Ulueyi stopped delivering the offerings there. The yalyi removed all the sacred that was protecting it: the water, the fauna, the mountain, the guara, the curi, the snake, the danta, the peccary, they took away everything while digging out one site after the other...

“Living without this shibulama is like having an animal without feet,” pointed out Romualdo. In order for the community to be able to walk again it was necessary to recover it. “When you retrieve shibulama you are restoring the people, the community, the agreement between the river basins of Ulueyi, Palomino, San Miguel, Don Diego and Mutainyi.”
Section 4.2

Upon my return to fieldwork in 2009, I decided to visit my friends in Mutainyi. This time I went up with envoys of Gonawindua Tayrona, a political indigenous organization of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. As I waited for the car to depart for the Buritaca river basin, I fixed my eyes on Gonawindua Tayrona’s imposing emblem, hand painted in thick black on each side of the Kogi governor’s silver 4X4 Hi Lux. I felt baffled by the flatness of the four cardinal points that comprise it: a cartoon-like figure with a heart in the center, symbol of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. “The Heart of the World,” repeat the spokesmen, increasingly like an advertisement.

After several hours of final arrangements, we departed. The silver coated SUV soared through the streets of Santa Marta like an air-conditioned bubble with dark bulletproof windows. What a contrast with the breathing bubbles produced by the yatukuas, the gourd containers that the Mamas carried in their mochilas. Many of these

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276 I would like to thank Peter Rawitscher, whom upon working with Gonawindua Tayrona suggested to the Kogi governor, Jose de los Santos, that I could cooperate in this journey.
Mamas had descended from the breadth of Kogiland: Maruama, Makotama, Takina, Seiyua, Nabubueishi, Chivilongui, Kemakumake, Tungeka, Santa Rosa, Luaka, San Antonio, Pueblo Viejo, Nubigaxa, Tumingeka, Seviaka, bringing with them the stones and tumas from their respective territories, in order to proceed with the divination. They also had their poporos with ambira or a black paste made of tobacco, as well as roasted coca leaves imbued with the particular taste of their region. Those who are familiar with the taste point out that the flavor varies enormously between one region and another.

Tight fitted in the back, like cargo being hauled, these Mamas held on to their hats, mochilas and poporos, as the SUV rocked from side to side, ascending up the rough road of the Buritaca river basin. As we continued along the path, I saw the mountain of Kalusankua: where the Mamas read the stars and where the Mother planted her gigantic spindle to start weaving the world. I saw one river basin behind the other: mountain ridges in the form of moving waves that ascend, flatten out and then descend, like thought and spirit that walks: first Palomino, then Don Diego and finally Buritaca.

The Kogi governor, Jose de los Santos, had called a commission of over seventy people, including a few wiwa from the Guachaca river basin, three Kankuamo who had brought a’buru with maize-husks from the Guatapuri river basin and his assistant Peter Rawitscher. Many of these people had never been to Teyunna before. They were to meet with the indigenous inhabitants of Mutainyi and discuss one of the questions that concerned Gonawindua Tayrona: what to do with the problem of tourism in this sacred territory? The Kogi governor’s worry was that a few Wiwa people in alliance with followers of extreme right-wing militias had established their own tourist companies. Some Kogi individuals were also interested in participating in the mainstream tourist
organization. “There are too many groups hovering over the Sierra Nevada like vultures ready to catch their prey,” said the governor to me the day before our departure, “and too many projects from all sorts of governmental and non-governmental institutions, bombarding the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta” he continued. “Everyone wants a piece of the cake, including the indigenous people who are divided because of this.”

I had climbed up to Mutainyi on many occasions before, and yet this was the first time that I experienced such a diversity of Kogi-speaking people. I couldn’t believe the wealth of Kogi mochilas that I saw with colors and patterns from different family lines: red, black and white-striped; yellow black and white-striped; green, red and white-striped; black and white striped; and some multicolored with all sorts of symmetrical shapes. I saw Kogi robes in full white, some striped with vertical purple lines and some with spirals up the white Mama’s caps. There were also woven straw hats with very high tops. As people climbed with their thoughts, songs, dance and messages brought from other sacred sites, including those that the main Kogi high priest: Mama Jacinto sent with his son Francisco, all of nature began to speak out.

We arrived at a flat terrain right before the entrance to the town of Mutainyi where there is a large tree with a big shadow. Mama Jose Maria, Mama Romualdo and ten others were sitting along the tree’s roots and on stone seats as they talked. More than half of the people had their gourd containers next to them, with their “kuitsi” or tumas for divination plunging into the water. As the conversation continued, bubbles wrapped in colors were surfaced and exploding in the multiple mouths of the calabash containers all round. Others were using another form of divination as they dropped the stretched out index finger of one hand into the other, listening out for a sign in their bodies of
agreement or disagreement with respect to what was being discussed. This was the first encounter organized by Gowawindua Tayrona in Mutainyi, and it was necessary to be fully alert of everything that occurred: each word that was articulated, each song that was sung, each warning coming from nature.

The commissary, Jose Antonio Dingula, was the person in charge of receiving the first alunashiguashi. He’s a small and powerful man full of hair with eyes that look like he could be laughing or raging. When you stand behind him you realize that he’s still sensing you, as if his over abundant hair had antennae of its own. His nujue in the town of Mutainyi is striking, with beautifully woven palm that envelops his home all around, from top to bottom. Two woven curved flaps mark the entrance, like the walls of a vagina that lead into the womb of the nujue. He has two very tall wives with long black hair who dance and cook like goddesses. Their girls are also gifted musicians that sing and play the drums. His house is abundant with food that was multiplied in this trip by the power of purchase of Gonawindua Tayrona, providing the transportation and the logistics along with rice, oil, dried fish, a pig and four hens for all of us to eat.

Peter Rawitscher and I followed the commissary to the river where I heard, as the Kogi say, “the small thunder”: parampampaaaamm and smoke rising from inside the well were we had to sit on magnificent boulders to concentrate in aluna. He handed over two invisible threads in which we had to gather all the thoughts that went through our minds on our way there. Then he pulled the two invisible threads: one from the right hand, the other from the left hand into a small bag of myriad colors and shapes that came out of his bigger black, red and white-striped mochila. He stood in front of me, tiny, with his multiple eyes as he asked me to pour thoughts inside it. Enveloped by the lush and
fertile sound of the river, I imagined that I was filling his bag with red and transparent tumas and lots of gold for this encounter.

As we continued to climb up the river basin the next day, I felt human, nonhuman and ancestral energies put in motion. Everything seemed activated, including the ears of ancient energies that seemed to be alert in each site. More than trekking up, it felt like a wakening of awareness, “rising,” as Mama Luca used to describe ten years ago when he lived in Teyunna, in the thread of “seishina.” Seishina, he would say, is a black thread that runs through the body of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. This body is composed of rocks and quartz that constitute the base. He pointed out that from this base, everything is conceived and grows. “Everything is tied there: positive and negative.” Without this thread, he would note, nothing could hold together: “the words, the understanding, the constructions, the gardens, the dancing, rise in seishina like the lianas in a nujue.”

As I lagged behind the rest of the group on our way up, I got lost. I walked along the tourist path that was the only one I could recognize and ran into a stick standing with two ends that pointed in two directions. I listened out for human voices, and thought that if I couldn’t hear all seventy people it was because they had continued straight up the tourist’s path. “This stick is standing there by chance,” I concluded and proceeded. I found a house with a sign that said: “Mr. tourist, do me the favor and write your name in the notebook.” Two of Romualdo’s daughters were standing in front of a shelf with Coca-Cola and Gatorade for $4,000 pesos, as well as a few bananas. Another sign on top read: “We sell soda drinks here” and there were two benches for tourists to sit and rest. I was greeting the children when two guides came rushing to tell me that two indigenous people were looking for me at the sugar cane press. It turned out that one of them was my
friend Peter who said: “we’re all one group and they are worried because things cannot
flow in the site of Makumeishi until we’re all present.” I found everyone sitting around
Makumeishi with their poporos and yatukuas in full use, surrounded by plantain trees that
I was told were more than five hundred years old. This was the same terrain where forty
years back Romualdo and Jose Maria had been trapped by jaguars standing at the door of
their house when they were kids. The conversation was intense and the people were rash.
There seemed to be little agreement as to how to proceed with the topic of Teyunna.
“Should we climb all the way up there and do more divination?” Some felt the material
offerings sent by the main Kogi Mama were insufficient. Others disagreed and thought it
was necessary to proceed. Then, all of a sudden, the chikua bird sang a loud: “nooooo.”
There was a long silence. The chikua bird was definite. He sang again: “nooooo.” We
could not proceed. And then it sang a third time. The sign was clear, there was no doubt
now, the chikua bird had marked a zone in space and time, between where we assembled
and where the ancestors sat.

Makumeishi was also the site of the jaguar family, the Dingula of white, black
and red striped-bags like the Commissary who had received alunashiguashi in the town of
Mutainyi or like Romualdo’s wife who fit Mama Lorenzo Lozano’s prediction that his
sons were going to “in-law” the jaguars. It is where their ancestors live, so the
articulation of their thought was particularly important at this moment, for they were
especially sensitive to everything that was rising in that place. “We must follow our law”
they spoke out: “nuestra ley.” “This is a call of Yatukua.” It’s necessary to work in
“Nuitenaxa”, the point of entry where Teyunna had his nine tumas turn into snakes, and
where permission must be granted before proceeding. Nuitenaxa is to receive the sexual
energy of a young virgin couple from Takina. They will be rendered there as the poporo is delivered to the young man and the woman receives the spindle. The young couple will offer their first sexual encounter there, just like the one that Teyunna organized in each site when he was rising in Mutainyi. This will help arrive properly in “Nuitenaxa,” and then from there the sites themselves will indicate what will follow before continuing to Teyunna.

During that gathering it was made clear that the precious tumas used in all the other river basins are Teyunna’s daughters, hence, he’s the father in law of all the people there. Consequently, the indigenous people in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta owe him a tribute. These daughters are not unlike the ones that the archaeologists dug out in 2009, in Teyunna’s “Central Sector,” as they refer to it, where upon digging they found “836 loose beads of various materials and styles.” They remark: “the amount is certainly surprising. If the pattern continues throughout, the fill could contain at least a few thousand beads.”

They specify: “green schist beads 792; Milky quartz (rose colored) 16; Carnelian (red) 14; Carnelian (purple hued) 3; Ceramic (brown) 3; Shell (undetermined species) 2; Red-brown andesite 1; Black andesite 1.”

Then they reason:

Since the beads were strewn throughout the deposit and at varying depths, it is also unlikely that they were part of a single coil or necklace... Rather, the beads appear to have been dropped in small handfuls as the fill was being added...

Cupped handfuls of offerings were now being invoked as everyone there from Maruamake, Mamarongo, Abuleishi, Chibilongui, Ashintukua, Makotama, Takina, Giraldo, Santiago. Lords of the Snowy Ranges: Politics, Place, and Landscape Transformation in Two Tairona Towns in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, PhD Dissertation, The University of Chicago, 2010, p. 243


Seiyua, Nabubeishi, Tungeka, Santa Rosa, Luaka, San Antonio, Pueblo Viejo, Nubigaxa, Tumingeka and Seviaka, was to return to their respective river basin and with their wives, gather these gifts for Teyunna. In this way, they pointed out, they could deliver “real food” from their particular regions, which came in the form of sexual fluids wrapped up in cotton: food that in aluna represented dry mouse, dry iguana, dry fish and so on. “Food,” they pointed out, which when delivered “would really fatten up the place,” making it swell with pleasure.

In that instant the logistics, cars, gas, food, schedule and institutional frame of mind that inspired this encounter all the way from Santa Marta, were reversed. We had to turn back because the yatukuas, the chikua bird and all the thermometers used to read the present condition of the river basin of Mutainyi, made it clear that in order to continue “rising:” stepping in material as we stepped in aluna, more alunashiguashi, more offerings and further articulation were needed. On our way back, a young Wiwa man from the Guachaca river basin commented that the problem is that Teyunna is the father in law of all the indigenous people living in the river basins, but no one is acknowledging this and they aren’t bringing the proper nourishment to the place. “Without the quartz and the gold the rivers will plug up like arteries in a body,” he said, “and there will be even more landslides.” I understood that it seems as if everything was stalling instead of flowing. “Delivering those offerings is the only way we can purge and heal what has developed in this river basin,” he pointed out. But then upon saying that, he had a second thought: “could it be that the government is continuing to take our treasures to weaken us and make us accept all the projects that are emerging, or is it really that we still need to cleanse and do alunashiguashi until we recognize our error?”
As I heard him speak, it pained me to hear these doubts harboring in a young person’s heart and to consider the distressing contrast between the “rising” that was invoked throughout this gathering and the material concept of rising that we cherish in our society. The very phenomenon that moves someone like Mr. BR to dance to the image of money: rising investments, rising employment, rising real estate prices, rising buildings, roads, bridges, marines, restaurants and hotels, no matter whether the rivers dry up, the carbon extracting industry eats away the sea life, the treasures nestled in the Earth are appropriated like a kind of credit that is consumed, and the crops shrivel up. Rise, rise, rise we say, as we continue breeding money and transforming our surroundings. Who doesn’t want to be immortal?

The earth’s treasures are taken. The pit vipers, the red corals, the cobras and other guardians of the Mother’s womb, come out like arrows that protect these sites, but it’s too late, nothing but a hole that can never be fully covered up again is left there. The liana that holds everything together begins to fall apart, the stones collapse, the land slides and the cavity of a whole memory lingers there like a great gap for which there is no longer a song to be danced, a history to be sung. A different kind of vine of illnesses, excess rain or drought, food that rots, seeds that dry up, and unfulfilled desires begin to climb up, not like the liana of Seishina, but a creeper that spreads needs, pain, frustrations, alcoholism, rage and war throughout the inhabitants of the river basin.

Follow the course of the Buritaca River and you will find horrifying manifestations of dissatisfaction in the underworld growing from the base up: expressions like Hernan Giraldo and his descendants. His thought is also said to come from aluna, an energy that is charging a debt and that is seen extending in the settlement of El Mamey
and beyond. It’s there where Giraldo holds two extensive farms that are a day’s walk away from the town of Mutainyi. “In the foothills of the snow-capped Sierra Nevada in northeastern Colombia,” begins an article published in Newsweek in 2001.

The Kogi Indians whisper his name in fear. And along the docks of the Caribbean port city of Santa Marta, gangsters speak with awe of his 400-man private army. But everyone knows that when it comes to Hernan Giraldo Serna, it's usually best not to know too much. The gangsters quietly recall, for instance, that Giraldo once ordered the brutal murders of four construction workers, and then had their bodies cut to bits with a chain saw. Their offense? They had built a special basement to store his multimillion-dollar cache of cocaine, and they knew where it was.280

In 2002 Hernan Giraldo was named one of the ten richest men in the world with an annual income of US $1,200 million.281 He dominated cocaine trafficking routes that went from the river mouth of the Buritaca to Jamaica and from there to vast consumer markets in the United States and Europe. He has so much power that after rendering himself to the authorities in 2006 in exchange for a limited number of years in prison in the United States, he disclosed the names of the mayors, congressmen, governors and city councilmen that he personally picked for elections, all of whom won.282 When he gave himself in, it turned out that the army of the “Tayrona Resistance”283 was twice the size that had been calculated: 1,166 men demobilized with him. He recruited minors into his growing paramilitary army, including his own son alias “Morrocoyo” or tortoise that began working for his father when he was thirteen. The son of one of the virgin girls 15 years old or less, that Giraldo claims are the only sexual partners he can accept because

281 El Espectador, “Giraldo Serna en la mira de EU” junio 30, 2002, p. 11A
282 19 sept, 2007, El Tiempo, Giraldo se decidió hablar, p. 1-6
283 Hernan Giraldo’s appropriation of local names like “Tayrona” and local animal nicknames for his children like the tortoise or the ocelot are quite telling.
otherwise he will be “salado” or literally “salted,” like a curse that will bring him bad luck. Morrocoyo grew up to become one of the most fearful hit men in Santa Marta, not to mention another one of his brothers: “Rambito”, little Rambo, whose influence is still felt in the region, or “Tigrillo,” ocelot, who assassinated twelve young men marked out as informants from his own army. He recognizes at least 38 children as his own, most of who remain in the region amidst a conflict that persists even after Giraldo was extradited to the United State. Confrontations between armed groups like Giraldo’s men, los Urabeños and los Ratrojos lingers and exceeds all the governmental and nongovernmental institutions working in the Buritaca river basin, including Gonawindua Tayrona, the Institute of Colombian Anthropology and History (ICANH), National Parks and the Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta.

“I don’t understand what happened,” comments my friend as she sits day and night by her sowing machine in her shop that has become her family’s home in the city center of Santa Marta. Men and women of all ages frequently arrive at her place with a pleated photocopy of an image taken from some fashion magazine, asking her to reproduce that exact color, that same shape, that fall, that twist, for the night out, the party, the marriage, the Halloween parade, the day of the Candles, and so on. Eucachieves it like magic. When I express my admiration she says she has been doing this since she was three years old and tells me about when she was growing up in El Mamey. Her father would bring her snippets of textiles from the towns, so that she could make her own dolls: apparels for twigs that she dressed up in beautiful colors because there was no

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284 Based on the character of Rambo played by Sylvester Stallone as a troubled Vietnam veteran who is skilled in weaponry and combat
285 El Tiempo, 11 april, 2010, 1-3
286 La Batalla por la Sierra, Sept. 3, 2012, Semana, p. 52
money to buy a real doll. “It used to be such a healthy place” she says, inhabited by people like her father who came from the region of Bolivar in 1955 growing crops and trying to make a better life for themselves. They named the settlement El Mamey after a bountiful tree with sweet fruit and fragrant white flowers. Now the region is commonly referred to as “Machete Pelado” or “Bare Machete” according to a local because when the marijuana boom came it was all about “getting drunk, stealing and fighting with bare machete.”

I remember each time I climbed up, rushing by Machete like pressing through a dark and threatening alley to continue my ascent. As I carried on to the town of Mutainyi, I would begin to divest myself of the unrest and malaise that weighed all around the atmosphere. In 1999 I found hundreds of armed men: Giraldo’s private army, crowded around the canteen while he was getting drunk. “Do you feel the sexual desire, do you feel the heat of rage, do you feel the spasms of anxiety, aren’t they people that walk too?” was the question raised by Mama Luca when he was addressing the community of Mutainyi gathered to fulfill alunashiguashi in 1999. “This is what thought is, thought that walks like people and we have to bring it back,” reiterated Mama Luca. “We must guard thought, look after it,” followed Mama Romualdo.

When a young girl starts to menstruate we must advise her so she doesn’t get scared, so she doesn’t lose its strength when it comes running down. We speak of ‘the war,’ ‘the army,’ ‘the guerrilla,’ and when a woman who is pregnant hears those words, they are recorded in the thought of her baby.

“There are many problems today,” pointed out Ramon Gil as he spoke to a yalyi audience.

287 Fieldnotes, 1999 while working with the Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta
There wants to be war, but it’s not a war of people but of the owners of each element... We have a debt with those owners. We haven’t paid a cent for manioc, for water, for meat, for the wind, for the sun, for fruit. We haven’t cancelled our debt... We have eaten so much food. Of course here we go to the shop, we buy meat, we buy rice, we buy water... but we aren’t paying; we are owing... we must pay a spiritual tribute as well as a material tribute. To be at peace we must know the peace of the owner of trees, of the owner of quartz, of the owner of water, of the owner of wind, the peace of the sun Nui, the peace of the owner of gold... I’m not speaking about material money: resources, but spiritual money: tributes... to cure the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta.”

With this in mind, Ramon Gil travelled to Bogota to speak to the heads of the Gold Museum. He asked Clara Isabel Botero, the director at the time, to call the whole team because he needed to talk to them. He wanted to point out that now that they had made it clear that they were assuming the responsibility of these gold pieces, they must feed them. “They are not people as we see them today, but people of thousands of years ago. I believe this is why anthropologists study them but they can’t see them,” he said. “They have been sitting behind the windows for years without food or drink.”

These are people from the beginning, from the time when there was no sun. We call the sun: Mama Nui. There are two names for the sun: Mama and Nui, double sun. In Wiwa we say: Mama Yui. It’s in Yuimake where dawn broke and daytime came. This is very hard for you to understand. Our sacred places are the places where the sun rose. The sun rose with the first sexual relationship, this is where feminine and masculine dawned. This sexual relationship came about like a kind of cloud, like a humidity that begins to rise, and when the semen burst, it rained. Once there was the sexual relationship then light came, it dawned. That is why we call it yui. Yui is something very sacred. A boy and a girl cannot learn about yui, about sexual relationships, before they develop. Their thought must be protected like sacred ground until dawn comes in them: yui fully running through their bodies, then they are ready to learn...

Our ancestors organized the gold and the quartz so that the trees, the animals the people could have yui running through the Earth’s body. When the sun rose he began to heat the Mother with his yui. Yui means white radiance. This is how she conceived those golds. They were left there to continue feeding their children: their descendants. Now you must feed them.289

He pointed out to the team that everyone, from the top down, had to take a piece of cotton and gather yui: their sexual fluids into it, “food for the ancestors” sitting in the Gold Museum. When I was told about Ramon Gil’s mission, I couldn’t imagine Mr. BR’s face as he heard that it was necessary for him to have sex with his wife and gather their bodily fluids into a piece of cotton to feed the Bank’s magnificent gold collection: “all 38,500 pieces of gold work.” It’s most likely that he never even received this information.

There is no room for scatter in The Gold Museum, notes Michael Taussig. The kind of scatter that would arouse the passion of a “genuine collector” such as Walter Benjamin “for what this scatter implies for him is its fantastic otherworldly character.”

Benjamin sits in his place from noon to midnight, with crates, dust, paper dispersed all around as he unpacks his book collection “not yet on the shelves, not yet touched by the mild boredom of order” but scattered all around. The “springtide of memories” comes dashing forth. “What memories crowd in upon you!” He exclaims. “Everything remembered and thought, everything conscious, becomes the pedestal, the frame, the base, the lock of the collector’s property. Memories that live “between the poles of disorder and order.” Taussig observes closely his kind of passion, and notes: “to impose order on such chaos is to render tribute to chance, such

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that the final arrangement adds up to what he calls a ‘magic encyclopedia,’ which in itself serves to interpret fate.”

In the Forward to Walter Benjamin’s Arcades Project, the translators suggest the book is a collection of quotations, drafts and excerpts that Benjamin assembled during a period of thirteen years and “was to constitute a ‘magic encyclopedia’ of the epoch from which it derived.” Through these architectural “Passages,” “set up to communicate among themselves,” Benjamin reenters the collective dream of 19th Century Europe with ramifications and individual passages that are as far from the Kogi collective in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta as “the other side of the sea.” And yet constitute a collective in which a whole universe comes to life and transforms the exterior into an interior world. The translators tell us that Benjamin likened this interior to a mollusk’s shell, in which for the first time things were coming to seem more material than ever and at the same time more spectral and estranged.

Benjamin laments that with modernity we have lost out powers of divination. Bounded within the circumscribed area of his collection, Benjamin gives rise to a domain in which the interior of the private man, “brings together the far away and the long ago”.... There is an “augur” or inspiration here that as Taussig points out, renders tribute to chance and allows us to cross the threshold of his magic circle “which in itself

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serves to interpret fate.”

And yet something at once more profound and extensive in Teyunna’s cosmology surpasses the circumscribed area of any collection. Amidst the most intense burdens, demands and needs brought about by Modernity, there is an urge amongst Kogi Mamas to reflect upon “a world of secret affinities,” that is living and that begs for us to listen and acknowledge the existence of ancestral tools and materials imbued with the power to speak, to draw similarities between constellations of stars and human bodies.

Michael Taussig observes the spit that accumulates around the mouth of Mama Luca’s poporo, “coca-and-lime thickened saliva” that accrues like a crust. “Faint greenish lines like a spider’s web wander around its sides; while viewed from above, the disc contains faint rings like that of a cut tree trunk” that grows. “This is the effect mankalukua,” I say to myself. “Mankalukua, the spider came in spirit,” said Mama Luca. The white spider came at dawn, the red one at noon, and the black one at night. “It brought a thread in spirit, Seishiya, like a liana that ties together a nujue. The Sierra is a nujue of rocks. When the sun rose, this thread materialized. As we fulfill the spiritual work we are tying it to that thread. This thread continues to grow inside these rocks.” When Mama Luca’s nephew translated these transcriptions, he remarked that as Mama Luca spoke, he was climbing through his words and tying a thread like mankalukua. “As he spoke, his listeners began to understand and say: “Ah, it is true.”” If Mama Luca “didn’t tie here,” said his nephew as he pointed to his heart, “to carry out his job. Or

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307 Transcriptions, 1999 while working with the Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta
here” he declared as he pointed to his head “to attain understanding amongst the people so that they don’t forget. Otherwise, it would be like an overflowed river that does not hold together. This is when people begin to forget the words spoken.”

“The Mother brought Mankalukua so that there could be strength flowing throughout the Sierra,” continued Mama Luca. “This is why we also have veins like the Sierra. Or the trees, too, have roots. They need roots so that they hold up. Also from there come the veins of all animals, fish, and crickets.”

Taussig observes the crust of Mama Luca’s poporo. A “document,” explains Mama Luca, “kalamutsa” notes Taussig, like “a living extension of the body, or should I say of the mind.” The rods tipped into the lime. Burnt and crushed sea shells: people from the time of darkness, infused with the coca leaves: the very thoughts of the Mother, tucked away in one cheek and moistened by the spittle, humidified like in the first sexual relationship when the life force erupts, and spit bursts: rain coming out of the mouth to return to the land, dampen and satisfy the Mother as she continues to sit in her nujue, spinning the fate of the Earth upon her gigantic spindle.

How different this web of wind and fluttering hummingbirds, as men and women gather in the womb of their nujues, from the image of the first object in the Gold Museum’s collection: the glittering Quimbaya poporo. It’s now sequestered in a space, “the centerpiece of the museum’s display” with a spotlight over it. A piece that Magdalena Amador inherited from her father, Coriolano Amador, a wealthy businessman

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308 Transcriptions, 1999 while working with the Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta
309 Transcriptions, 1999 while working with the Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta
in Antioquia, and in 1936 sold as a “gold vase”\textsuperscript{314} to the Bank of the Republic. Ever since 1923, the Bank held the power of acquisition of all the alluvium and mined gold around the country. However, instead of sending this piece to the melting house, notes Botero, “it was referred to the central office of the Bank in Bogota.”\textsuperscript{315}

From there on, the collection grew and by 1942 the Bank had acquired 1,987 gold objects, one of the biggest and most important metallurgic Pre-Columbian collections, points out Botero. It was in its first published catalogue in 1944, she says, that it was named “The Gold Museum.”\textsuperscript{316} No “fringe areas” in this Museum, as Benjamin refers to something that does not quite fit in a collection, in his case: two volumes bounded in faded boards with stick-in pictures that his mother had pasted when she was a child. Upon inheriting them, he writes, they constituted “the seeds”\textsuperscript{317} of his children’s book collection, for it’s precisely the personal bond towards a collector’s property that gives meaning to “the phenomenon of collecting.”\textsuperscript{318} No montage either, like the kind that Michael Taussig invokes in his Museum, “a philosophy not of form but of substances and force.”\textsuperscript{319} In the Bank of the Republic the first piece is already the limelight. An object, as Taussig points out, proudly exhibited with the following text beneath it: “This poporo from Quimbaya, which began the collection of the Gold Museum in 1939, identifies Colombians with their nationality and history.”\textsuperscript{320}

\textsuperscript{315} Botero, Clara Isabel. Op. cit., p. 264
\textsuperscript{316} Botero, Clara Isabel. Op. cit., p. 265
\textsuperscript{319} Taussig, Michael. Op. cit., Author’s Note, p. xiii
\textsuperscript{320} Taussig, Michael. Op. cit., Author’s Note, p. xv
Section 4.3

After completing the consultation and having returned to the settlement of Mutainyi, I was asked to fulfill the task for which Gonawindua Tayrona had invited me. I was sat down at a little table, by the house of concrete and zinc made especially for yalyi business: the infirmary, the school, the institutional affairs, with a small stack of white paper that the school teacher brought out. I began to write up an official record of the gathering: “Acta de Reunion para Gonawindua Tayrona”, Minutes of the Meeting for Gonawindua Tayrona:

“We the authorities and Mamas of each river basin have gathered on September 25, 2009 in the river basin of Mutainyi so as to continue the process of cleansing and defense of Teyunna, one of the primary sites that unites all four indigenous groups in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. After four days of talking we have seen through the Mamas’ yatukua that we cannot undertake any material decisions before we fulfill the spiritual requirements. It is for this reason that we make a special call from yatukua to the following points…”

It took me a long time to finish the report and as night descended I decided to move my writing utensils to the nujue where the women were gathered singing. “Leave those papers and let us dance!” insisted the women. The drum beat the dance of the yiyu fish, the dance of sankui: the parrot, the dance of the vulture, the dance of the bat, as the men continued with their long discussions in their nujue. I remembered Mama Luca’s funeral two months back: “dance, dance” repeated the Mama in charge, “because when you are dancing you are rendering strength to the dead. You dance and it’s your thought talking clearly; you ponder and it’s your thought lying. There is no lying in dancing. Dance, dance!”
The full moon grew. I left my papers and unfulfilled institutional duties behind, as the dancing enveloped me. The women transformed into fish, two by two swimming intertwined across the town’s square, then into wild turkeys, back to back in circles and around in movements that felt like I was flying, the bats swirled around, the vultures sang in intonations that were sharp and high, then low as we squatted on our knees. There is no doubt that everything around us was listening above and below, tapirs moving across the grounds where the underground was enveloped and growing: the thought of parrots, the
thought of guacamayas, the thought of the palm’s kanji fruit, each one emerging in urns left by Teyunna himself.

The last morning remains imprinted in my mind. I sat in Mama Jose Maria’s second house in the center of the town of Mutainyi. Two Mamas arrived to deliver some materials to him but he had gone out. One of them wore a striped robe and cap; the other one was an old man from Seiyua\(^{321}\) with lots of white hair. As Jaba Catalina received the materials that they handed over to her, one by one, I realized the complexity of the offerings to be delivered: each river basin with its myriad of riches to offer. Eysuama by eysuama\(^{322}\) opened up like creaks and streams that outflowed into one another, until they finally reached the sea; out came endless seeds of all kinds rolled up in pieces of cotton, organic materials of spider webs, wings, cocoons and shells of insects, stones, beads and quartz, red, whitish with red and grey tumas, ceramic bits of different colors, that appeared to proliferate in the hands of Jaba Catalina who turned them over towards one side then the other, like she did with my notebook, except this time she seemed to be reading “through them into their distant past.”\(^{323}\) Bits and pieces of live materials continued coming and going, as she readily handed them over to her teenage girl who was helping her put them away into a multitude of little containers that came out of mochilas, one after the other.

At the end the Mama handed over a kuitsi that she twirled around the top of her head with her wrist, then her daughter did the same, then her daughter’s husband, then the kids, and when everyone was done pulling their thought into the Mama’s kuitsi, he placed

\(^{321}\) Seiyua is an important sacred center amongst the Kogi

\(^{322}\) “Eysuama” in Kogi refers to a sacred site; it is what the Ika would translate as “kaduku” or “office”

it back into his bag to return it to his eysuama in Seiyua. When the visitors left the house, I began to pack my things. “How much is that?” Asked Jaba pointing to my hammock: $35,000, I said. “And this?” She asked smiling as she held up a yarn of cotton: $28,000, I replied. “And this?!” Asked her daughter, pointing to the red beads of her baby’s necklace: $30,000, I stated. As they continued playing and pointing to each one of the objects around the house and articulating a number, they assented and laughed, confirming their knowledge of ciphers, as if learning a unique language. Then in came Mama Jose Maria: “Ya!” he said, a clear cue indicating that it was time to go now. I saw the rays of the sun intricately woven in the textile of vegetation that surrounded us. “Pure gold,” I thought. The wind, the river, the songs of birds, the Mamas walking ahead of me, bright, clear, voices lifting like honey colored radiance through the foliage as I followed their foot steps all the way back to Machete.

We are suddenly back at Don Adan’s place: “Honduras,” the rock-bottom pit of two big slopes. His wife left him for another man. I remember two years back she was telling me Don Adan was frustrated, bored and spends most of his time drinking even though they are doing well with the tourism. She was pleased because they had recently been able to get electricity in their house. Don Adan is an ex guaquero and ex cocaine producer, who now survives with a share of approximately $3.00 US per tourist. A light bulb sits now right above a glass case in which Don Adan still exhibits bits and pieces of Pre-Columbian materials. As he sees me looking, he apologizes, embarrassed for not having more objects or gold. “The life of a guaquero is a hard life you know.” I ask him why. He replies: “because even though you are able to get ten times more than when you sell your crops, you spend it all on drinking and women.” Now he has acquired Direct
TV. Tourists like watching the Animal Planet channel and drinking Gatorade, he comments. I ask him about his activity as guaquero. He takes out some quartz stones to show me, each with its particular denomination: “of water, of molasses, tiger-striped, amethyst.” He tells me one of his greatest discoveries was a single burial with 64 carved jade animals: fish with different fins, tigers on wheels, toucans, deer, fox, owls, bats and chiefs. He gets excited as he points out that someone else had dug that out before him but didn’t have the luck to strike, so when he returned to the place he found it all. “Though no one has ever been as lucky as Nuri Casadiego,” he continues, who found the biggest guaca in the Troncal by the Don Diego river basin. “He took tins full of gold back to the city and opened two shops in El Rodadero.”

We continue the path until we arrive at Machete Pelado. We ask the owner of the restaurant if they can sell us some lunch. For that many people, explains the woman, the only thing they can prepare are lentils and rice. There’s neither yucca, nor plantain because no food can be grown in the area, “the government prohibited it for security reasons,” she affirms. Meanwhile, groups of tourists are coming down, moving in between 7-8 languages, some trying to translate to others whatever impressions their guides are entertaining them with.
Chapter Five. The Storyteller. Reflections on the Life and Death of Mama Luca Mojica

“All great storytellers have in common the freedom with which they move up and down the rungs of their experience as on a ladder. A ladder extending downward to the interior of the earth and disappearing into the clouds is the image for a collective experience to which even the deepest shock of every individual experience, death, constitutes no impediment or barrier.”

Figure 16. Mama Luca in 1999

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Section 5.1

It was in the year 2000 when Mama Luca read in his gourd of divination that the world was not yet ready to recover the shibulama of the Buritaca river basin, and that he had to leave those sacred sites to their own fate. This was a couple of months after we received news that Mama Francisco had died in the neighboring river basin of Don Diego. "Oh no!" lamented Mama Luca. “Oh my father died. Oh no no no no. This is a hole in my spirit. There is no one left to carry this history; I am left alone; I remain an orphan. I only have one foot now." He spoke as if an entire terrain held together by a pinnacle had come crumbling down. He was shaken. He said he felt “clouded.” Now that Mama Francisco had died he was seeing everything close up. “I can’t see far anymore. I am going to die and where will all this shibulama go?” he inquired while looking in my direction, knowing that it wasn’t part of my inheritance to feel the breadth of this gap in my body.

His wife Marina started singing. Her voice, sweet and compelling, lifted off like the flight of the hawk above us ascending through the Earth’s breath, in each one of the terraces of Teyunna. This was the song of Nujuna. “For a while we saw death coming” I wrote in my diary, “but now it is here and this is the moment that we are living

325 I would like to thank Claudio Lomnitz and my audience in the Franz Boas Seminar at Columbia University, for partaking of this reading and sharing their comments. I’m especially grateful to Xenia Cherkaev for her lucid feedback and companionship not only in this chapter but throughout this dissertation.
326 Shibulama is translated to Spanish as “Historia” or History...
327 The Buritaca river basin, also known as Mutainyi in Kogi is where Mama Luca worked to recover the...
For more on this please see Chapter 3
328 The Don Diego river basin is known as Ulueyi in Kogi. For more on Mama Francisco please see Julian Gil’s account in Chapter 3, pp. 50-51
329 Field notes from Diary of 1999 while working with the Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta
330 Field notes from Diary of 1999 while working with the Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta
331 Teyunna in the Buritaca river basin is both an ancestor and a sacred site, as well as an archaeological place known in Spanish as “Ciudad Perdida”
332 Nujuna is death
as Marina’s voice resounds in bodies within and without.” As I understood Mama Luca, it was under the thinking and the counsel of Mama Francisco that the seed of the process of recovery in the Buritaca river basin had began. He told me that together with Mama Romualdo, Mama Jose Maria, his nephew and his two wives, they went to consult Mama Francisco’s yatukua to confirm the names of the sacred sites they were recovering all around the region.

“He only came to visit us once, four years ago,” lamented Mama Luca. The tragedy is that there was no one who held enough strength to receive the totality of the shibulama that Mama Francisco had to render. Without Mama Francisco other very different threads of thought amongst the authorities in the Don Diego river basin would take over; leaders that were influenced by Evangelical sects and more concerned with increasing their cattle than recovering the ancestral sites. People feared that disarticulation and disagreement amongst the community would lead to more conflict, including the influence of armed groups.

Mama Francisco was the youngest brother of Mama Luca’s father: Mama Marcos Gil Nakogui. I met him once at the foothills of the Don Diego river basin. It was the first time that I saw a Kogi Mama that looked so ancient with so much long white hair. It was hard to guess his age but they told me that he had known the Thousand Days’ War, a Colombian civil war between Liberals and Conservatives that began in 1899 and ended in 1902. He had come down one last time to the mouth of the Don Diego River to deliver some offerings before returning to the place where he was to die far up in the mountains.

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333 Field notes from Diary of 1999 while working with the Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta
334 This is part of the initiative of recovering the Buritaca river basin known as Mutainyi. For more please read Chapter Three.
335 Yatukua is a gourd container used for divination with quartz tumas
He looked peaceful as he sat next to his wife who was stitching a bag. “Mama Francisco was getting ready to leave everything and walk to the snow peaks where the temple of Noaka sits,” remarked Mama Luca. He said that Mama Francisco had been to Bogota asking the government to return Teyunna’s gold but no one wanted to listen, so he realized that now he had to turn into gold himself: “food for the Mother,” pointed out Mama Luca.

The day after the news of Mama Francisco’s death, Mama Luca had been up all night talking. At dawn he looked tired. He stood at the terrace of Teyunna and started singing a deep long sustained inhalation. I began to hear his voice echoing everywhere. Then he listened to the shibulama that we had recently recorded with Mama Romualdo. He repeated that I had to pass on that advice. I thought he was referring to the stories we had just heard on the tape recorder and asked: “of all that, what exactly would you like me to convey?” He exploded. “Haven’t you learned anything all this time? The counsel you should take is the shibulama that we have been speaking all these months here. They come to extract guacas. I ask you: is that good or bad? What do you think? You see everyone coming here taking pictures and filming. I ask you: Is that what the Earth needs? What do you think? How do you understand the history you have been learning? Is it important or not?”

I took a deep breath and spoke from my heart because I knew this is what he would hear first. I told him that the history we had been speaking was extremely

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336 Noaka refers to the temple in the snow peaks where the Mother planted her gigantic spindle. It is here were life begins and where people return after death.
337 “Guacas” is the term used by Spanish speakers to refer to Pre-Columbian treasures dug out of ancient indigenous burial sites all around the territory.
338 Field notes from Diary of 1999 while working with the Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta.
important. It was something that I had never heard or seen before. “This shibulama to me is like dawn when I first open my eyes in the morning and see light growing all around,”³³⁹ I said that I could confirm that everything we had been speaking was true because I could see it reflected all around. When I said this, Mama Romualdo who was sitting by me said this is what Mama Luca wanted to hear pronounced in my body: “It’s true.” Mama Luca replied that he was now thinking about the Mothers and he was worried because when they went to consult the sacred names with Mama Francisco’s yatukua, he told them “he was now seeing in his yatukua that the Mother was claiming back all the big Mamas.” Mama Luca continued: “Now I’m seeing that what he said was true and when all the Mamas die, it will be the end of us. What will happen to all this shibulama?”³⁴⁰

It is in shibulama: words, songs, dance and ancestral materials, where the exchange of experience with the ancestors occurs. Mama Luca would often point to my tape recorder and say “we have tape recorders in spirit. Everything we do, what we sing sounds there where the ancestors sit... For many centuries we sang to these spiritual microphones but now these wires have been cut out and the connections are gone.”³⁴¹

Around the time of Mama Francisco’s youth, Konrad Theodor Preuss was one of the first to write the term shibulama or “sibalama” in its original language. He arrived in Kogi territory from December 1914 to April 1915 as part of an expedition in Central and South America to prove that “there was a ‘fundamental Amerindian religion’…”³⁴² Perhaps it

³³⁹ Field notes from Diary of 1999 while working with the Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta
³⁴⁰ Field notes from Diary of 1999 while working with the Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta
³⁴¹ Mama Luca, translated by Roberto Nakogui. Santa Marta: Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Sept. 1999 (Unpublished)
was the enormous amount of time that he had for contemplation, as he notes, “unusual leisure” that “I would say... breaks... up [the ethnographer] completely, in order to be reborn like another man,” that made him attentive to the depth of the meaning of Kogi concepts like this one. He leaves “Sibalama” untranslated and notes that it is “… song, dance and magical stones that have an obligatory influence on the demons,” it “… includes the whole knowledge of the mamas.” From the beginning of his writing, Preuss refers to the unique relationship that exists amongst the Kogi between the living beings and the dead ones. The Kogi don’t simply remember their ancestors, he points out, but they actually acquire their attributes.

“We come from shibulama...” said Mama Luca, from the thread “shi”:

Our birth begins like little threads that spin and rise. Everything we see comes from shibulama: the trees, even thinking comes from there... We say shibulama, you say ‘historia,’ but we understand that shibulama is where everything was born. This is also where medicine comes from. It is from shibulama that the way we sing is born... From shibulama comes the eye, right? This gives birth to the way we see. From shibulama comes the way we think, what one does, and from there comes positive and negative... It is like a base, like being born. In our language it is the same: shibulama ganacayibum, shibulama ganayibunabesum, shibulama enacayibum, shibulama nigabaka…

“We may end as a human race but this,” he said as he pointed to the Earth where we sat, “this will not end. It is here where shibulama is rising.” So we must fulfill the cleansing of death, mortuary, so that we can connect to these microphones through the nine layers of the cosmos.

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343 Op. cit., p. 29
344 Op. cit., p.130
345 Mama Luca, translated by Roberto Nakogui. Santa Marta: Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Sept. 1999 (Unpublished)
346 Mama Luca, translated by Roberto Nakogui. Santa Marta: Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Sept. 1999 (Unpublished)
Walter Benjamin quotes Paul Valery when he talks about “the perfect things in nature... ‘the precious product of a long chain of causes similar to one another. This patient process of Nature,’” continues Valery, “was once imitated by men. Miniatures, ivory carvings, elaborated to the point of greatest perfection, stones that are perfect in polish and engraving... all these products of sustained, sacrificing effort are vanishing, and the time is past in which time did not matter.”

Nikolai Leskov’s story, “The Alexandrite”, reveals such a time when the stones speak to an old Bohemian craftsman: Wentzel, as a living being would. “Wentzel was a cabbalist and mystic” and his inspiration comes not with time, notes Leskov, but with the will of the stones themselves that can be “rich and eternal” as in the case of the gems that carry the spirit of the mountain “from the primordial days.”

The lower that he descends through the hierarchy of created things into the inanimate, the more mystical he becomes, notes Benjamin. For the storyteller the lowest stratum of created things “is directly joined to the highest.” This is how it was in ancient times, says Leskov through Benjamin, “... many years ago, when the stones in the womb of the earth, and the planets high up in the skies – all were concerned with the Fate of Man.” It is here where we find the perfect craftsman and storyteller: he who “has access to the innermost chamber of the realm of created things.”

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349 Leskov, Nikolai, Op. cit., p. 201
Valery who says: “Modern man no longer works at what cannot be abbreviated.”

Benjamin suggests that this aversion to sustained effort is reflected even in the face of death. If the idea of eternity “declines, so we reason, the face of death must have changed.” In the course of modern times, continues Benjamin, dying has been pushed further and further out of the perceptual world of the living.

Mama Francisco had died and there was no way to follow the entirety of his life experience all the way through the nine layers of the cosmos where his ancestors sit. This kind of rendering of shibulama is delivered from mouth to mouth through lineages. To lose those connections as they are passed on from generation to generation, through the mouth of humans as much as the mouth of the sacred sites, is to lose the power of an entire life’s experience. A life experience delivered in the form of “shibulama”: materials buried in the womb of the earth where understanding grows through the hierarchy of created things, from the lowest stratum to the highest where Mama Francisco sits today in the form of an ancestor.

Mama Francisco’s shibulama: the knowledge and words that grew in his stones, was so vast that he did not find an inheritor, a vessel in which to deposit everything, as a storyteller would deposit the stories in the minds of his listeners. To draw from these energies, observes Walter Benjamin is to reach the unforgettable, the very thing that emerges at the moment of death and is imparted as it is passed on. But to lose this moment of death in which “not only a man’s knowledge or wisdom, but above all his real life – and this is the stuff that stories are made of- first assumes transmissible form” is

357 Op. cit., p. 94
to lose “the communicability of experience.”\textsuperscript{358} To lose this, would affirm Mama Luca, is to lose the very inheritance that sustains our thought on earth.

Walter Benjamin begins his essay: “The Storyteller. Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov,” by lamenting the loss of the storyteller as a force “in his living immediacy.”\textsuperscript{359} He observes we are losing in modern times the gift of storytelling, and with it the ability to exchange experiences. “Experience has fallen in value,” he writes, “and it looks as if it is continuing to fall into bottomlessness.”\textsuperscript{360} To refer to Nikolai Leskov as a storyteller, points out Benjamin, is to see him already at a distance. Nonetheless, as Benjamin brings Nikolai Leskov to mind, through his essay he conjures the art of storytelling and creates the very atmosphere, here and now, that allows for such an exchange of experience to occur. Benjamin draws not just upon Leskov’s stories but all the way from Herodotus in ancient Greece to 19\textsuperscript{th} C German storytellers like Johann Peter Hebel. Rather than aim to convey the pure essence of the thing “like information or a report,”\textsuperscript{361} notes Benjamin, as the storyteller fashions “the raw material of experience, his own and that of others, in a solid, useful, and unique way”\textsuperscript{362} he “sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again.”\textsuperscript{363} An entire lifetime is being passed on, “a life incidentally that comprises not only his own experience,”\textsuperscript{364} but no little of the experience of others. Thus “traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel.”\textsuperscript{365} To move through Walter

\textsuperscript{358}Op. cit., p. 93
\textsuperscript{359}Op. cit., p. 83
\textsuperscript{360}Op. cit., p. 84
\textsuperscript{361}Op. cit., p. 91
\textsuperscript{362}Op. cit., p. 108
\textsuperscript{363}Op. cit., pp. 91-92
\textsuperscript{364}Op. cit., p. 87 and p. 108
\textsuperscript{365}Op. cit., pp. 91-92
Benjamin’s essay, is to begin to feel his own tracks in the material as if he himself were leaving his trace.

The more natural the process of assimilation of the story, continues Benjamin, “the greater becomes the story’s claim to a place in the memory of the listener.”\(^\text{366}\) He suggests that this effortlessness comes associated with activities of mental relaxation, a certain kind of boredom and repetition, he says, like weaving and spinning to go on while the stories are being listened to. It is “an artisan form of communication,”\(^\text{367}\) providing us, his listeners, with a shared companionship. Without a doubt, it is this kind of transcendent companionship that comes to mind when I remember Mama Lorenzo Mojica Nakogui, better known as Mama Luca. He was not only a teller of stories but he was also a singer of history, where story, music and history refer to the same term: “shibulama” in Mama Luca’s native tongue.

**Section 5.2**

The first time I met Mama Luca in 1998 in Taganga, near the city of Santa Marta, he was in the middle of a story. As he spoke, he moved like a puppet held by an invisible thread that rose through the peak of his coned white hat, his tiny hands cupped like rivers around the bend of the mountains, twisting from left to right as if following the inflections of his voice with his body movements: “Oh, no, no, no, no,” he would say shaking his head. To hear him lament the Mother’s illness was to feel the illness itself. “Oh no, no, no, no. The Mother is ill. What are we going to do? We continue milking her to the last drop without nourishing her, she is suffering so! There are vulnerable parts in

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\(^{366}\) Op. cit., p. 91  
\(^{367}\) Op. cit., p. 91
her body that are so dry and barren now that they hurt. What are we going to do when one day we are left with no food to eat or water to drink? He expressed himself fervently as he looked out to the horizon, accomplice with the breaking of the waves against the boulders and rock caves to which he directed his high-pitched voice and movements.

Figure 17. Mama Luca to the far left, is gathered with other Mamas and a Saxa while he speaks shibulama by the sea in Yiraca (known in Spanish as Gairaca)

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368 Mama Luca, translated by Roberto Nakogui. Santa Marta: Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Sept. 1999 (Unpublished)
It was difficult to guess Mama Luca’s age. I remember when in 1999 I accompanied him to an eye surgery in Bogota, a very serious looking nurse appeared with eyeglasses propped upon the tip of her nose and a long sheet clipped to a slate. Insistently clicking on the top of her royal blue pen that contrasted greatly with her white glossy nail polish, head down, focused on the blank questionnaire with check boxes. She interrogated: “Name?” “Mama Luca” I answered. “Address?” “Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta.” Can you be a little bit more specific?” She asked as her rising eyebrows lifted the tone of her sentence. “Buritaca river basin” I added. She didn’t seem too satisfied, but continued: “Social security number?” “He doesn’t have one,” I replied. This lead her to finally, glance over her eyeglasses and notice Mama Luca, Catalina his wife, Manuelito, one of his apprentices, the baby, Marina his second wife, Teresa his granddaughter, all smiling at her from their seats, one after the other in a row, with their long cotton white robes, colorful hand knitted bags and cascades of beads hanging. Without a hint of a beam on her face, she drew a black horizontal line across that question. “Age?” she continued. Pause. “Jate how old are you?” I turned around to ask. He said nine harvests of the Kanyi palm. His wife, Catalina, who was sitting next to him and had perceived the nurse’s annoyance, eagerly voiced: “nine!” The nurse raised her eyebrows again and turned to me utterly dissatisfied, so I stated: “nine times nine years that it takes for the Kanyi palm to give fruit; maybe you should write approximately eighty-one.” However, it was hard to believe that Mama Luca could be that age, for his face was so full of youth and he laughed so much, that one would think he was a child.

369 According to Dr. Carmen Barraquer, Mama Luca had terminally lost 80% of his vision. I thank her and her team in the Clinica Barraquer for removing his cataracts for free and, as he would say, for “bringing back dawn to his eyes.”
He had long black hair that hung straight down his shoulders. He wore a thick white robe made of woven cotton and a knitted white hat that stood like the peaks in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, for as he would say so himself: it was there where his thought was connected like cool refreshing water: “ñi suixse,” moving through the earth. He wore a striped black and white cotton bag that his wives stitched for him. He always went around with beads and instruments in his bag for he would use them to uplift the spirit of nature as much as that of people. Sometimes one could hear a kind of rattling laughter in him, in between singing and speaking. He often marked the music with his command stick, a staff made of hard wood with bells and a ball of red threads that hung at the end: “aseguranzas” secured materially and spiritually with “kunchawa” as Mama Luca would say, the vision that comes from aluna.

Mama Luca received this staff after years of training in Makotama, a Kogi town near the snow peaks. This is a well-known school for Mamas. Those who have been there explain they are raised eating only plantain starch, native white beans and black maize without salt. They can only bathe at nighttime and during several years they avoid being out in the sunlight. They are taught to sit in the nujue with their knees scooped up against their shoulders, hands crossed over their legs, eyes half closed and fixed upon their feet, like the foothills of the Mountain where the elder ancestors sit in darkness. They learn to set their concentration on that one point, without losing their attention and awareness and from there they begin to spiral up: “to rise” as Mama Luca would say.

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370 An “aseguranza” or “protection” comes in the form of stones, tumas, threaded cotton, wood or whatever material is being used to bring back the energy from aluna, where the ancestors sit, and tie it there
371 Kunchawa in Kogi means vision
372 Aluna refers to memory, thought, imagination where all things originate in spirit and where the ancestral Fathers and Mothers live
373 A nujue in Kogi is a temple
When they come of age they are allowed outside. This is when they meet the incandescent white, the color of yui: the sun, which is imprinted in their minds as they learn to deliver the offerings to each element on Earth. “Que va!” “Nonsense!” would say Mama Luca when asked about the benefits of this education. His personal opinion was that in order to learn to concentrate and deliver offerings in the nujues where the Fathers and the Mothers sit in aluna, it was unnecessary to have to bear so many years of this collective schooling.

Mama Luca was a master musician. If he didn’t play the instruments himself he would play his tape recorder. He loved it when people gave him recordings of traditional indigenous songs as much as Vallenato coastal music and Rancheras imported from Mexico. He had a gift for languages and is the only person whom I have known to speak all four native tongues of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta: Kogi, Wiwa, Kankuamu and Ika. He was much sought after by members of all groups, for apart from being able to communicate in their language, he seemed to comprehend their worldly matters in such depth that he always had useful counsel to offer. He was a connoisseur of plants that cured all kinds of illnesses. He had trekked so many climate ranges, from the tundra region to the coastal cities, and towns in and around the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta that he knew where to find what he needed.

As my long time Ika friends, Cheichi and Zati’s daughters,³⁷⁴ described him to me before I ever met him: Mama Luca was “an effective mamo,” “un mamo efectivo,” and “a wise man.”³⁷⁵ He had lived for years in the river basin of Donachui in the Cesar region and they heard that he was now in Taganga. There had been illness and problems in their

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³⁷⁴ For more on Cheichi and Zati please see Chapter One
³⁷⁵ Field notes from Diary of 1998
home lately, maybe because Cheichi’s marunsama\textsuperscript{376} was demanding something, they wondered, and went there to consult him. When I arrived in a taxi from Santa Marta with Cheichi’s family I was introduced as someone who had shared many experiences with them in Windiwa and who liked to work with the Mamos. Mama Luca saw my Ika marunsama, he cleared the path for my work in the Buritaca river basin, sang Chicote songs\textsuperscript{377} and since then retained his knowledge of my relationship with “Peibu,”\textsuperscript{378} as the Kogi refer to the Ika.

During the eleven years that I knew Mama Luca, I never once saw him alone, for he went around in the company of his family and apprentices converging in the words as he articulated his thoughts. There were always children moving about. “Shibulamu was planted by our ancestors and it is growing… and filling everything that is surrounding us,”\textsuperscript{379} he would say. He was stimulated by the sound of his listeners who many times replied: “ah yes, it is true.” “To assent,” pointed out Mama Luca, “is to feel the words rising in you.”\textsuperscript{380} Walter Benjamin observes that as a storyteller’s experience is passed on, he deposits his story in the memory of the community of listeners. While spending time with Mama Luca, I realized that this memory upon which the storyteller is embedding shibulama, not only includes people, but all of nature: birds, animals, the wind, the pools of water, boulders, the sea, taking part in the rising of the story in moonlit nights sitting by the fire or at daytime when the sun is up high. As he spoke he was attentive to the sounds of birds; the rustling of the wind that flows or diverges; the

\textsuperscript{376} Marunsama are the stones where the Ika deposit their life experience
\textsuperscript{377} Chicote refers to Ika songs adapted to the accordion
\textsuperscript{378} Peibu in Kogi means friend
\textsuperscript{379} Mama Luca, translated by Roberto Nakogui. Santa Marta: Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Sept. 1999 (Unpublished)
\textsuperscript{380} Field notes from Diary of 2000
rumbling that one hears sometimes in the pools of water that reply; or the influence of the sea as much as the earth, where the ancestors are sitting underneath, listening all around and either: “receiving the history well” as Mama Luca would say “or digressing.”

I would usually see his audience entertained in some rhythmic activity, whether it was chewing coca with the poporos, spinning the spindles or stitching mochilas. In this way, as the storyteller molded his story, he deposited his experience in the community of listeners sitting around him, while fashioning the articulation of his thoughts like a kind of writing in the mouth of the poporos and the threads growing on the spindles and mochilas. “Storytelling, in its sensory aspect” is not only a question of the voice, notes Benjamin, but there is something else that materializes. “With these words, soul, eye, and hand are brought into connection” in such a way that they determine a practice, he points out, a mix of repetitive activity amidst a shared companionship.

As I continued visiting Mama Luca in Taganga, he said he was paying an offering to Jaba Selugetakan, the Mother of Taganga. One of his apprentices who tried to explain to me the depth of Selugetakan’s name, commented: “Mama Luca is standing and taking his first step where all things begin in “Se.” “Ta” is where we step when we are rising,” he continued, and “Takan is that step forward. The Mama is rising from Se.” One of his listeners, Mariana, commented: “as we sit here and speak the histories of the Mother, it is

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381 Field notes from Diary of 1999 while working with the Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta
382 Poporos are gourd containers with lime extracted from burnt and crushed sea shells used to chew coca leafs
383 Mochilas are hand-stitched bags made of cotton, synthetic yarn, sisal, or sometimes wool, as in the case of the Ika mochilas. As a thread is transformed into the navel of the bag, this is named the origin of the bag, which comes from aluna. Once you have the navel you stitch around it as it opens like a flower and then it begins to grow nine levels like the nine stages when a baby develops in a womb
like we’re breathing with her."³⁸⁶ “Now we are singing in Taganga, Ta – gan – ga,” articulated Mama Luca.

This is where Mother Selugetakan sits. It is where the Mother of all instruments, of the horn, of everything sits. It is like a store with everything we need: hammocks, sardines, blankets, flashlights, bread, rice, oil, just like what we see today but in aluna. At the highest point of the hill, towards the other side of the bay, sits the temple of Makra: the Mother of gold masks. Followed by the house of Sisigua: the Mother of monkeys. Seokukui and Serankua left all these names for all of us inhabitants of the Earth. Without this shibulama we couldn’t communicate with our ancestors.³⁸⁷

What a contrast between listening to Mama Luca’s shibulama and hearing the pounding base of the techno music that came tumbling down from the neighboring hotels all around us in Taganga, a fishermen’s town of around 3,000 inhabitants famous for providing full service of drugs and prostitution to cheap tourism. Perched in the opening to the Tayrona National Natural Park,³⁸⁸ it constitutes a kind of infernal paradise that holds a strange tension between traditional families of fishermen trying to survive, alongside a hard drug industry. One feels the dynamic of a growing marijuana and cocaine trade around this impoverished town, surrounded by the idyllic blue green water of the Caribbean with old canoes, their names carved or painted on them: Pillao, Slasipuedes II, Doña Marta, la Niña Yanira, Maria del Mar II, Nostalgia, La Negra, Minerva, El Rafi, La Muñeca del Mar, Katrina, Virgen del Carmen, El Palomo Zuliaga, Yucelli, Dalia, El Paton, La Niña Juana, Milagro de Dios...

³⁸⁶ Field notes from Diary of 1999 while working with the Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta
³⁸⁷ Mama Luca, translated by Roberto Nakogui. Santa Marta: Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Sept. 1999 (Unpublished)
³⁸⁸ The Tayrona National Natural Park or Parque Nacional Natural Tayrona is a protected area of 12,000 hectares between the Caribbean Sea and the mountainous terrain of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta
These canoes are seen increasingly parked on the shore rather than fishing in the sea. They are made of single blocks of hard wood from the Caracoli tree\textsuperscript{389} that along with other riches from the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, are disappearing. The artisan fishing here is barely able to survive the destruction of the sea life by coal mining industry and large-scale modern-commercial fishing practices that are taking over.

\textit{Figure 18. Boats in Taganga}

It is mostly older fishermen that one finds patiently sitting in their canoes, day and night, rocking in the sea, or standing by the shore with their nets in hand, waiting to catch something other than plastic bottles, diapers, old shoes and car tires that come running down with the overflowing rivers into the sea. My Kogi friend Paulina Zalabata explains to me that the sea doesn’t receive the rivers at once, but engages them in

\textsuperscript{389}The Caracoli tree is a species of \textit{anarcadium excelsum}
alunashiguashi\textsuperscript{390} beforehand. Once the alunashiguashi is complete they enter, but all the rubbish is discarded. The fishermen from Taganga, sitting in the beach of Sisiguaka, agree to this and affirm: “the sea discards what is not hers.” They know the currents and advice tourists not to go in. I see plastics, bottles, paper, old shoes and foam being pushed out at every shore. “We think that when we no longer see the things we throw out, they disappear by magic, but where does all of this go?” I say to Paulina. She adds: “And not just the things but where do our thoughts go?”\textsuperscript{391} The fishermen in Taganga are keen observers of the sea but their children are no longer compelled to follow their call. Instead there is a general trend to seek the money so as to train in a technical career, or become a policeman or a soldier for an army of some kind, or otherwise join webs of crime or drugs that seem like the only way out of the overgrowing despair.

Newspapers often publish stories about some recent felony in Taganga, like the five young inhabitants who were captured in Aruba in 2010. They were believed to be part of the international web of “Urabeños” that send drugs to Aruba, Central America, the United States and Europe. Three hundred twenty five kilograms of cocaine were buried in Chengue, a beach that’s not far from Taganga. It was estimated at eight million dollars. Furthermore, the current mayor of Santa Marta who governs the borough of Taganga, declared an emergency situation due to sexual diseases transmitted to minors in an ever-growing sex industry. Teenagers from Cartagena, Santa Marta and Antioquia are seen coming in and walking out of hotels with clients. One of these places is mentioned in the national newspaper, El Tiempo,\textsuperscript{392} for it was closed in January 13 of 2012. Its owner: Yossed Shimon is believed to be part of a group of ex militaries from Israel that

\textsuperscript{390} Alunashiguashi is translated as confession, for more please see Chapter Three
\textsuperscript{391} Field notes from Diary of 2010
describe themselves as “international investors” and go around highly armed in SUV bubbles with dark windows.

It was more than a decade before the official outbreak of this problem, that I first met Mama Luca near these hotels in J’s place. Lined with stone steps that rise around a series of terraces, my friend J had built his house in the terrain that he inherited from his mother, decades ago. It appeared as though the more than two hundred terraces that made part of Teyunna, where J had worked and lived intensely as a young man, had crept into his dreams and had now come out to inspire the structure of his own home. J declared that the highest terrace in his compound was for Mama Luca to stay whenever he pleased. When I arrived I found Mama Luca lying in a hammock, overlooking the whole bay as he spoke and played history. It was close to noon, when J emerged out of a lower terrace where he built his own room. Another Taganguero393 was calling out his name from the beach in order to launch him his morning breakfast: a ball of tightly packed marijuana that he declared was a tradition that he was proud of. According to him this was part of what came with having the “tough Wayuu blood” from the Northern desert land “running through the veins,” as is characteristic of being “Taganguero.”

Once he finished smoking his joint, he climbed down the stairs with his Bob Marley-like cap and started disputing to whatever ears were listening around in his neighborhood of “international investors”: “Do you hear me?! Taganguero tradition has existed long before the Gringos and the Israelis pretended to take over this land! There’s no way I’m going to sell my house to any of you crooks, try and throw me out of here and you’ll see!”394 At that point, Mama Luca peered out of his terrace above and scolded

393 “Taganguero” means from Taganga
394 Field notes from Diary of 1998 while working with the Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta
J for drinking and smoking too much. He knew J from years back as do many of the Kogi that visit Taganga. “Man!” replied J “if you weren’t a Kogi I would throw you out this instant! You think I would take your shit from anyone else?” Mama Luca retorted with his fond laughter and said: “You know that words, history, music all cost. They are gold for the Mother. What I’m doing here is helping you.”

Figure 19. Ramon Gil and his wife Maria de la Cruz: Mama Luca’s sister, with their son and grandchildren rendering offerings in Taganga

Section 5.3

J describes himself as “a firm believer in the magic of Indians.” According to him, this is another one of “Taganguero traditions.” The elders of Taganga claim that the exchange between the people of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta and the fishermen living there: connections between the lands below and those above, go all the way back to ancient Pre-Columbian times.

Mama Lorenzo Lozano’s father was the son of a great Mama in the river basin of Don Diego and his wife: Juana Gil was a Saxa. When her husband died, she began

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395 Field notes from Diary of 1998 while working with the Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta
396 For more on the story of Mama Lorenzo Lozano please see Chapter Three and Chapter Four
397 Women are trained to develop their spiritual powers and become Saxas
to accept the visits of an unusual yalyi\textsuperscript{398} man: “the Old Man Angel” they called him in Taganga, who had climbed up there by himself to try to “survive in that jungle.” It wasn’t easy he remembered. “I lived so many things in my life, that it would be impossible for you to record them all,” he would often say to me. It took him years to learn to hunt because he would get lost trying to follow the tracks of animals. He would go fishing but he wouldn’t catch anything in those rivers. After a long time it was Juana Gil whom he said taught him everything he knew. Then when she died he returned to Taganga. He always expressed his gratitude to her and her family for accepting him as her husband and teaching him. “They are good people,” he affirmed frequently. The kind of people he said he used to know when he was growing up. As a kid he lived in an extremely poor neighborhood, “but there was never lack of food,” he stated. “One would always see the plates of food coming and going from one house to another because you knew that just as you were able to give today, you might need tomorrow. Nowadays things are very different around here,” he would point out. “Now you find hungry people everywhere and no one to give them anything.”\textsuperscript{399}

The Old Man Angel: heir to the memories in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, remained in a small house towards the slopes of Taganga without being able to walk properly and with hardly any possessions of his own, except for the secrets that he had shared with Juana Gil. His adopted Kogi grandchildren, such as Mama Romualdo and Mama Jose Maria would stay with him whenever they came down to deliver offerings in the sea and fulfill errands in the city. I would sometimes visit Angel on the weekends and rest next to him for a few hours, observing the sea that came and went, as it drifted away

\textsuperscript{398} Yalyi means non-indigenous  
\textsuperscript{399} Field notes from Diary of 2000
with all of Angel’s silent thoughts until he died in 2007. One day when I was ready to return to the city of Bogota, he said to me: “always remember that when you are carrying worries in your body, you should release them like an outlet to the sea.”

Nikolai Leskov “tells us that the epoch in which man could believe himself to be in harmony with nature has expired,” but “the storyteller keeps faith with it.” And in keeping with this is epic remembrance itself. A historian, continues Benjamin, has to explain the happenings with which he deals, but a chronicler can content himself with displaying them as models of the course of the world. The chronicler, he says, is the historyteller. In its very nature, observes Benjamin, Nikolai Leskov’s story “The Alexandrite,” is “outside all real historical categories.” The time when historytelling was not about measuring time but marking it so as to acknowledge the scale of created things, both animate and inanimate.

Follow Taganga’s slopes down from Angel’s house to the shore line and you will find J’s place where Mama Luca had a full view of the hill that the mother of Taganga inhabits; the same hill where the high-security buildings of privatized land bought by so-called “investors” are today. Mama Luca spoke and sang in Jaba Selugetakan’s direction, a big cave by the foothills where as he said “it’s in this nujue where she sits. This is where the head of millions of indigenous people is; Jate Malula was his name. He was the maximum authority. This cave comes from Se and it’s where the strength was left to heat the earth, like burning fire. It is here where one must sit and speak something like

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400 Field notes from Diary of 2000
403 Op. cit., p. 97
refreshing thought, something suiaxze that cools the earth from inside.” There’s water running throughout the earth like blood running through family lines, he pointed out. We see the lakes above and the sea below, and we think that everything is descending but in aluna it’s rising. That is why the origin lays in the foothills by the sea, where the elder sisters are. These are wetlands known as “Madre Viejas” or “Ancient Mothers.” As they reproduce they begin to rise through their descendants. Their daughters and granddaughters are up above in the form of lakes. This is how each one was organized, the younger sisters communicating with their older sisters through the vessels where the crystal quartz is nestled, all the way from the sea up to the snow peaks. There are different kinds of lakes, each one with its Mother, its family members, and its heads. They have family connections just like our great grandparents are connected to us. Our ancestors: the elders are in the grounds below us and as life continues, the family lines rise through their descendants: the youngest generations above.

To hear Mama Luca’s memory articulated like “that slow piling one on top of the other” as Benjamin says, “of thin, transparent layers which constitutes the most appropriate picture of the way in which the perfect narrative is revealed through the layers of a variety of retellings,” was to see the traces of the storyteller clinging to the story just like the craftsmanship of nature leaving its tracks in the Earth, or the handprints of the potter embracing the clay vessel. “Memory,” points out Benjamin, “creates the chain of tradition which passes a happening on from generation to generation.”

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404 Mama Luca, translated by Roberto Nakogui. Santa Marta: Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Sept. 1999 (Unpublished)
“In the beginning it was only spirit that unfolds like a baby that grows in a womb until it’s conceived on Earth,” continued Mama Luca articulating shibulama along with the other Mamas that accompanied him. “Each place was left organized with its eyes, its mouth and its arms.” Without the wisdom of the ancestors who arranged everything before us, we could not see. “They came first. They are not just the spirits of human beings but also the spirits of each element in nature. But the Little Younger Brothers don’t see that. They have desecrated these places and now they are weak. Some of the Mothers of water can hardly get up anymore and walk through the Earth, they are drying out.” That is why we have to give them life force through offerings and sing to the quartz so that they can get up again. When we talk and sing sweet and refreshing thought, we begin to rise with them through the spirit of their family lines, “searching, searching, to see where we arrive.”

The Kogi Mamas that work with the Kogi governor today: Jose de los Santos, are constantly pointing out that they know how to nourish these sites and that it’s urgent to fulfill these offerings. They appeal to reporters, anthropologists, filmmakers, politicians, governors, international human rights activists, indigenous organizations and anyone who will listen. They say they come down to deliver the offerings where the connections are. These are like yatukuas or sites of divination around the Earth. Places in caves or on flat terrains with receptacles in rocks that hold bounded water, meaning that it doesn’t have an outflow. This is usually where Jaba Ñinejan: the Mother of water lies in the form of gold and crystal quartz. But they say that many times when they come down the

407 Mama Luca, translated by Roberto Nakogui. Santa Marta: Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Sept. 1999 (Unpublished)
408 Mama Luca, translated by Roberto Nakogui. Santa Marta: Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Sept. 1999 (Unpublished)
Mountain, they cannot access these places because they either find that the quartz and gold is gone, or else they find a new Little Younger Brother saying: “I am the owner of this site. This is private property. You cannot trespass.”

The Mother was here before us and now we are killing her children. ‘How many pains have you caused my daughters all the way from the beach up to the tundra region?’ Asks the Mother. The Little Younger Brothers who are living below are drying up the wells and the springs. ‘But how are you going to live without me?’ She asks. Maybe we should take someone, cut a piece of their hand off and ask: do you feel that, or don’t you? And if they say they do feel it, then they will comprehend what the Earth is feeling now that we are hurting her.409

Mama Luca was referring to this problem a decade before in Taganga. He pointed out that when Seokukui and Semukuexe “brought the thread seishiya around, as they fertilized these places, the Mother of water began to rise where the terraces are. It was here that all water was paid for. When the sun came all things in Taganga: the trees, the underbrush that runs along the seacoast, and all medicinal plants were born. But these terraces are now gone. There is no water in Taganga. The mother of Ninejan, the white quartz, has been dug out. Without these terraces there is no access to the mothers of water, no control. So how are we going to organize this now? We can no longer live as we did before.”410 To bring the thread around in the understanding, the thinking and the spirit of his community of listeners, just as the ancestors did when the Earth was coming about, is to fill the experience with new life. The life that is given to the “experience which is passed on from mouth to mouth”411 in the story, notes Walter Benjamin, is like a gentle flame that continues to burn, and “the storyteller... is the man who could let the

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409 I thank the filmmaker Alan Ereira for allowing me to take part in the consultation that was carried out in Tungeka in July of 2010, while Mama Luis, Mama Luntana, Mama Manuel, Mama Jose Maria, Mama Sintana and others were discussing the film they wanted to make as part of the Kogi governor’s project
410 Mama Luca, translated by Roberto Nakogui. Santa Marta: Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Sept. 1999 (Unpublished)
411 Op. cit., p. 84
wick of his life be consumed completely by the gentle flame of his story.”

Thus the story does not consume itself in the moment, like information that ceases to be new the moment that it’s released. A story instead, “preserves and concentrates its strength and is capable of releasing it even after a long time” To be “capable after thousands of years of arousing astonishment and thoughtfulness” is what a storyteller does.

Mama Santos, a contemporary of Mama Luca, who knew him well when they were growing up as kids, says that his father: Mama Don Juan never had to descend to the sea to pay the offerings because all the connections remained, so he could speak, sing and follow the lines in aluna all the way down. “My father, Mama Don Juan, knew all those places. He didn’t need to go to the sea in order to get there. He only had to come down to Mingueo, which was all forest then. He never saw the sea but he knew how to communicate from above, like when Paulina can hear you when you are speaking on the telephone. In the same way, the lakes above can communicate with those below.”

However, now that the Mothers have been dug out, Mama Santos has to come down physically to pay his offerings. While standing in Taganga, Mama Luca recalled:

I remember when the great Mama Don Juan, who died in the Palomino river basin in the 1980’s would say that the Younger Little Brothers will come and generate heat, problems, hot waters, there in the base that sustains the Earth. He used to say that the lakes up above in the Sierra are protecting this heat below so that it doesn’t explode. We must pay something like a tax down here so that it remains in balance. But we are worried because the Little Brothers continue looting and bringing more heat. They don’t believe what the Mamas say. If the proper offerings are not delivered there, this heat can explode and release much evil and problems. Father of Fire: Jate Gorseinxi, can bring about problems, lightning;

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413 Op. cit., p. 90
415 Field notes from Diary of 2011
416 Field notes from Diary of 2011
volcanoes of the Sierra, lakes up above that will come crumbling down into the sea as all the water dries up.  

When Mama Luca stopped talking, I switched off my tape recorder. He turned around and looked at me. I was feeling a kind of overwhelming excitement for everything that was happening. Amused by my reaction he said: “Yalyi doesn’t understand, right?” referring to me. I answered in plural: “No. We are blind Jate” He looked into my eyes again and said: “No, not blind. It is that your ears are obstructed.” At that point I closed my eyes and behind the techno music, the motor boats and the buses, “I heard the sea, the wind, big and small birds all around, some closer, others farther, fantastic sounds that I could not begin to distinguish, rising from the sacred sites all around.”

Mama Luca articulated and sang shibulama for years in each of the sacred sites, or “eysuamas” in Kogi, not only in Taganga but also along the higher river basins like Mutainyi. As Mama Romualdo would say, he was “doing mortuary... like pulling back the memory.” It is here where the connections between the sites above and those below continue growing. Mama Luca was, as Narges Erami suggests in her reading of Benjamin’s Storyteller, like a weaver and spinner, ascending and descending as the storyteller does through the rungs of a ladder. Erami attributes this influence in Walter Benjamin, to the kabbala linked to “the ten emanations through which God manifests himself.” She notices nine gradations in each part of his essay through which he

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417 Mama Luca, translated by Roberto Nakogui. Santa Marta: Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Sept. 1999 (Unpublished)
418 Field notes from Diary of 1999 while working with the Fundacion Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta
419 Mutainyi is the Kogi name for the Buritaca river basin
420 Please see Chapter Three for more
descends with a pivot half way: in Part X, when he introduces the face of death. At this point he begins to ascend another nine sections, one for each rung. In this way, she marks Benjamin’s movement that is as consistent as the chronology he observes in Johann Peter Hebel’s story: “Unexpected Reunion”, in which as Benjamin points out, death appears with “the same regularity as the Reaper does in the processions that pass around the cathedral clock at noon.”423 “Never has a storyteller embedded his report deeper in natural history,”424 observes Benjamin. “Death is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell... In other words, it is natural history to which his stories refer back.”425

To dispose of everything so as to pass on one’s life experience at the moment of one’s death, is the authority of death. “This authority is at the very source of the story,”426 observes Benjamin. “Listen well Jaba,” I heard my friend Paulina’s voice through a weak mobile connection from her Kogi hometown in Pueblo Viejo, where she stands in the only spot where there’s a signal, without budging an inch so as not to lose it. On my side, I was winding through the curves of the “Circunvalar Avenue” towards the eastern mountains of the city of Bogota. As my taxi driver continued at full speed, I heard her voice drifting close and then moving away. Again another call: “As I was saying Jaba, you have to find all kinds of food, quartz of all colors and $2,000 pesos worth in.” Pause. The third call: “You find yellow coins of $100 and complete around $2,000 pesos. You concentrate and think that you are giving him all kinds of nourishment through the

424 Op. cit., p. 95
426 Op. cit., p. 94
material: fish, rice, oil, cheese, roasted coca leaves, bread, beans, long onion, you insert everything in the material."^{427}

I had told Paulina that I was having continuous dreams about Mama Luca. The last one was very strange. I went spiraling up to the top of an higueron^{428} tree from where I saw his site in Raquira. “Well Jaba he is asking for all kinds of nourishment” replied Paulina, “and since you are his daughter he is requesting this from you.” As I heard her say I had to give him “toda clase de alimentos” I remembered Mama Luca’s voice instructing us by the seashore of Taganga to concentrate our thought, and in our minds gather “toda clase de alimentos,” all kinds of food for Jaba Selugetakan. As we concentrated cotton yarn, bread, cheese, oil, rice, fish, hammocks, candles, flashlight, batteries, chocolate, cooking utensils, “everything of gold” for her, he moved his wrists in her direction as if he were sending her all these articulated thoughts. I lay back on the ridge of the rock with my tape recorder in hand, faced the hill where Selugetakan sat, and

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^{427} Field notes from Diary of 2010
^{428} Higueron is a *ficus aurea* tree
began to wonder in my mind. After a couple of hours Mama Luca turned around and said to me laughing: “you got lost.” More than a decade later, my communication with Paulina continued to break off five times and five times I called her back until I gathered enough information to collect the offerings I now needed for him, and prepare my journey to the place where he laid buried near a town called Raquira, three hours away from Bogota.

Upon my return to Colombia in 2009 I received a phone call from L, one of Mama Luca’s followers in Raquira. I heard L’s voice: “the old man has left us.” He died on July 31, 2009. Mama Luca had arrived to Bogota in 2001 with the Chagas disease, a heart so oversized that he was coughing up blood. He was treated with pills to control his terminal illness and was diagnosed one year left to live. Nevertheless, Mama Luca continued the next eight years preparing his death. He carried out his divination all around the territory until he found the hill of the Deer in Raquira, which he saw was the place where he had to render his life’s experience. By this point, he had learnt to speak Spanish. His followers: a mix of indigenous and yalyi disciples, “my children”, he called them, tried to abide by his instructions and will but had some difficulty at the end when he asked to be left to dehydrate and die. When they saw him so feeble they insisted on taking him back to the medical center so as to hydrate, nourish and save him from death. This is expected in a milieu in which as Benjamin says, it has become less frequent to

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429 I thank Doctor Reynaldo Cabrera and the Fundacion Cardio Infantil in Bogota, where they so generously received and treated Mama Luca for the Chagas disease. Chagas is known as American Trypanosomiasis that is carried by the “pito” insect or kissing bug. When an infected pito bites a person, it inserts poison that reaches the heart and after a few years it begins to swell.
sleep in a room that has been touched by death and “the thought of death has declined in omnipresence and vividness.”

L continued his account on the phone: Mama Luca’s family took over the whole situation, he said, and allowed him to die “the way they do.” Mama Luca had asked to be left outside his hut, in the hilltop in Raquira where the sky is so clear that the stars seem like white gems embroidered upon a black cloak. This was the roof above his head, and the base was a mat where he laid for several nights by a fire that had been lit outside to keep him warm and to help him dehydrate, until the moment he could leave his body, get up and continue walking his path. It is at the moment of death, points out Benjamin, that a man’s entire experience is released step by step, “as a sequence of images is set in motion inside a man as his life comes to an end,” he continues, “suddenly in his expressions and looks the unforgettable emerges and imparts to everything that concerned him that authority.” As I heard L’s description I wondered what had gone through Mama Luca’s mind in that precise moment of release, in which he looked into the face of the night full of stars.

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Mama Luca had instructed his yalyi community on the rituals necessary to propel him to the afterlife, all the way to where the Mother sits in Noaka. He explained to them that he was “too heavy” meaning he had such spiritual density, not unlike the density of the stones that in “The Alexandrite” Wentzel identifies without looking⁴³² that they could not carry him through nujuna or the death ritual. They needed help from the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta to animate the energy that connects to Noaka, the temple in the snow peaks. He specified what Mamas to bring.

Three mamas along with the rest of Mama Luca’s family travelled hundreds of miles from the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta all the way to Raquira so as to tie the thread

of Mama Luca’s shibulama in the site where the Mother of the Deer sits, as well as in the hearts and the understanding of the community that lives there and that will continue to remember Mama Luca like their “Jate” or Father. Ramon Gil\textsuperscript{433} also came with his first wife Maria de la Cruz and her twin sister Isabel, both of whom were Mama Luca’s beloved sisters. They carried song, dance, words, ancestral stones, quartz, pieces of ancient pots, leaves of frailejon\textsuperscript{434} from the tundra region to fulfill the cleansing, gold, coca leaves and native foods with them in the three-day bus ride. When they arrived, Mama Luca’s “powers,”\textsuperscript{435} were waiting for them: his staff and his bag with his poporo, yatukua and aseguranzas. The Mamas had to tie shibulama there because his novice community did not have the experience to do it.

In an attempt to find connections to their indigenous past, an identity that has been greatly lost in the land that used to be occupied by the Muisca Confederation of Chibcha-speaking people around the central Highlands of Colombia, Mama Luca’s followers call themselves “neo-Muiscas.” They obeyed his instructions. In the place assigned by the old tree where Mama Luca had been concentrating for years, they dug out a hole several meters below the surface of the ground. It had to continue straight down, under the tree with a lateral chamber that would not damage its roots. It is here where they buried the big ceramic pot in which Mama Luca now sat like an ancestor, with his quartz stones, gold and his staff.

When he released his breath, continued L, they sat him in fetal position, wrapped like a mummy in a white woven tunic. They left him like that near the fire in his nujue. In

\textsuperscript{433} Ramon Gil is the authority in the Guachaca river basin. For more please see Chapter Three
\textsuperscript{434} Frailejon is... All four indigenous groups in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta use it when they carry out their death rituals. Mama Luca also told me that this plant was useful for mountain sickness.
\textsuperscript{435} Please see Teyunna’s story and the question about where he could have left his bag in Chapter Three
this way, as he sat in the same position in which as a kid in Makotama he learnt to concentrate with the ancestors, he started drying up and when it was time they deposited him in the ceramic vase with pieces of ancient ceramic and a cotton thread that was to be wrapped around his big toes in his feet, then around his hands crossed over his legs, embracing his poporo and finally, through his white coned hat all the way to the surface of the earth, by the tree. Another gourd container was placed face down on the ground, in between a mound of rocks where the connection of the thread converged.

This thread “shi” was the cord Seeeshiya that Mama Luca had articulated so many times in his stories, all the way from the first level: “Se,” where all things are still in darkness. Now that death had come, the thread could materialize on Earth providing the connection to the place where he would now: an ancestor, sit in aluna. I can still hear his voice articulating shibulama and saying: “crecemos como algo hilitos” we grow like little threads. This thread “Shi” continues all the way up to where the roots of the tree grow through the hierarchy of created things from the inanimate to the animate.

When I arrived right after his death, I brought two gold reproductions of Tairona feminine frogs: their bodies flattened out and their eyes less protruding than the masculine ones. Mama Luca taught me that when someone dies these frogs turn into “marunsama” as they are animated to become wives that accompany the dead man in his journey. To consolidate their eysuama like a kind of hearth where others can gather and concentrate their thought as they draw the shibulama that grows in the sacred site, is what Mamas are expected to fulfill in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. However, Mama Luca chose to die and render himself outside the Sierra. His Neo-Muisca followers say he’s
now “a pilaster for the Muisca people. It is not that we want to turn into something strange” comments one of the leaders, “it’s that we want to be people: Muisca People.”

Mama Luca’s case is exceptional. The Kogi governor at the time: Arregoces Conchacala, strongly manifested his disagreement when he left. In the Kogi governor’s eyes, Mama Luca ended up rendering himself to a group of people that were neither Kogi nor familiar with the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. It is not clear whether after Mama Francisco’s death, Mama Luca who consistently worried about the fate of shibulama, was not in fact, planting shibulama in new grounds and opening a different understanding in a yalyi community. We are yet to see this shibulama unfold in the life and minds of his listeners, as much as the sites that they inhabit in and around Bogota. Nevertheless, it was a challenging situation. He left a difficult social context imbued with violence and conflict and rendered himself to a group of diverse people competing for knowledge, money issues, land rights and attention. They brought him alcohol and he had to resist the threat of alcoholism, which abounds everywhere, in and outside the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. Furthermore, he had to articulate and hold together a body of followers that did not have the ancestral connections or the tradition of the Mamas with their yatukuas to help them access, live and render a collective experience. “He came here to weave thought, sites and community” I wrote in my field notes, “but it’s very hard to achieve it.”436 According to Arregoces Conchacala, to plant shibulama outside the Sierra is to diverge the energy that belongs to that vast mountainous terrain where it should always return. But when Mama Luca heard this he said: “que va!” “nonsense!” in those moments that were so common with him, in which one didn’t know whether to call him a rebel or a visionary. It seemed consistent with Mama Luca’s personality to trek new grounds, both

436 Field notes from Diary of 2004
through his experience of life as much as his experience of death, and in this way open pathways and find new thresholds.

A year after his death, I was back in Raquira: a town in Boyaca that attracts a great number of tourists for its beautiful landscape, brightly colored houses and pottery. I walked into a coffee shop and was taken by surprise when I saw images of Miss Universe 2010 in Las Vegas. “He’s the boss!” cried out the announcer with her bright silver sleeveless dress. “It’s amazing, continued celebrating the anchorwoman as the camera showed a close up of Donald Trump, ”apparently every time he picks a girl that he likes, she wins.” I saw him smiling on the TV screen with his red skin and washed out yellow hair. In that instant, I had a flashback to the Donald Trump buildings’ aesthetics in New York City, the energy of metal and marble glowing and enlivening his name everywhere. Peter Pels observes that “the materiality of human interaction with things is best studied in terms of aesthetics: the material process of mediation of knowledge through the senses.”437 I wondered what kind of aesthetics I would find reflected now, a year later, around “Jate’s Sitting Room” as his wife, Marina, referred to it. I can still hear her asking me right after his death: “Did you already say hello to Jate?”

I reached the site after a forty-five minute drive up from the Central Square of Raquira towards the Hill of the Deer. His immediate family had returned to the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta and I found few signs of shells or any other kind of offerings from the shores of the sea. Instead, his Neo-Muisca followers had built a shelter of fours posts sustained by a thatched roof in order to gather around Jate’s site. Waiting for Mama

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Luca’s eysuama to “speak and act”438 and bring them the knowledge they needed to turn into “Muisca People,” they gathered around while one of the members announced: “she is going to instruct us,” as if the site were about to voice a message. But I replied that I had come there as a result of my intimate dreams and understanding, a very limited one indeed. His yalyi followers accompanied me as I delivered my offerings to Jate. After a few hours I thanked them for their hospitality and left.

As soon as I was back in Raquira’s Central Square, Paulina called me with Mama Jose Maria, one of the Mamas that work with the Kogi governor, to find out how it had gone. I told them that I did not carry the inheritance in me to trail the intimate connections all the way to the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. Delivering the offerings without a Mama, I pointed out, felt like a vast void. Nevertheless, I continued, I followed all the instructions: I concentrated my thought to collect the rage, fear, and fights in the materials and placed them where the sun sets on the left side of the eysuama. Then I filled everything with the thoughts that made me content and peaceful, and in my mind, shined it bright like the sun. I placed that on the right side of the eysuama: where the sun rises. I commented that when I took out my materials around Mama Luca’s eysuama, all the kids present started playing around. They loved the bright yellow coins and the colors of quartz that emerged from my bag: dark red, green, white, yellow, blue, as well as some bright metallic stones. “That is a very good sign,” replied Paulina. Children are the gateway to those other layers in time and space. “If the negative had accumulated then the kids wouldn’t be attracted and playing there,” she affirmed, and added: “the energy growing there, is probably helping them feel well and grow well.”439

439 Field notes from Diary of 2010
Figure 22. Raquira (photograph by Don Miguel)
Chapter Six. Santa Marta: Gates of Dream

Section 6.1

The day after my return to the United States, I heard the doors of New York City Subway’s Number One Red Line shutting tightly and felt the pull of the wagon as it lifted off to the next stop. A young man about fifteen years of age had just walked in and was standing right in front of me. His abundant black hair looked as if a great gush of wind had swept through it, only it didn’t move; I wonder how much time he spent fixing it with hair gel. His pants fit tightly around his legs; he had a chain falling out of his left pocket, just the right slant; he was wearing black Nike shoes, the authentic ones, to go with his t-shirt that spoke out loud and clear in big block letters: I TRIED TO BE GOOD BUT I GOT BORED. “This kid is more than good,” I thought to myself, “he’s compliant with the laws of fashion and the market.” How different from the boredom of the two young men who tried to rip off my digital camera a few days back in Santa Marta.

“I can’t stand that plague!” voiced Antonio loudly as he referred to the new generation. “They don’t want to lift a finger, they want everything fast and easy. They are sluggish and the only thing they are after is their appearance.”440 As we tussled back and forth with the young man that was trying to take my camera from my hands, I bent my whole body over to increase the pull and noticed his fake Nike shoes. “No, no, no, no!” I shouted furiously for I wasn’t letting go, until Antonio lit a cigarette and pressed it so hard against the man’s arm that he instantly released it and flew away with his big shoes. Antonio followed him and his partner, but the two young thieves disappeared into one of

440 Field notes from Diary of 2011
the warehouses of the many locations in San Andresito, an array of smuggled goods, alcohol, cigarettes, cigars, electric appliances and cheap products, mostly made in China.

I had just gone past San Andresito in my city tour with Antonio. We started off in the place that used to be the magnificent train station at the time of the United Fruit Company’s banana plantations, which has now turned into a kind of curse: the street of drugs and massacre. They call it the Slaughterhouse or “El Matadero” where despair reigns. They say that if you linger there for more than eight minutes you can be easily murdered. It is where the drugs are sold behind the Sociedad Portuaria or Port Society: a rising tower of containers, one on top of the other, surrounded by all kinds of security checkpoints. H says the workers that retired from the United Fruit Company, were “a lost generation here in Santa Marta. Good for nothing,” she continues. “When the banana bonanza was over and the weekly check stopped coming in, they sold their houses in the city center and moved to other neighborhoods around town. She says the city center became one big brothel like Cangrejalito Street. Then when that money ran out they had to find something fast and easy, and the marijuana boom came along.”

As we proceeded with Antonio one block south from “El Matadero,” he talked about the glorious times during the marijuana boom. He pointed out the brothels that flowered “when guaqueros would squander their money.” Like many who lived the heyday of guaqueria, he remembered these men drifting from bar to bar with wads of bills in their pocket and lavishing their money on prostitutes. Tenth Street is now supposed to be a social zone for urban renovation, in Spanish “renovar,” but it was eleven

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441 At the end of the 19th C, the United Fruit Company began exporting banana to the United States and Europe and flourished in the 20th C. The workers in Santa Marta organized a month long strike demanding better working conditions and in 1928, after a threat from the US government to invade Colombia if they didn’t protect the Company’s interests, the Colombian army massacred hundreds of workers in Cienaga.

442 Field notes from Diary of 2010
in the morning and I saw a bar that instead of Renovar in Spanish was called “Renobar.”
A wearied middle-aged woman tightly fit in a small red miniskirt opened its dangling doors, as I caught sight of rows of billiard tables and people inside. Another older looking woman dressed in provocative black was smoking a cigarette outside.

As we moved on to Cangrejal Street, I spotted boys between 6 and 12 years of age, crashed against the sidewalk with nothing but more hard drugs to welcome them back from their trip. I stood in the corner of that pedestrian alley connecting one street with the next. It is called the “alley of varieties”, “Callejon de Variedades.” It is here where a family of Lebanese ancestry used to sell all kinds of textures, patterns and colors that came alive in the fabrics brought from the city of Medellin. However, the business dwindled when the zone deteriorated. Like a carcass of prosperous times I saw the external structure of beautiful art-deco houses now inhabited by tenants such as Antonio who enter and exit, as they try to make a living off the streets.

Antonio told me he had been living around this corner for the past thirty years. He pointed out the two-story house in front of him where the Secret Police was before, with grand white balconies. I took a picture of him below the old street sign that read: “Calle San Vicente o Cangrejal.” He asked me to wait a moment as he disappeared into his cramped little room, a “pieza” in Spanish, connoting a “piece”, where he rescued my sandals carefully tucked away in a plastic bag. He had been keeping them for months since I asked him to repair them. He told me that everyone knew him around there, which is the only reason why he could walk around calmly. Yet he appeared rather nervous,

443 Cangrejal means Crabnest
444 Arturo Bermudez writes that since the mid-19th C it was named San Vicente because it was facing the direction of the fort San Vicente on the bay side. But at the same time, it was called “Cangrejal because of the numerous crab holes” along the beach surrounding it. So without further ado, it was simply called the “Street of San Vicente or Cangrejal.”
turning his eyes everywhere in front and behind us, trying to anticipate any possible crime that could take us by surprise. We advanced through this alley filled with the smell of human urine until we burst out into the Square of San Francisco. It’s here where Señora Ana Vicenta Leyva’s 98-year-old memory exploded with details of the excitement she breathed when she was growing up: “the real market” she said like “the real people” that she would see visiting the grand restaurants in the area that “even had international cooks.”

As we sat in the backyard of her daughter’s house in Bonda, a borough towards the south east of Santa Marta, next to the Rio Piedra, I could see the river wide and abundant swaying by the gigantic ceibas, bongos, campanos with the fresh breeze of the cool water running through it. We talked and ate icaco fruit, mamoncillos and mangos that were growing all around. In the meantime, the city center of Santa Marta came alive like a moving picture through her account. The memories flowered in her mind. She recited the street names of the city like the stops of the train that she would hear from her room when she was growing up in the house where she was born almost a hundred years ago, between the Cemetery and the Railroad Avenue. “First the Street of Santa Rita where the church of San Juan de Dios is” she said, “then the street of Burechito; then the street of San Antonio; then the Tumba Cuatro; then the street of the well or el Pozo. Then the Big street or calle Grande; then the street of Santo Domingo; then

445 Both icaco and mamoncillos are small tropical fruits that grow on trees
446 Now 22nd Street
447 Now 21st Street
448 Now 20th Street
449 Now 19th Street
450 Now 18th Street
451 Now 17th Street
452 Now 16th Street
the street of the Acequia\textsuperscript{453}, then the street of the Jail or Calle de la Carcel\textsuperscript{454}, then the street of San Francisco\textsuperscript{455}, then street San Vicente o Cangrejal\textsuperscript{456}, then the street of Cangrejalito\textsuperscript{457}, and finally, the street Campo Serrano\textsuperscript{458} where the train station is.\textsuperscript{459} She knows the streets like the stops, for after all, she is a city girl from the heart of Santa Marta.\textsuperscript{460}

Señora Ana Vicenta is blind and yet her recollections were so distinct that they became as tangible as the white lace around the collar of her sky blue dress. Through her mind, I saw the San Francisco Square where the market was at the beginning of the century. I was amazed by the multitude of wound threads that she described in thread spools: “azul de pelotica,” a shade of light blue, red, yellow, orange, black, white like a pallet of colors. I saw the glitter of the merchandise, a glance, a flash, a light, a shine like a spider web in the sun. I heard the voices, rising and falling like the sea, as the prices came and went with the crimson white and colored fabrics, layered one on top of the other like slabs of stone, cut and transformed into beautiful dresses. I heard the church bells tolling as the multitude of parrots descended upon the mango tree right above the commotion, bursting with the morning sunlight.\textsuperscript{461} “This used to be the real market,” she pointed out, “nothing like that dirty place that people call el Mercado Central de Santa Marta” or the main market today. That used to be a bunch of coconut trees with so much shadow that people stayed away from it, she recalled.

\textsuperscript{453} Now 15\textsuperscript{th} Street\textsuperscript{454} Now 14\textsuperscript{th} Street\textsuperscript{455} Now 13\textsuperscript{th} Street\textsuperscript{456} Now 12\textsuperscript{th} Street\textsuperscript{457} Now 11\textsuperscript{th} Street\textsuperscript{458} Now 10\textsuperscript{th} Street\textsuperscript{459} Field notes from Diary of 2011\textsuperscript{460} Field notes from Diary of 2011\textsuperscript{461} Woolf, Virginia. The Waves. USA: A Harvest Book Harcourt Inc., 2006, p. 4
Now standing and observing with Antonio, I saw that one side of the San Francisco church became the domain of San Andresito, as myriad little locations make a living by selling stolen and illegal merchandise. I asked Antonio about one named “Las Vegas”, and he commented they were all the same; they have always sold alcohol. Towards the south of the square of San Francisco one could see the Gateway of Iron, “La Puerta de Hierro”, where P sold his first guaca when he was fourteen years old.462 We walked about half a block east from the Puerta de Hierro where Antonio was pointing to the coat of arms on the Republican building of the old the Bank of the Republic, when upon taking a photograph I was overtaken by two well-dressed amiable looking teenagers. With fashionable new caps and clean shirts, they appeared to have nothing better to do than to grab the latest technology in a shot.

A minute later, Antonio and I suddenly found ourselves surrounded by a crowd that wanted to know what had just happened: “Did they attack you? Did they take anything away? What did they do to you?” They were street vendors living off selling cellular phone credit, Chance,463 sweets, warm coffee out of thermoses, and shoe shining, shoe sole mending, as well as tour guides, crafts salesmen, messengers, old retired men hanging around the Parque Simon Bolivar in the Main Square of Santa Marta, all looking for a little distraction from the stillness in the city center when the sun begins to rise and the heat takes over. In the meantime, I went over to call upon the policeman’s attention. Not much older than eighteen, he stood at the street corner of the scene without paying much notice as he was busy talking on his mobile phone. I interrupted his conversation to report the event. Annoyed by the disruption, he asked the person on the other side of the

462 Please see Chapter Two
463 Lottery tickets
line to hold for a moment, as he replied to me that it was my fault for going around like a tourist with a camera.

I walked away thinking this was the job that my friend Om aspired for her daughter’s partner. I can see Om’s anxiety accumulating in the veins of her neck whenever she talks about her kids. “I can’t understand their lethargy,” she said. “What is wrong with them?” she wondered as she pulled out a sheet with a heading that read: “CV on Request Employment.” She affirmed that he only liked to exercise so she figured a security course might be good for him. I read:

Would you accept working in a City other than the one where you were initially hired? Yes. What are your monthly expenses? $400,000. How much do you aspire to earn? $900,000. Do you currently have any earnings? No. Please indicate briefly what working, educational and personal expectations you have and tell us how you plan to make them come true? My expectations are to work so I can cover my costs, and to save so I can take the vigilance course and join the National Police.464

The questions in the Resume were striking for the lack of imagination: bareness enclosed in a layer of plastic to keep it from getting creased or wet with the heat. To find a job without a single reference or any ingress seemed almost impossible, but Om insisted that my “elegant” handwriting would open up doors for him. It’s like having “una pinta elegante” she affirmed, meaning dressing up. This is how she dresses for medical appointments at the Social Security building. She has to look “pintosa,” she stated, with her makeup, her royal blue satin blouse, high heels and a glamorous hairpiece. “Un pinta” is expensive but it can make all the difference in the world. My friend J from Taganga referred to that as “uniformarse” or “to uniform oneself.” But Om said it’s lively, “alegre” as when people congregate around the Malecon of Santa Marta

464 Field notes from Diary of 2010
by the bayside. They stroll while proudly displaying their newly acquired clothes, “estrenando,” meaning they are wearing them for the first time.

Figure 23. “Una Pinta Elegante”

It’s mostly at sunset as the temperature declines, the wind blows and the lights are turned on that people go promenading to observe the ships coming in alongside the tugboats while enjoying the Boulevard, which sometimes offers concerts, bazaars and food stands. Tourists and locals alike, are seen walking at leisure, as if they were on a stage facing the world that is watching them from the other side of the Ocean, with the lighthouse winking right in front of them. The lighthouse is hoisted upon El Morro, a colonial fortress that stands like a guardian at the gate of dreams in Santa Marta. It’s one big façade to the world, as trends come mostly from abroad, they grow and then fall and disappear on their own. For the privileged in Santa Marta the Morro is the portal to future enterprise and progress, for the Ika it is a portal to the world of ancestors where at least
once a year they take offerings to feed three important Mamos that died there as prisoners during Colonial times.\footnote{465}{For more on the significance of El Morro for the Ika see: Diazgranados, Jose Luis and Rozo, Cesar. “Pensamiento y Ritual, Recorrido por Sitios Sagrados de la Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta con el Mamo Norberto Torres,” Documentary, 2008}

Many people who live in Santa Marta hardly ever visit the bay side. They prefer to “take it easy,” stay at home and sit in the porch of their houses rocking through conversations that give life to stories, which drape around the robust, long standing almond trees, ceibas,\footnote{466}{Ceiba or Kapak tree} camanos,\footnote{467}{Saman or Rain tree} nispero.\footnote{468}{Fruit bearing tree also known as sapadilla in Florida} In marginal neighborhoods, it’s usually around weaker trees like D’s garden with her lemon tree, and a couple of white flowers perched in the uneven grounds of the round of the Manzanares River. D has been a couple of times promenading in the Malecon. It’s here where they stole the only Pre-Columbian stone necklace that her husband J ever gave her.

In her free days she stays in her neighborhood near the Malvinas Bridge. I went to visit her once on a Sunday after it has rained and everything has cooled down. There was mud everywhere, and yet people were out playing, drinking, listening to the “picops”\footnote{469}{Portable sound systems equipped with powerful loud speaker}, the base sounds pumping at full volume, mostly Regueton music but also Champeta.\footnote{470}{Champeta, which originated in the city of Cartagena and Barranquilla, is a kind of rap. While the name Regueton derives from reggae and it’s a mix of various Caribbean genres.} I needed to find “El Campito.” As I inquired people asked me to be more precise: “which Campito, 1 or 2? Number 1 is further down and number 2 is closer the Bus Terminal.” I couldn’t remember and as I entered an endless labyrinth of barely traced out alleys, it was difficult for me to guess where I was heading. I moved through crammed spaces with piling bricks, sheets of aluminum, cement, black plastic, sand, whatever could be used to
turn cheap materials into dwellings, each one trying to outdo the other by adding luxuries, a black window here, an iron grid there.

After skipping puddle after puddle, mounds, passing by corner store after corner store, house after house, I asked a man who was laying out bricks if he knew where Mrs. D and Mr. J lived. His name was Emilio, he looked old to me but as we started talking I realized he was my age. “I belong to the church” he told me, and asked me if I was single. “With your cunt I wouldn’t leave you on your own, if ever you need someone let me know” he said. As I turned away to continue my path he told me to wait a second while he safeguarded his tools. It turned out he used to be an old neighbor of Mrs. D. When I found Mrs. D and Mr. J waiting for me, dressed up looking “pintosos” on their rocking chairs, I felt relieved. I commented to them that I had gotten lost. Emilio turned around and replied: “no one gets lost here except by his or her own will.”

The children and the dogs played in the puddles. Mrs. D had a white nylon chiffon blouse and a red skirt. She wore makeup. Mr. J wore pants and a clean shirt. I praised their garden. Mrs. D immediately replied that it was due to Mr. J’s green thumb. He corrected her: “it’s the piss, a good fertilizer.” She lives in a room with a fan, a TV, a bed and one beige curtain. Mr. J was planning to build more rooms when he gets some guacas. They have been scarce lately. He’s proud of having built a real bathroom for Mrs. D, with tiles and two luxurious faucets one for the hot water and another for the cold, just like the ones she saw in soap operas, only that in their bathroom there’s no running water.

As I talked to each, they both answered at the same time, each one as immersed in their world as the other. “Praise god” is one of D’s favorite phrases. I told them about my visit to Tigrera, Minca and the bridge of Aladin where I was informed there lived a

471 Field notes from Diary of 2010
“duende.” “Bull shit!” answered J, “people make up stuff.” And he started describing a real duende that he knew in person. They were people that knew witchcraft. “Oh my god, praise the lord!” intervened D. “I don’t believe in those things, my father was a good Christian.” Suddenly the Regueton and Champeta that had been playing came to an end and an ever louder noise began to rise all around Campito 2: “Aleluya, aleluya, knock on the doors of heaven...” out of tune voices clapping and rising everywhere with speakers that flooded the neighborhood. It sounded like a bargain: “buy two for the price of one, come, come, this is your chance, it will never be this cheap... come and buy it now, two for 1, two for one, anything and everything, come now.” Mr. J continued indifferent to Mrs. D’s voice of distress as he recalled his uncle.

“My uncle was a real duende. His farm was near Tigrera, there was sugar cane everywhere and lots of snakes,” continued J. “Oh my God!” Mrs. D turned to say to me: “Do you really believe in those things Rosario?” He went on: “When we were kids they used to warn us that my uncle’s plot was free from snakes because it had a spell. He would travel in a second from one place to another and he could easily enchant women by putting his hands on them. What he did was pure filth.” “Oh my God Jesus my Lord! Let me tell her what happened to me the first time we went there when we were newly wed” But J continued so immersed in his memories of his uncle that he ignored what D was saying.

Look my father also knew this filth. I remember we would go all the way up to Cerro Kennedy and my father would say: ‘stay here I’m going to get some arepas and bollos.” But bollos where only made in Santa Marta so I thought he was crazy. What does he mean, is he going all the way there just to get some bollos? Well, he would descend and return in five minutes with the bollos in his hands. He would take giant strides like animal leaps. Those wizards knew how to

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472 Goblin, evil spirit
473 Maize confections usually eaten instead of bread
transform into animals and they would travel great distances in no time, they knew spells and they enchanted people. They would bathe in the Green Pool below the Isabel Bridge. The other pool: the Blue Pool above that bridge is for the good people. Despite the whirlpools they wouldn’t drown, nothing would happen to them, instead they would learn their things. But invariably they ended up dying on their own, ruined and in utter poverty.474

“Now I am going to tell you what happened to me,” repeated Mrs. D until Mr. J finally decided to let her tell her story: “As I arrived in that farm and I looked yonder, I saw a good looking man, tall, thin with an elegant hat, full sleeve shirt and nice pants. I saw a young man. As he came close to me, Oh my God! What a horrible looking man, he was worn out with a broken hat and torn pants. It was because of his witchcraft that young women like me would see him young and beautiful, he wanted them to fall in love with him.”

“Where did he learn his witchcraft? Was it from the Indians?” I asked. “Que va!” replied J at once. “That witchcraft comes from Africa, that was of the blacks.” “So your uncle was Afro Colombian?” “Oh yes!” they both replied in unison. “That is why when I see a black man or an Indian,” commented D, “I start praying at once.” She started telling me about an Indian neighbor who used to live in front of her house. I had a very bad pain in my leg and when he walked past me he announced it: “your leg is hurting” I kneeled and started praying at once. “Oh God my lord, you are my one and only.” And even though he offered me some herbs to drink, I never once went to his house. “Those duendes were bad,” continued J, “and they were always broke. Their knowledge was pure filth.” And they didn’t teach their children? “No. That ended years ago. No one today knows any of that.” “When I prayed to God” continued D, “I would say: ‘Oh God of mine please let J come soon.’ I was alone with my kids, without any money and when he

474 Field notes from Diary of 2010
went on guaqueria he would leave for months. But when I prayed it seemed like God would listen and J would come back with a good compensation for a guaca. And so we would go to the market, to that place, what was that place called?” She asked J who was thinking of something else, “the one with clothes from Barranquilla? Anyway, those were good clothes, they would last a long time. We would go with the kids. They would say: I want those jeans and we would buy them.”

Andrea their granddaughter, about ten years old, was sitting there without paying any attention to the conversation but happy for people to watch her. All she wanted was to be seen, “a natural model,” said D to me. She stands all day looking at herself in the mirror and mimicking models on TV or on advertisements. D suddenly jumped with a smile: “Oh! I was forgetting, I have a gift for you.”

Figure 24. D and her granddaughter in front of La Quinta de San Pedro Alejandrino

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She came out with a huge red nylon flower, little black dots in the center. “I thought this would look beautiful in your hair,” she said, as she proudly gave it to me. J looked at us with a devilish smile, as he rocked in his chair, his eyes gleaming a beastly like green spark.

It was the same spark that I had seen in Pato’s eyes when he told me that “of course duendes exist.” He said he learnt some spells and ancient prayers. He remembers Isabel “that crazy woman who wouldn’t leave me alone.” He would wake up and underneath he would see “puras tapas de cuchecas” Someone told him that was a sign of bewitchment and he started realizing “that woman was exerting pure witchcraft on him. Duendes are the men and witches are the women,” he said. He told me about the time when he was out on a dig with other guaqueros. At night he heard: tsss, tsss, tsss, and behind the fire he spotted an ugly black bird. Everyone else was knocked out sleeping in their hammocks. He got up and tossed fire at it, because as soon as he saw it, he knew it was Isabel. When they arrived a couple of days later to sell the pieces, he went asking for her in Tenth Street. They told him that she was on leave because she was ill. So he went to search for her at her house. They told him that she had gotten burnt. He said he had a daughter with her. “My daughter now lives in Barranquilla, but she’s no witch.”

Pato and I were talking at that liminal hour in which most people in Santa Marta are taking a siesta at midday. Even banks are closed from noon to two. It was scorching hot like the ember that burnt Isabel. When I got out into the street at noon I felt as if I were trying to make my way through deep, dense water, submerged to the point that I could hardly move. Cornered by the heat, I entered a coffee shop next to the Parque Bolivar where I asked for an iced coffee and sat under a trupillo tree, fanning myself.

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desperately as only “a true cachaca” would, meaning someone from the highlands. Not a whisper in the streets, nothing moved while the sun, as the Kogi tell us, sits at that hour by the blazing fire poporeando\textsuperscript{477} until he decides to get up and walk towards the western gateway of the temple he inhabits. Not unlike the temple in Seiyua\textsuperscript{478} where Mama Valencio sat for more than a hundred years with four hearths marking each of the cardinal directions and hundreds of men sitting all around from the east to the west portal. I looked for a pen in my bag and on my Juan Valdes receipt. I wrote: “Scorching hot. I saw a minibus approaching at full speed but I didn’t care, I continued to cross so long as I could get to the other side of the street with pressing hurry, as if rain had come pouring down on me only this wasn’t water but the burning heat of the midday sun.”\textsuperscript{479}

The only stir throughout the city of Santa Marta at this hour was the minibuses. Hundreds of little minibuses, “colectivos,” take over the streets following all sorts of routes. They are like moving stages of intimate conversations between strangers. It is not unusual to have the person sitting next to you telling you the most private accounts of their relationships with their lovers or family members, usually confessing envies, deceptions, “things which are better released from the heart,” people say. And so pretty soon you find yourself expressing your own concerns. During the ride, a circuit of money is continually running through passenger’s hands, as the fare journeys towards the bus driver and then the change returns to the owner. “Do me the favor Mam,” “Hágame el favor Seño” is the phrase used as you get poked in the back to hold your hand out for the bills and coins that are passed on to you, right up until the time comes to ask the bus

\textsuperscript{477} Poporeando, meaning chewing coca leafs with his poporo
\textsuperscript{478} The sacred center of the Kogi in Seiyua is also known as San Miguel
\textsuperscript{479} Field notes from Diary of 2010
driver to stop exactly at the place where you want to get off, not a foot past it, not in that heat.

It was from these “colectivos” or collectives traveling through the changing moods of the city where I saw neighbors grouped everywhere like sprouts under the shade of a tree or behind the grills, sitting on Rimax⁴⁸⁰ or rocking chairs gathered in a circle around a conversation, a game of cards, a domino, or a “picop,” a loudspeaker that gets the whole block vibrating with the music of Vallenato,⁴⁸¹ Champeta and Regueton, more than one genre playing at the same time. It used to be that one would experience the blast of vibration inside the collectives too. As these little vehicles dashed through urban space and time, shifting through transitions and intersections while playing the radio: Tropicana, Olimpica Stereo, and so on. One would suddenly see a whole row of discrete shoulders within the bus, moving to a rhythm or a beat. However, around the time of Uribe’s government, when the political elite started interceding for a city of tourism, attractive to foreigners, music was banned in the colectivos for they reasoned this noise would deter tourists. As the coins continued to circulate from the back to the front and back again, the only sound I heard in the minibus was the competition for passengers as men measuring the time between one route and the other, stood on certain street corners shouting out the number of minutes between one bus and the other to the bus driver, in exchange for a coin or two.

In the past ten years the most popular means of transportation has become the motor taxi. It’s cheaper and faster. You put on a helmet like you would ear phones, an extra layer that separates you from your immediate surroundings, clutch on to the driver

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⁴⁸⁰ Rimax is a cheap plastic chair
⁴⁸¹ Vallenato was originally sung by people who traveled from village to village through the whole coastal region, both as a form of entertainment and as a way to keep the inhabitants informed of news
and ride in your efficient isolated capsule, bypassing any traffic jam all the way to your final destination. This would have been irrelevant ten years ago for the big joke in Santa Marta was to call up a friend and say that you were running late because you were stuck in a traffic jam, as if you were in a big metropolis. Now with so much construction going on it’s for real, half an hour wait to take the turn by the light on the Railroad Avenue, which no longer has a railroad. Om tells me that when her partner can’t drive her on his motorbike, she takes a motor taxi from her neighborhood. This individual experience now requires a certain degree of protection not just for the astounding number of bloody motorcycle accidents every day but also because of a lice epidemic that has abounded in Santa Marta and requires you to wear a shower cap underneath the helmet.

Om told me her partner sometimes helps her out with a little money, as she doesn’t get a penny from the father of her children, who “has money,” she commented, “but what good is it if he can’t go out anywhere?” Now her twenty-year-old son is in the same situation. He wanted to work in security but he had to flee to Bogota because some members of the right-wing militias who live in the same neighborhood threatened to kill him. A bunch of men on two motorbikes came asking for him, she said. “His father wants him to be like him but he’s not good for that, he’s weak,” she observed lamenting the day when he ended up getting caught by the Police because of his friends. When he was taken into interrogation he told it all. “Sapo!” they called him, a frog that croaks out everything. So his father’s brother who’s a “Patron” or boss in the right-wing militias had to vouch for him. Om only has one other son but he’s mute and most times in rage. She lives with her four daughters, her son in law, her son, and supports them all on a minimum wage. Om tries to brush off the despair that weighs down upon her house that stands like a
juggler on the inclined shantytown of the Barrio Tayrona. It’s such a contrast with her childhood memories of La Revuelta where she grew up near Rio Piedra, she commented. There were so many guacas then. She remembered the adults “would take a rod of half...” and plunge it into the earth, if there was ceramic the tip would come out red and they would start digging. They would take out chiefs, tumas with perfect holes, frogs, mates that are pen-like objects with a ball at the end, and plenty of stone axes. Beautiful seats to grind maize, she said, “metates” I add. “That’s it!” She replied content that I could comprehend her childhood memory. When it rained all the kids would come out and search for tumas, they would gather them together with the mangos, she said, and give them to the adults who would then go out to the city and sell them. They would get a little commission for it.

As she drifted into her childhood memories in the room where we sat, small piercing military planes started flying over us. Startled by the noise, she jumped. She was sensitive. Everything was listening around us, spirits everywhere, through the walls and the roof. I remembered how Mama Santos was trying to explain to the family of proprietors in the house by the sea, that by 4PM it was best to keep out of the water, because this is the time when the spirits on the other side are waking up and bathing, between their 4AM and 6AM. We delivered the offerings in the afternoon and had to stay awake at least until 10PM when they received them on the other side, at 10AM on their side. The precision of these spirits whose life elapses like ours except in the polar opposite space and time was astounding. As I heard him speak, I imagined a busy universe of spirits not much larger than birds waking up at the exact time in which our world was darkening. I envisioned our rivers nourishing their pool of thoughts under the

482 In Spanish it’s referred to as “vara de media”
sea, as they received the outflow just on time for the hour in which they were waking up. But in Om’s sensitivity it is the other way around. The underground is in commotion, and as we suffer this turmoil, it’s picked up like an uproar by the jets hovering above our heads. We had to be careful for in this world turned upside down, the spirits can be pretty nasty, malicious, pounding you one day after the next, and just when you are lifting your head up: “tenga!” Bang on your head, she said as she tried to gulp down the tears rising in her eyes because a couple of motorbikes appeared in her neighborhood the night before and out of the blue, shot her son’s best friend.

Om lived in the same neighborhood as F. F whom as his brother remembered, “used to have so much authority in Ciudad Perdida that nothing moved without his consent. He used to be the one to put order there; he would decide when the helicopter should depart with the provisions; who would enter and who wouldn’t; he was the master!” F who survived the rainforest, was guaquero in Ciudad Perdida and then announced its existence, remained unknown to most people. He was simply an old tour guide. I saw F for the last time in July of 2010 two weeks before his death, entering the Tayrona Park with an empty sisal bag hanging along his ribs and a group of Japanese tourists following him in utter silence. He had his eyes fixed on the ground, submerged in some kind of void, without even a murmur coming out of him. “Adios amigo”483 said my friend who was now frequenting the Park. And as he turned around he fixed his rebellious eyes on the person sitting behind her in a fancy SUV. He moved towards the lowered window of the car and with a spark in his eyes said upfront: “I heard that you were kicking my brother out of your farm.”484 “F has never regarded social structures or

483 In Spanish: “Goodbye my friend”
484 For more on F see Chapter Two
economic stratum,” noted his brother. “He used to highly distrust the Doctores.485 He simply survived on a day-by-day basis, and when he had money he drank.

I went to look for him once in El Rodadero, which is where I was told he worked as a tour guide in the Tayrona Park. “Did you say you’re looking for F? Hey Mocho! Do you know who F is?”486 And Mocho shrugged his shoulders with a question mark on his face indicating that he didn’t have the faintest idea. I went from one corner to the next asking several people but no one seemed to know him, until a man said: “Do you mean el Abuelito?” the Little Grandfather “Look! He’s right there!” he said pointing at a thin man with white hair sitting amidst all the young tour guides that were waiting for their next scouting. When I walked towards him with a big smile on my face and asked him if we could have a refreshing drink and talk, he responded that he was tired of interviews. I asked him if he would just let me walk with him, but he wasn’t sure. I should call him, he said. And just like all the other phone numbers that I am given by guaqueros, I only hear the sound of a deep void on the other side and then a message saying: “the person you are trying to call is out of reach…”

After F’s death I was in a little minibus, speeding through the streets of Santa Marta. Everything felt lively, lots of honking and activity. A rapper, clearly cachaco, had just gotten on and was singing his own composition; one of two sisters started mimicking him and moving her body; a teacher with wooden pink heart earrings sat in front of me, and a student wearing lots of hair gel timidly saluted her. After crossing the Libertador Avenue, the city center and then the Santa Rita Avenue, we suddenly entered a wave of silence that we could not escape as the bus paraded behind. A coffin in front of us, a

485 “Doctores” meaning people with University degrees
486 Field notes from Diary of 2010
wreath on top, women dressed in black with rosaries tightly held in their hands, friends and neighbors paraded behind the dead one, rolling their motorbikes along, not a sound to be heard.

When F died they carried him around to all the places where he used to hang out in Santa Marta, as is customary amongst the tour guides in Turcol. They said, “he had three plugged coronary arteries but even so he wouldn’t stop drinking.” No one understood where he got the strength to continue walking through the Tayrona Park until the end. But what struck me most about the overwhelming silence that enveloped F the last time I saw him, was the cloud of indifference emanating from him. I watched him as he disappeared down the trail of the Park with his particular stride bending one knee and lifting the other without giving up for an instant, and yet receding into something greater than him, as if he were finding his balance amidst a weight, a vast boredom, a kind of “tumbling in the calm.”

Heidegger observes “profound boredom, drifting here and there in the abysses of our existence like a muffling fog, removes all things and human beings and oneself along with them into a remarkable indifference” Everyone in Santa Marta seems to be complaining, like Om, about a kind of lethargy and despair that is taking over, specially amidst new generations, “oscillating between boredom and anxiety.” One cannot say what it is, like the mood that guaqueros such as Pato and J were frequently trapped in whenever I met them in the city.

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487 Turcol is the touring company that took over Ciudad Perdida under Hernan Giraldo’s command, for more see Chapter Three
Section 6.2

Antonio is a middle-aged inhabitant of Santa Marta, who spends his days in the street corner of the central square, Parque Simon Bolivar. As he spoke one could almost hear the twist of his chain smoking suspended in his vocal cords and released in such a way that every utterance turned the little corner where he devoted his time into a spellbinding landscape. His observations, comments and conversations, carefully intertwined amidst the changing mood of the crowd from one hour to the next, continued nonstop right up until the hour when the church bells marked six. In the meantime, if someone landed upon his black leather bound seat, he started shoe shining mechanically, without thinking twice, brush in one hand and polish in the other. Then when the sun neatly slipped behind the horizon right at the edge of the city, behind the bay, the crowds dissipated as they found their way back to their homes, and he returned to his “pieza” a few blocks away.

Antonio was fully informed of every bit of gossip in the area. “Tarzan of the urban jungle” read the local newspaper that he proudly pulled out of the wooden compartment below the seat where he kept his neutral, brown and black polish creams. He showed me his image, a quarter of a page wide in the local paper: El Magdalena. “Illustrious shoe shiner” continued the article folded on the carved creases, repeatedly tucked away since the time it was first published ten years ago. Payment for Antonio seemed to be the conversation, as he accommodated every little detail he could catch in his panoramic view of the city center. The rest was retribution: “give me three thousand or two is fine,” he would say, as if at the end it didn’t really matter.
One day, as our conversation quieted down, Pato appeared submerged in deep silence, tall, thin and erect out of nowhere. All he mumbled to Antonio who asked him how he was doing was that he was bored to death. He came to sit along with all the idlers in the city that linger there passing the hours under the shade of the recently planted palms in the Parque Bolivar, waiting to catch something of the bait of Fortuna. I noticed that as Antonio’s mind moved with the crowds, Pato remained indifferent to them.\footnote{Benjamin, Walter. The Arcades Project. USA: Harvard University Press, 2003, Convolutes O on Prostitution, Gambling and m on Idleness} I sat next to Pato. He said it had been four days since he arrived in the city and he felt he was going mad. “This anxiety has a certain quality of calmness, yet it is indeterminate and marked by generalized unease,”\footnote{Taussig, Michael. Op. cit., p. 61} “We ‘hover’ in anxiety,”\footnote{Heidegger, Martin. Op. cit., p. 101} the silence weighing down upon us. Pato tried to shake this off as he made an effort to speak.
He told me he had spent more than $900,000 pesos on medical examinations and he had no money left. He was already planning his next trip guaqueando, even though his wife and daughter didn’t want him to leave. They are concerned, he said, because the last time he went digging a grave under the sun, he was overtaken by a heart attack. They cannot understand, he said despairingly, that he is unable to take a few days off, that he has to leave for the next round of guaqueria. Somewhat irritated he added that his daughter became a nurse and she constantly tries to make plans for him in the long term. Then as if wanting to shake off that thought, he abruptly changed the topic and started talking about the old man Gairaca in Bonda.

The best guaquero ever known: the old Crazy Man Gairaca was damn right crazy. He wouldn’t stop digging and when the others would say to him that it was time to leave, he would throw his pike up in the air and he would say: ‘if it falls with the head up I will remain digging, if not I will leave.’ He would throw it all the way up and it would land exactly in the place where the gold was to be found. That man would never stop and he’s the one who found the most gold. But the old crazy Man Gairaca smoked so much that he lost his voice. Now he goes around with a scoreboard scribbling whatever he needs to communicate to the world.\footnote{494 Field notes from Diary of 2010}

Pato told me that he lived all alone and his daughters take from him the little that he gets for making perfect Pre-Columbian reproductions. He was on his way to see him. But as we spoke he decided that before that, he wanted to pass by the antique shop a few blocks away to talk to the owner about some pieces he left him to sell. We went together. The shop was across the street from the house known as “Pan de Huevo” on Eleventh Street. People in Santa Marta remember Pan de Huevo or Challah bread. He used to sit on his chair just like the Challah, with his legs spiraled in such a way that he not only crossed his knees but crossed his feet as well. And thus his descendants are all known as the egg breads, “pan de huevos.” Pato asked if the owner had sold any of the pieces that
he had left him a few months back, but he wasn’t in and they didn’t know. Pato left and I returned to where Antonio was. He asked me how it went. I told him that Pato left “aburrido.”

I have felt a kind of “malaise of anxiety” in several occasions around guaqueros like P or G. When I first met P I thought the unsettling experience of feeling a kind of weighing emptiness, as if nothing mattered, could be a consequence of thirst, heat or hunger, but after several encounters I came to think of it almost like a lucid indifference that he developed in order to get through his day-to-day encounters, “turning about in the city” as P referred to the errands he had to fulfill in Santa Marta, letting the heat pass through his body and watching the same people day after day, neither mindful of weekends nor aware of the lunch hours. “That’s okay too” was his typical answer. As he let the day drift by, he would await an opportunity to get some prey, to catch something unexpected, maybe a tourist, maybe the sale of a fake piece as if it were original, and with that money climb back into the wilderness, dig out a guaca from a nice burial, and square off.

Then when I heard P chattering away in the wilderness I wondered if this boisterous side of him was an effect of “the shadow” that F pointed out in Ciudad Perdida, when describing the changes in the last thirty years. There was more shadow then, he said, when you had to go around with a machete in your hand and all your senses fully alert, ready to kill the next snake or danger that appeared in your path. This shadow comes with a wet humidity that awakens a covering of vegetation, including the snakes that P kept mentioning in each site that he pointed out, as if the mere recollection

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495 Bored
497 See Chapter Three
connected him to the exuberance and the spirit that he once knew in these grounds when he began digging out the guacas. As we trekked behind P, he would suddenly turn around and fix his eyes upon us with his 57-years of age, two teeth left, his very white clean face and parted hair that seemed to make the roundness of his skull stand out and his thick eyebrows angled in such a way that the further we penetrated the forest, the more I began to see the face of a snake in him. My husband began to whisper in my ears that he saw a snake in P. I thought about the snakes that Mama Luca said were like spiritual arrows protecting the very sites where the life force of the Mother dwells. Only in terms of Mama Luca, instead of protecting these treasures, these snakes were charging a debt for the missing life force in these sites.

“I wanted to fix my ‘parcela,’” he continued talking, “but the Environment ruined it” as he referred to the Ministry of the Environment. “My parcela” is how P referred to any terrain that he invaded in his life. He said he began in 1972. According to P there were people who deserved to die, like the head of “Parques” who wanted to throw them out of their allotments. “When there are injustices of this kind there is no good or bad, there is only justice to be done,” he continued.

Oh! I called that place there Alto de los Cedros where I found a whole bunch of ancient dwellings. And that big palm a little beyond the creak is where I saw a white luminous light flashing upwards towards the sky and I knew right away that there had to be a guaca there. Like the time when my cuadrilla and I found a strange dinosaur egg in Cienaga and under it we extracted a basin that exploded: ‘pum!’ When it came out of the ground, there was a greenish substance in it and we threw it away. Then someone told us that was worth more than gold because it was the secret to how the Indians used to pierce the tumas. I remember when we were there the Paracos appeared. The commander was going to kill us, and I said: ‘aren’t you Miguel?’ ‘How do you know who I am?’ He asked surprised. ‘I know your sister and I remember when we were drinking together for a New Year’s in Rio Molino.’ So he ordered not to kill us. He was part of the Frente Tayrona. I know all those people cause I arrived in Don Diego at the same times.

498 Paracos, meaning paramilitary right-wing militias
as Giraldo, Medina, and the others. I know them from years back. They leave me alone. I was to become paraco but I never settle for a job and besides, part of the training is to behead cats and dogs, that’s not for me...

After a few hours we reached a magnificent boulder carved with veins that connected little piercings as if one were seeing a wire box filled with electric circuits dressed in green moss. When I asked P about this stone, a constellation of guacas lit up in his mind as he explained to us that those piercings on the stone map indicated all the sites where there are guacas. Behind the boulder there was another guarding stone as if it were marking a gateway to a sacred world full of burials. “This is my parcela,” announced P. My husband and I continued to stand fixed to the ground as if we could not find the energy to move away from the boulder, as an entire terrain wholly overturned, burnt and dug out, opened before our eyes. Ps ranch was made of wooden planks and a black plastic that served as a roof. It was built upon an Indian dwelling that he dug out himself. He told me he has erected at least three ranches on top of ancient Indian dwellings. It had been two months since P had last been there and his youngest brother of fifty, the Mono, left everything a mess. “That Mono is crazy, look where he planted the avocado tree,” he pointed out as we saw the tree trying to squeeze itself in between the wall of the kitchen and the black plastic that stood for a roof. He left plantain and avocado rotting everywhere. Hungry and loyal animals appeared as soon as we arrived, the cat yowling of hunger. “What are we going to eat?” we asked. P affirmed he didn’t need food and instead looked around for the first pot he ever bought from his first sale to Mr. Baron. He

499 Field notes from Diary of 2010
used it to make some coffee as he took out a box of Merlin cigarettes. P was a survivor and that was his way of life, to eat and sleep “well that’s not for me, it’s for others.”

I began to feel a bleak and piercing cold seeping through the ground, the cold humidity penetrating our souls, and little by little a kind of desolation began to install itself in us like a black cloud electrified by a mix of desire and unrest. P and his neighbor Israel, who also lived there, kept sucking upon cigarettes like chimneys, as if they were trying to keep the last bit of ember ignited, the last fragment of warmth and illumination amidst the ice cold darkness that invaded us. What a contrast with the cradling heat of the hearth of the fires in the nujues. It was the first time that I slept in the Sierra without a fire. That night we had P’s eyes and ears on top of us. He said he spent so much time in the woods, he didn’t need to sleep, he was used to it.

The next day we continued along the “original trails” as P referred to the Pre-Columbian stone paths, pointing out the spots where he found gold buried underneath the steppingstones. We followed creaks and streams named by P, like “Caño Culebra” or the “Snake Creak” and “Quebrada No Se Ve” or the “Brook You Can’t See.” As we trekked the ground, more maps of guacas lit up in his mind until we reached the bay of Cinto. This place had its own brooks and creaks that descended and shimmered like gold running all the way to the wetland where alligators, crocodiles, birds, monkeys, squirrels, lizards and many other animals came looking for water and food. The wetland used to spread all over the beach until A, the caretaker of the farm, had to fill it with sacks of sand so that the owners could pull up their yachts and hang a couple of hammocks under the palms.

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500 Field notes from Diary of 2010
Their guests are often seen captivated by the astounding beauty of the place: the mountains emerging from the crystal blue green sea. “This is a Paradise!” is often heard in the privileged accents of Bogota, as Presidents, Vice Presidents and other influential figures lay in the hammocks discussing development projects such as tourism, potential exports, investments, recruitments and shares. And as these “people of means” are deciding the future of the nation, A orders the cook to bring out more hors d’oeuvre and drinks for them to enjoy under the influence of the shade, the breeze and the cradling of the waves. Unaware of the violence in this place, like when A’s brother killed his own wife or when A’s wife tried to kill their daughter, or when groups of four or five right-wing militia came to rob the house and ask for money in exchange for the surveillance of the area, the guests reach the end of the afternoon convinced that this is indeed the most idyllic corner of the world.

As caretaker of the farm, A has a scant salary. He “squares himself off” as P says, by allowing the guaqueros to dig out the grounds in exchange for a few pieces that he then sells to these well-to-do visitors. It’s near the wetland where burials are dug out in between the old ceibas and caracoli\textsuperscript{501} trees. We saw a giant tree with roots that with every guaca that’s removed, shoots from the branches down towards the ground. It looks like an old man bent over with hundreds of canes to keep himself from falling over, only these canes are hovering above the ground, for it takes decades for them to reach it. A said this tree consumes a lot of water and its roots are very deep. The dead are buried around its branches, as if the tree were there to protect them. There are broken pieces of metates all around that have been left behind with bits and pieces of bones and skulls scattered all around. “There’s an old tiny Indian Joaco who comes visiting every year,”

\textsuperscript{501} Caracoli tree a large shade tree
commented A. “He says this is a place of gold and he doesn’t like to see his dead rolling around. That is why I like to bury the skulls back in the earth,” he pointed out, as he lifted a piece of spinal cord and threw it into one of the holes that were left open forever because a hole from guaqueria can never be fully healed again. How different to hear A reiterate that this is a “place of gold” with that yearning spark in his eye, instead of hearing the old Indian consecrating it. A says guaqueros always come back because “they never have money, they drink it all and spend it in brothels, spending it like a faith they have that they will find the next guaca.” I remember J saying “guaqueria is damned money. The person who drinks, finds guacas and if he doesn’t drink, he won’t find anything.” But as F’s brother, Y, pointed out, it wasn’t just a question of drinking but there’s a certain faith behind it. He added each time his brother went digging, he would light a candle to the Virgin beforehand and set himself the goal of finding a chief, and he would!

P said the gold in this bay is all to be found in the northern side of the beach where the fishermen spend their days and nights sitting. They complain that they haven’t caught anything for months now. “Don’t they ever dig the gold out?” I asked P. “No, they say that’s not for them.” I asked him how the fishermen could be so calm when there is no fish to be caught. He said it’s just like guaqueros, since they are not the owners “they’re grateful when it comes and when there is nothing, well there’s nothing,” he reiterated as he shrugged his shoulders in that characteristic gesture of his, as if at the end nothing really mattered.

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502 Field notes from Diary of 2010
503 Field notes from Diary of 2010
On our way out, we found private security men catching prawns in the well. They live on the other side of the cliff, in the house of a drug lord who was extradited to the United States. P said he knew the caretaker there from way back, so he allows them to dig out as much as they want. It is in this drug lord’s property where according to N, he figured out the whole terrain and he knew exactly where the gold was: a site that he claims is marked in a cave drawing. “Listen well” he said excitedly. “You stand in front of the cave and on one side is the cutting edge of the cliff and on the other side you see the burial. You picture it? I’m almost certain the guaca is right in front of the cutting edge of the cliff!” As he said this he could envision the guaca. N worked in construction. At the moment, he was making a swimming pool to get enough money to finance the two guaqueros that were out there working for him. He said construction is much easier than guaqueria but he prefers guaqueria for the excitement. Once he finishes the pool he will
go to Palmarito and join them. They are digging on $50,000 pesos\textsuperscript{504} a month right now. N affirmed that with $3 million pesos he could remain digging there with his three sons and two helpers for six months straight. He added that whoever financed them would get half of the guacas they found.

N told me his sons started digging from when they were twelve years old, the same age at which he started digging with his own brothers. His eldest brother began first by working in the Troncal. “In those days,” he said, “there were no bridges. In order for the cars to cross from one side to the other they had to be towed by boat.” As N and his brothers continued to fix the stretches along the road they began to find gold. It was through experience, he pointed out, that they started recognizing the different types of burials and then developed their techniques of guaqueria. “To square off is not only good but it’s what we live for,” continued N. Unbridled by the frenzy they would all go to consume some beer and beautiful women and then they would spend the remaining amount on provisions to go back out in search for more guacas. He told me the little he saved helped him build the house where his whole family lives now. “In those days it was the guaqueria that moved the market,” he continued. “My eldest brother is now too ill to go out anymore but he was able to buy a food store that his children manage.” N’s son G remembered how his uncle almost went crazy over “an enchanted guaca. He would ask the guaca for permission and say: ‘look, I’m not here out of bad faith.’ But ‘el encanto’\textsuperscript{505} almost killed him. He dug and dug nonstop and just when he was about to reach it, he felt a big bang on his back. He was lucky to get out of there alive.”\textsuperscript{506}

\textsuperscript{504} Approximately $20 US
\textsuperscript{505} The charm or spell
\textsuperscript{506} Field notes from Diary of 2011
As we moved away from Palmarito and Cinto, P’s narration carried on non-stop, invoking bits and pieces of stories that seemed to rouse P to the temptations, dangers and risks in the area. We went past the “Paso de la Muerte,” where more than one has died, he affirmed, and then started talking about cemeteries. He said he liked them because they are full of light, unlike the churches that are dark. He said the only thing he ever grew were ginger flowers that he took to his Mother’s grave. He’s not afraid of the dead, “I’m not afraid of anything,” he continued, and started telling us about his childhood memories and his very strict grandfather in Santander. He would go around with a whip and had hidden texts of enchantments, which he stole from him. He learnt to baptize the dead so that their soul remains at rest. When he digs them out he names them: Juancho, Pedro, Ismael...

As I continued to hear P, I was filled with the sense of having shots of information being sent my way in such abundance and so disjointed that as soon as P articulated something, it was already slipping away. As the list of places that he had dug out grew, I witnessed the same spark of excitement that I had only seen manifested in him once before when we were invited to a collector’s house on the Libertador Avenue in Santa Marta. Once inside the house I remembered D’s fantasizing of those interiors: “so lovely!” she emphasized as her dreamy voice lingered in her recollections of the house of the collectors who bought guacas from J. The cool drink directly out of the fridge with ice, or the drink that is so special that you cannot even find it in San Andresito, was like another world to her. The “elegant dinning rooms, with such fine woods, the spacious rooms, the high ceilings and so fresh inside, no dust,” for one of D’s daily challenges was

507 “Paso de la Muerte” or “Passage of Death”
508 Field notes from Diary of 2010
to sweep those abundant grains of dust and sand that came dashing with the wind into her house. I was overtaken by the sense of having time at a standstill in this Collector’s interior heavily demarcated by its thick walls, which made you forget that there were buses running up and down the Libertador Avenue. But P remained indifferent to this. He didn’t want anything to drink. Instead the sight of the collection opening before his very eyes absorbed him. P had provided them with a great part of it. “I’m the one who dug all of this out but I find it incredible to see it all together!” he exclaimed with an enthusiasm that I had never detected in him before. “Almost everyone here buys to sell, but people who buy to keep are very rare,” he commented.

As the husband and his wife guided us from one window to the next, from one room to the other, I realized that where I was seeing objects or fragments of objects, P saw the burials he had dug out. I saw saino fangs, puma fangs, jaguar fangs, vaginas, phalluses, curved bottoms, crests, snakes, whistles of all kinds, one swallow whistle that sounds exactly like a swallow, flutes, felines, carved jaguar bones, a ceramic depiction of Mamas gathered around a fire, a man with a phallus and a baby on his back, crystal quartz, bats, sorcerers, mutates. While P named out loud the places from where all of this had been extracted: Colonia Agricola, Neguanje, Gairaca, Guachaquita, Cinto, Cienaga and so on...

As I saw everything laced together: felines with felines, whistles with whistles, pectorals with pectorals, bats with bats around wood, bone, jade, quartz, cornelian, bullet beads of cornelian, tortoise discs like necklaces, I asked the couple who had organized the pieces? “I like to balance the energies” replied the husband, and the wife added that

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509 Field notes from Diary of 2010
510 Field notes from Diary of 2010
she had a very particular order and she didn’t allow anyone to move those pieces around, not even the cleaning lady. I heard the art deco clock ticking tic, tack, tic, tack, by a rose wood Buddha that stood on a column next to more collections of fire arms, virgins from Mompox, and an ebony African figurine which the husband said had been found by the fishermen in Taganga. When we were ready to leave, the husband asked P to get him more button beads, a bat pot and quartz tumas. As soon as we were outside P commented: “and they didn’t even let us into the gold display.” Apparently they only show it to the people they trust the most. When I got home, I tried to write down the feeling I had: “So far I have only been able to obtain snippets of notes here and there, like fragments of ceramic or bone or skulls, this is the sensation I am left with after the visit to this collection: bits of skeletons, bones of animals, penises, vaginas, gazes, sounds, polished pieces of materials.”

Bits and pieces is also what I felt in G’s shack except in his place they appeared to constitute an excess of memorabilia used for distraction from the really central things in his life, like his pike and shovel: the guaquero tools that he kept hidden in the wilderness so that “Parques” wouldn’t confiscate them. He told me about the time they would leave for months with a whole cuadrilla. When the food ran out they would hide the guacas in the bushes and come back the next day to continue digging. In between the planks of wood that stood under the zinc roof he inserted flags left by tourists that navigated into the far out beach of Gairaca, where he lived in the Parque Tayrona; post cards from some of them, a card from one of the many women he has had affairs with, an old trunk full of magazines and reading that people have left behind, with his favorite on top, like “Soho,” a Colombian magazine where I see Silvia Elena as photographed by her husband, the

511 Field notes from Diary of 2010
popular Vallenato and rock singer from Santa Marta: Carlos Vives. The graphic images of her nude molded body become almost palpable in G’s place. Next to that is the golden image of Tutankhamen in the cover of a National Geographic with his fantastic pharaoh eyes and bright guise that seemed even more phenomenal under G’s gaze, and then there was an article in the local Magdalena paper about a crazy teacher that assassinated a 28-year-old accountant. The article informed that he was “practicing a shamanic ritual upon this beautiful woman.” They found her raped in front and behind, with $50,000 and $20,000 peso paper bills inserted in her genitals. The article concluded that the man is dangerous and so he will not be allowed to continue teaching. G said everyone in the Central Market of Santa Marta was talking about it.  

I asked G if he enjoyed the city and he replied that he doesn’t like to go there because he’s scared that the motorbikes would run him down. He told me that one of his two sons lives there in the Barrio Tayrona with a woman who has two children of her own. But he hardly visits them because they are too many already, living in a room he said with a giant television, “a very good one, not plasma but very sharp,” he added. He said he only travelled to Santa Marta when he needed to fulfill specific errands, like restoring a guaca, calling his sisters in Cali, as well as his two sons and a few beautiful women, and finally, getting ice and water to bring back to his cabin in Gairaca where there’s no sweet water.

512 Field notes from Diary of 2010
I remember when I met him again in the Parque Bolivar in Santa Marta, he looked so impoverished and worn out in the city as compared to how I had seen him the Tayrona Park that I hardly recognized him. When I saw his necklace of tumas I knew it was him. I asked him how he got it. He told me that he found a whole family of beautiful gold jaguars once in a Bay nearby and sold them all except for one, which he kept, tied to a thread. He would hang it around his neck, until one day one of his guaquero partners, the old man Gairaca, said he wanted to barter. He placed a necklace full of glittering stones on a table. It had red tumas, crystal quartz and red stones shaped like bullets, green jade and carved stone. G accepted it and has kept it since. He said he keeps it hidden most of the time and only wears it to go out to the city.

G has lived in Gairaca for thirty years. The zinc roof is so deteriorated that it hardly protects him from the rain. But since there isn’t sweet water in that beach, he puts pots and pails under the roof to gather enough rain to bathe and cook. The beach is astoundingly beautiful, with the Caribbean Sea extending like a mantel of greens and
blues that expands all the way to the horizon in front of G’s shack. The hills around are just as magnificent with dinosaur shapes, boulders and native vegetation, and yet G commented he’s looking for “a place where I can feel free.” He said he feels too restricted there with the gaze of “Parques” on top of him. Each time “the officials are commenting: ‘there is G again guaqueando,’” and he was tired of it. “I’m surrounded by ‘sapos,’”513 he stated with that characteristic tone of his that sounded tender and enraged all at once, as if he were possessed by a double spirit that shifted intermittently from dream to desecration and back.

![G in Gairaca](image)

**Figure 28. G in Gairaca**

In the meantime, he sold cigarettes to foreigners who navigated into the Bay. He said every night he had to smoke a little before going to sleep. He had his radio on all the time to listen to Salsa music,514 the news or simply to break away from the silence that

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513 Field notes from Diary of 2010
514 Salsa music is often heard in the city of Cali where G is from.
tormented him. His stories usually inspired by either guacas or women, shed one into the other. “Oh look how lovely!” he exclaimed repeatedly with such an affectionate voice that it was almost scary. Then followed a wanting smile like when he told me about the first time he arrived there in 1968, and saw many guaqueros, men and women, living in hundreds of tents of black plastic. He said he got enough money to return to Cali and started a shoe shop where he met a woman who became his second wife, because his first wife who had beautiful dreamy eyes that went well with her brown glazed skin, had died at a very young age of liver disease that had no cure, he said. And then with that melodramatic voice of his, he pointed out that in Cali he had it all: money, his sisters, his mother, work and a wife, but he couldn’t stop thinking of the guacas. “Its like you’re bewitched. The spell pricked me and two years later I was back here digging full time.” 515

He advised me to talk to the men who work for the big patrones, 516 “then you will understand the whole history of guaqueria.” He remembered when he was taken up to the Rio Frio river basin by one of those drug lords who wanted to dig out his property. He was nervous because “those people are tough.” The man sent him along with his bodyguards and a cook. He said he was lucky and found thirty adits. “But I tell you the dead up there are so well preserved that it’s striking; with the cold it looks like they had just died, full of hair and everything.” 517 He knew that if he didn’t find anything he would be killed. But even though he didn’t know how to decipher those burials because they were different from the ones down below by the beach, he found a few guacas and survived.

515 Field notes from Diary of 2010
516 “Patrones” meaning the bosses or drug lords associated with right-wing militias
517 Field notes from Diary of 2010
When I asked G if the next time he went digging for guacas I could accompany him, he exclaimed in his glossy voice: “Oh how beautiful!” as if I had declared my love to him. He launched himself towards me as if he had found a guaca and tried to kiss me. I held him back and withdrew. As if nothing had happened, he continued to tell me that he felt a fascination with the Tairona pieces. He wanted to give me a command staff he found in a burial as a gift, but I said that it was best to leave it there. When I returned to Santa Marta in the bus, the driver asked me whom I was visiting. I said G and he replied: “oh yes he’s guaquero.” He told me that when he started driving to the Tayrona Park, he began selling five ceramic pieces, then twenty. He would accumulate them until there was a request for them and he would sell them for twice or even three times the price that he had paid. His best sale was a gold chief and a pectoral that appeared in Cinto. He sold that for $200 million. He said that he saw a lot of guacas coming out of there: deer, animals, all sold cheaply. “Then when the gold ran out they started selling ceramic. Now there’s no ceramic either, but pure forgery. I still managed to square off for a couple of Christmases though.”\(^{518}\)

The final destination of this bus route was the Central Market of Santa Marta where an exciting hubbub of activity comes to life every day from three in the morning on, as the fruits and vegetables produced all over the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta arrive in big trucks and fish is brought from the bay sides. “In this place everyone knows each other,” commented my friend who goes there almost every day at five to buy fish. One alley follows the next with stands that sell just about anything one can imagine: from plantain, salty Costal cheese, spices and nuts, to herbal medicine like the kind one finds

\(^{518}\) Field notes from Diary of 2010
near the Contra pharmacy where they give you good tips like how the skin of the cashew fruit can help you cleanse your digestive system. There is also cheap clothing, towels, school books with colorful bindings, pots, pans and domestic appliances, needles, lace, plastic beads, buttons, and if you want something more magical you can go to the corner where “the Putumayo Indians” are selling herbs and special beads in shapes of hearts and fangs that protect you from evil spirits.

Likewise, you can find honey, knives, saws, chains, rope, matches, big and small locks, hammocks, freshly squeezed juice and arepas and fabrics like the ones that Mr. Hassim has sold for over forty years ever since he first came to this country. “No joda!” he said in his Lebanese accent having adopted the slang terms from the Coast, “this country has given me so much, I love this country.” The last time I saw him he was sad because he had to leave with his wife to Venezuela where their sons decided to remain permanently. I would arrive there and before asking me what I was looking for he would say: “No joda, I really admire you for going up that mountain, it must be amazing!” and as he asked more questions, he would install me on one of his stools to hear my stories. In the meantime, he would ask one of the boys that went from shop to shop as messengers, to bring me a cold soda from another stand.

Unexpected pockets such as Mr. Hassim’s shop make the market exciting. Passages that lead you into further passages are filled with wonders as much as horrors. For the Mercado is not only the place where you get the cheapest products sold in Santa Marta but it’s above all, the center of illegal activity around certain narrow alleys in which one can find “really bad people.” When I mentioned this to P, he replied: “if we didn’t see bad people we would be dead. As for good, well, maybe it’s like people say: if
so and so is a Saint, it’s probably because that person is no longer with us.” He said that while we stood in front of the granary “La Estrella,” which is where most of the routes to the Tayrona Park and all around the Troncal leave in the early morning.

In “La Estrella” you can buy flash lights, nets for sleeping, oil, chocolate, rice, bread, Machita boots, rope for hanging hammocks, everything you need in order to survive in the Sierra. A girl about twelve, selling gummy “frunas” walked in. She was astoundingly beautiful and yet when she spoke her voice was so rough, thick and worn out that no one even turned around to look at her, as if she were cursed. I smiled but saw no light in her eyes. She continued descending down the alleys of the market… down, down, down until I saw her disappear with her 4x6” box of frunas.

The owner of La Estrella, army-like hair cut, a scar cutting through the front of his face, restless eyes, with a half cachaco accent because his mother is from Cundinamarca, asked: “What are you looking for?” And straight up front I answered: “I’m looking for guaqueros.” “That’s prohibited now,” he replied. “But I like that shit,” he went on and told me he has a gold and quartz necklace from when he used to dig in La Estrella, but he put it away. I told him I’m trying to gather the history of guaqueria and I would be interested in talking more. He got frightened. He summoned one of his Kankuamu helpers from Atanquez so he could speak to me about his “culture.” I said: “I’m not interested in tourist attractions, I want to talk to you.” He replied: “I never have time.” The particular way in which the illegal activity is coordinated is always dependent upon the armed groups that hold the monopoly in the Central Market, and the confrontations between one group and another explodes each time into a new murder, a
new incident until the commotion wears down. Twenty-five years of age have been
enough for the owner of La Estrella to learn that he cannot afford any risks.

**Section 6.3**

B who is more than ninety and lives near the Railroad Avenue in Santa Marta,
longs for the time when she would spend the summer up in the colder terrains of the
Sierra. She remembered the delightful dinner parties to which they were invited in big
haciendas with beautiful silver wear, cooks and waiters dressed in ironed linen imported
from Europe. She talked about her Irish nana, Lady McLane, who introduced her and her
sister to all kinds of English literature. However, when the World War exploded, she left
worried for her home and family. She continued writing letters to them and described
how the towns she knew on the face of the earth had vanished. They were all bombarded,
she said, and pointed out that she had found a place different from the one she had left
behind. “Now Santa Marta looks just like this,” reflected B, “one big hole”519 She
complained that she hardly goes out anymore because she doesn’t recognize anything
anymore.

Santa Marta is assailed with eagerness for investment, buildings sprouting like
mushrooms everywhere. The city center has become saturated with restaurants for
tourism, while the amount of crime, drugs, and displaced populations have fired up.
There used to be a natural well near B’s house, with animals, a forest full of ceibas and
campanos that followed the roundabout of the Manzanares River, expressed B. But now
the only thing that traverses the city is security cameras, vigilance and commercial
centers with guards and air conditioning. As Fortuna is equated to money, zones become

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519 Field notes from Diary of 2011
borders, passages turn to boundaries and the thresholds between magic and money slip away. It is not hard to fathom that the most desirable of commodities left in the next round of bonanzas that have been parading up and down, will be the magic of the land.

“Nature was something that inspired such reverence,” commented Señora Ana Vicenta. People felt a great sense of awe with The Manzanares River that was so pure before. “But what was pure before is now pure filth,”\textsuperscript{520} she pointed out. People would wake up very early in the morning and between two to six in the morning, they would go with the ceramic pitchers to fetch the freezing cold water that came running down from “the Colonies” as she referred to the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. “There was El Recuerdo, Cincinnati, Vista Nieves, la Victoria, Mundo Nuevo, Tornoban, Arimaca, Las Nubes.”\textsuperscript{521} Enormous coffee plantations that had their own colonies like Cincinnati, which was founded by Mr. Orlando Lincoln Flye and his wife Eva.

The Flyes arrived in 1892 to install one of the first hydroelectric plants near Santa Marta in Bonda. When Mr. Flye walked around the area he found coffee plants and sent a sample to the United States, they told him they would buy all he wanted to sell. He began acquiring more and more land and grew up to 2,584 hectares. He called it Cincinnati, which is where he was born in Ohio. In a single harvest there were thousands of workers that would come together to pick the coffee grains. The Colonies were not an easy terrain, as Mary Boardman noted; a New Yorker whom in the beginning of the century decided to escape her duties of marriage and seek a little adventure in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. She observed that one of the biggest challenges was to go on walks, “You cannot climb up because directly back of the house begins an almost impenetrable

\textsuperscript{520} Field notes from Diary of 2011
\textsuperscript{521} Field notes from Diary of 2011
forest. If you go in the other direction, you - well, if you missed your footing and began to roll, you would be back in Santa Marta before you could stop yourself.” 522 Cincinnati had its own chapel for baptisms, confirmations and marriages. It had its own school and they even had a cinema to view silent film for two cents. They had their own coinage with the seal of “Hacienda Cafetera Cincinnati.”

This Hacienda became such an important point of reference in the region that well after it ended in 1984, on a clear night in which I was standing in the Buritaca river basin in the nujue of Shibuleyi with Jaba Catalina523 by the hearth of the fire we saw before us the clear night and the constellation of stars all around except for one light that was different from the others, and in her very limited Spanish, she pointed to it and said: “that is Cinnati.” Señora Ana Vicenta mentioned that the people who came down from the Colonies would take a dirt path that went past Tigrera. She remembered when the road for cars was first traced from Santa Marta to the Quinta de San Pedro Alejandrino, and then all the way up to the town to Minca. It was completed in 1941. The Flye family brought a specialist from the United States to teach three people: Olivorio, Fernando Tovar and Carbono to drive a Tuber Bacar, a Ford and a Chevrolet all the way from the Quinta de San Pedro, well past Minca. The banana and coffee technologies and exports were synonymous of progress in the region, but according to Señora Ana Vicenta, these were also times when everyone made good use of the river. “No one could ignore it or forget it. If any one person would dirty the water, everyone else would complain and demand respect,” she said. “But when each one started obtaining their individual water taps, they didn’t care any more. The water was now private and everyone turned their

523 Please see Chapter Four

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back to the river. Now the river is the wasteland of Santa Marta: one big filth is what connects us to the Colonies up in the Sierra Nevada,” remarked Señora Ana Vicenta.

Her daughter’s in laws, like Al, grew up playing on the big boulders in between in the ceibas, bongos and campanos of Bonda. Unlike Ana Vicenta’s bird’s eye view that allows her to pull together 95 years of lived experience with the transparency of daylight, everything that Al described was tainted by the image of a dark Domino piece. He remembered the places of guaqueria with respect to the creek in the form of a Domino; he recalled the pool of yellow clay in relation to the place where the red clay is extracted, like a Domino piece. Everything he drew in my notebook looked like a rectangle with dots on each side. He was married, without a penny and terribly ill but he couldn’t stop betting Domino. There was something indomitable and unyielding in him, always on the verge of squaring off. He couldn’t eat solids, and carried in his shirt’s pocket a box of antibiotic Metronidazol “to kill off bugs in my stomach” he said. He only consumed liquids, and if that included alcohol, he said, it’s done “a lo bien” or in the right way, meaning that he won’t drink just one little beer here and there, but a whole basket full and in the company of friends. In the meantime, his wife seemed to have taken over the expense of the house, continuing to survive despite her husband, whom she left to his own passions and addictions. He acted like “un arrimado” in his own house and thanked her for the liquids that she gave him as we spoke. “Again, what is the name of the creek that you mentioned still has potential for guaqueria?” I asked Alcide for the third time. He kindly repeated the name. “I don’t know why I have such a hard time

524 Field notes from Diary of 2011
525 Field notes from Diary of 2011
526 Meaning like a guest in his own house
remembering it,” I said to him. “What is so hard for you to remember is just as hard for me to forget,” he observed.

As the conversation carried on, I began to feel as if the people in Bonda felt that the connection to the earth of the Bondiwa, the natives of that land, gave them the right to mold those ceramic figures. “Hybrids” said Alcide, is what is most common now. People will make up anything to sell more. His relative, Delfina who was also a Bondiwa, meaning from Bonda, gestured the process of making this earthen ware in the middle of her living room: the yellow clay was dug out and put here, while the red clay was likewise dug out and placed on this other side. One would mix the amount necessary from one and the other and make a kind of flattened cake, she said. All the women would gather each with their piece, and ahead with it! They would give it vanish with a red stone that the family would bring back from their outings for guaqueria in Palmarito. One would take it and polish those pieces until they were perfectly smooth and bright. Then came the “bruñidor.” All of that would be placed in a kiln that was made especially for that. But very few people today have that knowledge, she pointed out. Señora Delfina learnt it from her grandmother, but she hasn’t taught her granddaughter. “It’s not that it’s difficult,” she replied to my question, as she sat on her imitation velvet sofa with the shiny black furniture, the television set and the elegant nacre coffee cups around her. Her granddaughter was in school. As we spoke, one could hear the kids playing in the schoolyard. “It’s just that there is no longer any time or interest. If you can bring the resources, I can teach you”, she continued in response to my interest. “It was a family thing,” she added, “we would all spend time together and go out with our pikes to guaquear, it was a natural thing, we are from Bonda and that is what people do here, we

527 Field notes from Diary of 2011
carry Guajira blood, that’s our tradition. It’s just like the Tagangeros, they have their tradition too, and so do the Cienagueros.”

The crispness of Bonda was such a contrast with the feeling I had a few hundred feet above Bonda when my friends invited me to visit a property they wanted to acquire. Follow the way up the river and everything begins to feel strangely warm, as if the water were emerging with this heat from underneath the earth. My friends insisted that they wanted a little house in the Sierra with the view of Santa Marta from above. An architect friend of theirs from Bogota was already envisioning a similar idea. A personal reserve up there with a compound of houses, pathways for the inhabitants to walk at leisure within their privacy and a place to leave their cars when commuting back and forth from the city to the Sierra. As I looked all the way to where my vision could reach up to the cutting edge of the cliffs in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, I inquired who lived up there. They pointed out the bigger owners who hold titles to vast properties with creeks and rivers that feed into the Toribio, Manzanares, Cordoba and Gaira rivers, where their kids organize exciting and adventurous outings of motorcycle racing with the full professional gear, around the star of water in Cerro Kennedy, that the Kogi identify as “Jaba Nakulindue”: the Mother of Water.

I asked one of the owners of those properties what he believed the future of the Sierra was? He answered that the Sierra regressed. “When the English, Americans and foreigners came to plant coffee and make roads, it was progressing. But with the violence it relapsed. Plantations and livestock are not so easy to grow in the Sierra because of the inclination of uneven terrains,” he noted, “but one can invest in tourism. I think the future

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528 Field notes from Diary of 2011
of the Sierra is in fact, tourism." And since he belonged to a family that also owns extensive properties by the sea, he envisioned opening that magical connection from the sea to the cold terrains in the tundra regions by the lakes, where tourists could enjoy the magic in a single gulp, one package.

As I stood in that middle zone with my friends above Bonda, in between the passage that connected the highlands to the low lands, I could feel the bowels of the earth drying up, I saw the boulders overturned everywhere, and black hoses like arteries trying to drain the last drop of water with and an entire slope full of hungry cattle right in front of us. My friends explained to me that the owner there has exhausted guaqueria and is now ready to sell his terrain, just like P’s friend in “La Revuelta.” P’s friend sold his “parcela” to one of P’s buyers because he had a mortgage of $11 million pesos and it was confiscated for $20 million pesos. The buyer paid $31 million for this property full of caves and big boulders. P’s buyer wanted to gather all his guaquero friends to dig out the place completely, so as to rescue all the treasures first, and then turn the terrain into a center for massage, yoga and Tai Chi. He talked about building some cabins on the ancient terraces to get some ecological tourism going. He said there was no greater fascination to foreigners than the Tayrona, “what they like” he insisted “is the Tayrona myth,” and as he spoke he conflated ancient culture and the Tayona Park.

P told me he first got to know his parcela in a place called Mexico when he carried mules filled with marijuana to the beach. Once loading a ship to Martinica he was caught and spent eight months in jail. Now he was working on a parcela above the Once de Noviembre, a shantytown at the outskirts of Santa Marta. He was there with other

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529 Field notes from Diary of 2011
530 Field notes from Diary of 2011
guaqueros. They could walk from there to Santa Marta in thirty minutes but before they can move in, they need to get water up there. After getting some water in and if he could get some money, he said, he was going to buy some zinc sheets for a roof. They needed various kilometers of hose and the transportation that added up to $400,000. A dealer was willing to pay that amount for a pot he dug out in Neguanje. “He will probably sell it for a couple of million pesos to some gringos that live in los Cocos,” commented P. As he referred to another fancy neighborhood by the bay with buildings high enough to gulp down the view of the sea and the Sierra all at once. “But I don’t care,” he continues, “all I’m thinking about is the hose, the rest doesn’t interest me.” P was now trying to sell Mexico in the Tayrona Park for $9 or $10 million pesos. He added that if the buyer were Parques he would sell it for $120 million but the parcela didn’t have the papers and he didn’t have the money to turn it into a touristic compound. “Someone with money could get a lot out of it,” he pointed out.

P planned to settle down in his new parcela in El Once and gather a cuadrilla “to go for some real guaquería.” J wanted to go for some “real digging with his cuadrilla” too, looking for a town he had devised thirty years ago in the property of one of the richest men in Santa Marta near Cerro Kennedy, but after searching around for almost two weeks, they couldn’t find it. “Why did the real digging stop?” I asked P. And without hesitating he answered it was because of drug trafficking. “Those pots don’t come alone you know,” he pointed out. “Those who were willing to pay were the mafia and then the paramilitaries who took over. It became easier to obtain money for a piece used to transport cocaine.” I remembered J’s story when he was invited with his cuadrilla to

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531 Field notes from Diary of 2011
532 Field notes from Diary of 2011
dig out a private property. As soon as they arrived and saw the guards “armed to their teeth,” they realized they had to find a way to escape... they were waiting for them to get the gold before they even started digging.\textsuperscript{533}

On our way back from Mexico, as we returned with P to the Troncal, he receded back into his characteristic silence. We entered a store near the Troncal and I asked the store tender what food she had? “We are dying of hunger” I commented. “Dying of hunger?!” she repeated and looked at P as if he were responsible for this. “Ay P!”\textsuperscript{534} she said pronouncing his name in the diminutive, not so much because of his small size but because of the childish innocence that he seemed to project. He smiled, shrugged his shoulders and lifted his eyebrows. She shook her head and offered us some morcilla that was freshly made. However, it was not just the physical hunger that my husband and I were suffering, but something vast, a feeling of deprivation that crept deep inside, and oppressed us to the point that when we were back in Santa Marta we felt wrecked. I remembered Mama Luca’s words: the Earth is hungry, thirsty, we are sucking out her bowels, her liquids, her life force.

I called my friend Paulina and she advised us to take advantage of Mama Jose Maria’s visit. As we sat next to him, Mama Jose Maria looked into his bottle for divination where a bubble trickled up and down the rum liquid. “Could it be guaquero, or snake, or paraco or witch?” he articulated as he tried to cure us from the energies that had penetrated our spirit. These energies awaken all sorts of different reactions in different people: sexual desire, rage, violence, desire for riches, longing... “The problem is that you

\textsuperscript{533} Field notes from Diary of 2010
\textsuperscript{534} Field notes from Diary of 2010
slept on the ground,” continued Mama Jose Maria as he read the bubbles in his divination bottle, “where the Mothers and Fathers of that place are claiming a debt.”

Mama Jose Maria was humorously named “the antimotin” or antiriot police of the Kogi governor, for defusing negative spirit riots and warning him whenever there was danger in the area. Such as the time some right-wing militias tried to shoot his car in Mingueo but missed him for had followed Mama Jose Maria’s signal and changed cars. Mama Jose Maria was an expert in dealing with negative forces. He was also the one who cured me from my first illness when I started my fieldwork with guaqueros. “I am minding the dead.” I wrote delirious when a fever of 104F overtook me with a turbulent and dizzying wave of shivers.

I began to see A’s diamond ring blinding me. His chubby pinkie, half a pinkie because the rest had been chopped off, caught between the sea and the mountains,
moving around passionately as his diamond inlayed in 12K gold remained fixed. He smiled, and gave me a carved bone as a gift. As I saw my hands deliver the neatly packed and new bulk of bills of my Sabadones,\(^{537}\) I felt like they were someone else’s. I paid the stones for Mama Luca’s offering. It went straight into the closet of the house where I was staying, not far from the room where the ashes of the dead husband lay in a wooden box that was too small for his body. “He was too big,” commented the wife as the plastic bag overflowed within the case. The crucifix balanced right on top of it. Her housekeeper told me she didn’t like to clean that part of the house because she could feel his presence, “he is unsatisfied,”\(^{538}\) she said because they never fulfilled his request. I slept among the dead and hoped there wasn’t a conflict between the Indian man’s liquid in the form of quartz stones and the rich dead man’s ashes sealed in overflowing plastic. The image of my grandfather dying returned to me as he continued to touch the top of his head, trying to see if it was still there at the very moment of his last breath.\(^{539}\) As if he no longer had a head: unspecified head. It could have been any one of our heads like the skulls and pieces of skeleton that I saw rolling around the holes in Cinto. Which one is my grandfather’s head? I wondered “And there are more burials underneath!” affirmed A, so excited by the prospect of treasure that he could hardly breathe.

\(^{537}\) Please see Chapter One

\(^{538}\) Field notes from Diary of 2009

\(^{539}\) Please see Chapter One
Chapter Seven. FORTUNA

“In the town they tell the story of the great Pearl – how it was found and how it was lost again… And because the story has been told so often, it has taken root in every man’s mind.”

Section 7.1

Mr. Barbas was a missioner of calculation; his encouragement for precision served him exceptionally well in his empire of prices. It was within this fortress that he was able to exert full control, like a commander who exerts an influence over each person attracted to his merchandise. He was the sole owner of this “Antiquities” shop. Cross the street from the San Francisco Square towards the Puerta de Hierro and half way across a pedestrian passage you will find Mr. Barbas’s shop. He’s a petite, well-groomed, fit-looking man who has traveled all over the world selling Pre-Columbian pieces or “merchandise in Europe, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Switzerland, Spain, Italy, France, and even negotiated pieces in NY, Miami, Panama, Curacao, Bon Aire and other islands in the Caribbean.”

He affirmed his life changed when he was told he was terminally ill with pancreatic cancer. He began to search for alternative cures and claimed to have found techniques to control the energy of the body, including concentrating extraterrestrial energy. He acted as if he were a scientist drawing connections between Pre-Columbian pieces and UFOs. He was certain that UFOs have been sent on numerous occasions to rescue the gold hidden high up in the lakes of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. He affirmed that it’s the energy of gold that extraterrestrials are after for the people who hid...
it there a thousand years ago, he said, were in fact extraterrestrials. “You can see this reflected in the pieces,” for example there’s a piece you can find in the Gold Museum in Bogota that looks exactly like a UFO. Those beings didn’t make up anything. On the contrary, they captured reality exactly as it was. As I heard him say in Spanish that they “plasmaron” everything they saw, I imagined the plasma televisions that have swamped the market, those which reflect reality to the finest degree of accuracy and are sold in San Andresito, half a block away from his shop. Endless quantities of electronic devices and alcohol emerge there from warehouses shut away underground and hidden from public view.

Mr. Barbas looked as if he were about to attend a ritual, bathed in cologne, with well-ironed shirts. When he was not in his shop he was in the Freemasonry fraternity. The phone rang, it was “el Profe” asking if he could come in at 7:30 on Saturday morning. Barbas assented enthusiastically and announced he had interesting stuff to show him: whistles and other things, “no rare tumbaga though.” “Everyone is looking for the rare piece, they want what no one else has” commented Mr. Barbas as he hung up his cream-colored dial phone. He was often seen answering calls from people who were looking for very specific things: a stamp, a coin, an antique, and so on.

As I sat perched upon his stool I told him I was writing about guaqueria. “Every guaquero wants money,” affirmed Mr. Barbas as if he were quoting a price. “One was the piggy bank of guaqueros,” he continued. “A cuadrilla consists of six members: three partners,” explained Barbas. “While some would pierce through the ground with pikes, the others would dig out with shovels.” He said that many times he would come along

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543 Captured reality
544 Field notes from Diary of 2009
with the cuadrillas to make sure that they didn’t trick him. “If there was gold or stones, pectorals, whistles, ceremonial ceramic pieces or everyday ceramic pieces then one would determine the price right away, and of course the prices were known for there has been a market in the Magdalena region since 1965, 1966.”545 One of the terms they use frequently is: “we squared off” or “nos cuadramos. This term means to pay off the debts and have more left over, depending on what was obtained: there were guacas of a million, two, three, ten, even fifty million.”546 He told me he sold a lot to the Gold Museum “they were opportunists... They only bought the extraordinary pieces so one had to find other buyers. If the pieces were not taken abroad, Senators, Congressmen, Ministers, and many times the mafia would buy simply because there was excess money in Santa Marta.”

Mr. Barbas told me he belonged to the line of ex-Presidents of the Guaquero’s Syndicate founded in 1971. He was the president from 1985-1990. “Its first President was the greatest buyer of Pre-Columbian objects in the Magdalena region: Mr. Baron Gomez. He had a bar and when a good guaca came along the guaqueros would flow in there, asking for a bottle of whisky.” He remembered how they used to “put many bottles in the hands of guaqueros before negotiating. Once ablaze with alcohol we would surprise them, in their weakness they were willing to negotiate anything for more drink and women.”547

Sometimes the guaqueros wouldn’t come into the city but would ask to have the whisky sent out to where they were digging. “A bottle would cost $700 pesos, $500 pesos, $1,000 or $2,000, depending. There was 100 Piper, the most common. Then there was Sello Negro or Buchanan or Chivas Regal. The best one was Chivas Regal 21, which

545 Field notes from Diary of 2009
546 Field notes from Diary of 2009
547 Field notes from Diary of 2009
came in a porcelain bottle. That was my favorite. One would bring them the bottle because the fact is that: guaquero that doesn’t drink, is not guaquero. A guaquero must get drunk and have the endorsement of the alcohol to spray over the dead. The Indian likes chicha\textsuperscript{548} but since we didn’t have chicha then we would give the dead whisky, rum or aguardiente. Guaqueros have no concept of saving and all they do is spend two, three or more days in the canteens.”\textsuperscript{549}

Mr. Barbas was interrupted by a man who walked into his shop with euro bills and asked for $30,000 pesos, “I’ll give you 10,000” he said right away without the slightest hesitation, “not because your hunger is reflected on your face, but because that is what these bills are worth.” The man accepted the money and walked back out of the shop looking ashamed. I remember my embarrassment the day before. I had arrived at his shop at 12:12 but Mr. Barbas had not waited for me. When I called him baffled because we had an appointment for lunch, he said to me in a suspiciously calm tone: “don’t worry, I didn’t wait for you because I am like an American. When I saw that you had not arrived at 12 o’clock sharp, I left the shop.”

Mr. Barbas was bitter because in 2003, the Colombian Institute of Anthropology and History, ICANH, confiscated 360 pieces from his shop. “This is all due to President Patraña, meaning President Strife, as he referred to President Pastrana (1998-2002) who passed a law prohibiting guaqueria and exporting Pre-Columbian antiquities which national patrimony. Those who are caught are fined with up to 400 minimum salaries. “All you have to do is turn on the television to watch an interview on the news with some Minister or Congressman. As he talks to the camera you can see his library behind his

\textsuperscript{548} Chicha is an indigenous drink, many times fermented and usually made of maize
\textsuperscript{549} Field notes from Diary of 2009
desk with Pre-Columbian pieces standing on its shelves. You can be sure that was dug out with the sweat of some poor man. But when they see the piece in the hands of the rich man the State doesn’t do anything, instead when they see a poor man with a piece in his hands, they say he stole it or he’s going to sell it, and they take it away immediately. If there is a law it should apply to everyone!” “Word amongst dealers,” continued Barbas, is that President Patraña believed himself to be Christopher Columbus discovering America and was easily fooled with a fake Pre-Columbian piece from the Valle region, that cost him $640 million pesos. “When you believe yourself to be Columbus you are easily fooled with anything,” added Barbas.

He took out several pieces from around his shop and chuckled pointing out that most of the confiscated merchandise was fake. According to him, archaeologists from the ICANH returned a broken piece, which was one of the few authentic ones he had. He claimed he could tell the authentic right away because of the aura of the piece. He said that reproductions “screech.” Supposedly you cannot buy anything because if you acquire a piece the ICANH will take it away, despite the fact that one is negotiating it within national borders. “If a piece comes out by accident,” continued Barbas, “there is always someone who will buy it in the black market. There can be all the laws you want prohibiting the sale of these goods, but as long as there are interesting pieces there will always be someone with the will and the money to acquire them. It’s natural!” he concluded. “Another thing is to send the objects abroad. But imagine!” he exclaimed, “if we have tons of drugs being shipped out in submarines or big ships, how can you expect not to find a piece of gold or ceramic in the cargo?”

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550 Field notes from Diary of 2009
At that point, I saw a young man around twenty leaning his bicycle against the shop’s façade, dressed in red Bermuda shorts with two black and white stripes on each side, a cap, a goatee and a white, black and red quartz necklace that he wouldn’t sell. He handed over to Barbas a ceramic pot that he found in perfect condition except for a little groove on one side. He asked for $100,000 but Barbas said he would buy it for $50,000. They bargained and Barbas agreed to give him $80,000. He told him he had a bag of red tumas he would be bringing in next week. Barbas paid $80,000 for the bag but would sell each tuma separately for $50,000 to $80,000, depending on the quality. “He wants a profit of more than 100%,” commented Antonio who’s aware of all the gossip in the area. He said Barbas has a reputation for being hard with prices and the guaqueros only go there as a last resort. When Barbas went towards the back of his shop to get the money, I asked the young man where he got the tumas. He told me that everyone knows him in Mingueo, he goes from one house to the next carrying pots, pans, spoons, plates made in China, all kinds of cheap “cacharreria” that he buys in the Mercado Central and exchanges them for the tumas that people find in the ground when it rains.

The next day I returned because Barbas had offered to show me how to tell the fake tumas from the genuine ones. He took out the tumas that can be seen in the window and claimed those were all fake. Then he climbed up his ladder and pulled out a copper basin that looked like the conch shell in Bottecelli’s “The Birth of Venus.” It was filled with necklaces with quartz and jade tumas and other stones. He pointed out those were all original. I asked him why they looked so glossy; he said they were cleaned with Baby

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551 Antonio is a shoe shiner who works a few blocks away in the main square of Santa Marta in the Parque Bolivar. See Chapter Six
552 Mingueo is a township at the foothills of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in the Guajira region
553 Crockery
554 For more on the Mercado Central please see Chapter Six
Johnson oil. He then placed a genuine and a fake in each of my hands and instructed me to feel the difference: the weight, the heat in the hand, and so on. Then he showed me the piercings at each end and how one could see a thread had been perfectly wound around, getting narrower towards the center as if they had spun something into the quartz. I remembered J’s theories about how they made each piece, including the tumas. He thought “the Indians” would take the big thorns of the trupillo\textsuperscript{555} tied together with the spinning thread. When heating the quartz, the thorns would burn away but the thread would remain. He told me that once he found one with a big, thick, black hair, instead of the thread. According to Barbas, there isn’t any technology today that can match the perfect spiraling holes of Pre-Columbian pieces.

Mr. Barbas commented the people who work with indigenous Mamas were always coming around buying tumas and said “the Indians are very naïve because one can stick the broken pieces and... wait a second,” he said as he interrupted the interview and stood up to see a woman who gestured from outside his shop. I saw her sun burnt, very poor, wasted shoes, she released a magnificent ruby red tuma from her hands. As I watched the quartz stone dropping out of her hands I remembered the article on Julio Cesar Sepulveda’s\textsuperscript{556} father: Florentino Sepulveda, his hands “full of calluses” pulling out from his pocket “two pink stones with white streaks tied together with an old and dirty piece of thread,” informed the author.\textsuperscript{557}

This is the only thing left from the discovery of Ciudad Perdida, “along with a dead son” he said in the interview, as the author noted that his lungs whistled because he was so ill with tuberculosis that he could hardly breath. “Three years ago I went myself to

\textsuperscript{555}Thorny tree which grow in dry forest land
\textsuperscript{556}For more on Julio Cesar Sepulveda please see Chapter Two
\textsuperscript{557}El Tiempo, “Apenas una tumba para Julio Cesar...” February 8, 1987, p. 11A
dig him back out. I put what was left of him in a little box and brought him back with me...” He told his story: he came from the North of Santander to the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta where his wife’s uncle had already settled, looking for a better life. He only found “necklaces of colored beads,” said Florentino. “I didn’t even find a kernel of gold. That’s what luck is.” Then he remembered the time when his son Julio Cesar was alive and said: “We would sell fifty bead necklaces for $1,000 pesos in Santa Marta. We developed the habit of looking for necklaces every time we needed money, because it didn’t pay to sell maize or plantain. It’s more expensive to bring the mule down to the city, than what they pay for it.” According to J, it was in the Central Market of Santa Marta, where the dispute between the Sepulveda and the Restrepo family began over $100 pesos. At that time it was a lot of money, pointed out J. You could buy a beer for $1.50 pesos at the Lincoln or the Castelblanco in the city center.

The woman apologized to Mr. Barbas for not having come in the day before, “but there was such a flood” she said, looking exhausted. Barbas had already paid her the stone. “You know I trust you,” he replied in his decided tone, “if you give me your word, I trust you. That’s why I gave you the money.” She left and he returned to his seat without even giving her the fare for the bus. He hid away the precious red tuma for which he paid $15,000, before I even got a chance to feel it.

“Those dealers don’t give anything for free; they only calculate,” affirmed P, “what else can you expect!” P told me that Mr. Barbas doesn’t really care about the quartz because he’s after bigger deals. “He wants to sell the big things while he allows the small ones to trickle on the sides,” he commented. “There are many of those tricky men,” said N angrily as he informed me that he’s desperately trying to bypass another.

558 For more please see Chapter Two
dealer he used to sell everything to. “That man ripped me off!” he said hurt. “They take advantage of others just because they have contacts.” Since I was from Bogota, perhaps I could help them? He asked. “Surely I would know people who would be interested in the beautiful gold guacamaya he’s trying to sell.” He’s selling it for $30 million pesos and it seems that someone from Medellin is interested but he needs to send a couple of photographs and he doesn’t have the means to take them. Could I help him?

We were in the Once de Noviembre. P had climbed down from his parcela where he had finally managed to install the water hose. His sister LM invited me to visit them in her house. As I arrived I saw so many paths up the cliff, with structures piled one on top of the other and staircases that lead to more streets and others that lead nowhere, that I felt completely lost. I went into a bakery with two big “picop speakers” pounding at full volume and asked the woman there if she knew where LM and P lived? She told me I should get more instructions directly from them because if I asked anyone around there they would be suspicious and refrain from telling me, even if they knew. Distrust reigned in this shantytown. I felt everyone’s gaze nailed on me. By LM’s hunch she told P to call me, and he rescued me from the bakery. Thereafter, we began to climb up the muddy precarious stairs. When we finally reached the house, LM gave us “Saltinas” and colorful bright soda in aluminum cups.

Two new visitors arrived. One of them was wearing a Wayuuu hat and looked at me suspiciously. “I have a buyer for your parcela in Mexico right now!” he said to P “but it has to be soon cause that man is eager.” Then a third man arrived and they all went behind the curtain that divided the living room from the bedroom murmuring something

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559 See Chapter Six
560 Saltine crackers
561 Mexico is P’s invaded terrain in the Tayrona Park, see Chapter Six
before they came out again. P had changed his cap for a cowboy-looking hat and had a

I mentioned to P that Mr. Barbas was selling a gold guacamaya, which he claimed
came from a bigger town than Ciudad Perdida. “Bullshit!” replied P. “Everyone these
days is after a town like that. If he had found one, everyone would know about it.” I
thought about the town painted at the entrance of the cherished fish market section in el
Mercado. It’s referred to as “Pueblito” or the Little Town, named after the Little Town in
the Parque Tayrona, which together with Ciudad Perdida carries fantastic myths about the
gold that is buried in the ground. “Where there is a town there’s a government: the chiefs,
the Mamas, the helpers. That’s a lot of gold,” asserted P.

P commented: “money is an illusion.” He remembered how many times people
have gone crazy over it. His sister LM who was standing next to us making lunch, told us
the story of a poor man in El Once who won the lottery and became a rich man. “But the
illusion was so big” she said, “that he couldn’t take the news, went crazy and died.” I
asked them what happened to the money and P replied that his wife took it and built a
two-story house. Those who have something and don’t invest it are left with nothing,” he
continued, “and those who have never had anything and suddenly find something, don’t
know what to do with it.” As the conversation carried on, I found out the visitors were
mining in “Quebrada del Sol,” in the Don Diego river basin. They insisted, “there’s
good gold to be found there.” There are veins and there’s also gold in the rivers, they
pointed out. But P said he had promised many years ago that he would never work for

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562 For more on the Don Diego river basin or Ulueyi in Kogi, please see Chapter Three
anyone again. You find the gold and then the patrones charge you hard for every little streak. “I don’t like that. I only work for myself.”

That afternoon I went walking with N along the Troncal that delimits the lower part of El Once de Noviembre. He wanted to show me the place where he’s helping build a pool. On our way there, by the Troncal or highway, I saw an extension of land that he pointed out was one of the last farms left in Santa Marta. It belonged to a well to do widow who decided to sell it to a man, he said. The man divided the whole terrain and is selling each allotment for $1,200,000. People are making their individual houses. This neighborhood is now called New Millennium. In a year the whole thing will be one big housing development. But instead of a development N sees very fertile land “full of dead Indians.” He noted the river used to pass through it before. He commented on the sand sacks they placed there to dredge the river; they removed all the roots of the trees, and now the whole river is overflowing.

When we arrived at the swimming pool, I found that it has been filled with dark brown water from the river. The kids swam there instead of the river, which is right next to it because now everyone wants a swimming pool just like the privileged. “You see the hill behind and the flat land in front?” N continued excited, “that right there is an Indian town!” But then he told me there is a brick factory on top of it, and “when a bunch of us tried to get in we couldn’t get past the bricks.” I replied that I was amazed there could be a whole town so close to Santa Marta, and he started pointing out each hill around us where gold was found... “There were more people then than there are now,” he said. N pointed out guacas have always existed and there are towns everywhere: “Bonda,

563 The patrones there are bosses that belong to the right-wing militia: Aguilas Negras or Black Eagles. They re-emerged from the ashes of the demobilization process of the AUC, between 2004 to 2006. For more see Chapter Two.
Taganga, Neguanje, Palmarito, Bahia Concha, Cerro Kennedy, el Once, lots of them!” he began to list the places as if in his mind he were seeing armies of dead bodies buried with their treasures. “There’s gold everywhere,” he repeated. Even when he was making his own house in El Once he found a little pot with a bead of gold underneath one of the columns. “The kids sold it,” he said referring to his four sons who are now in their thirties. He lived in his apartment with his wife, his two daughters, a son in law, his four sons, a daughter in law and five grandchildren. His aunt used to live with them but she died the week before. He was trying to find someone interested in renting her room.

Figure 30. N showing me around the Troncal

On our way back from the swimming pool, I saw N walking along the Troncal, with the traffic behind him at the fringes of the city, pushing the limit that in my mind divided urban from rural, work time from leisure, the dead from the living. It reminded me of my conversation with F’s brother: Y. I asked Y what he thought was the difference between a Mama and a guaquero? He answered:

You hear the guaqueros that used to climb up peaks, cross over valleys, journey through the forest and it’s like listening to the Mamas today. They’ll recognize the land, the burials of women with white tumas and they’ll say: ‘this is the place that abounds in water.’ Then they’ll move on to the place where the guacamayas nest and they’ll find a plot full of gold guacamayas; or they’ll see the spot were gold abounded and they’ll recognize it: ‘the place of chiefs, or this is the place where
the poor are.’ Guaqueros used to travel such vast extensions of land that they learnt to recognize the signs of nature. It is just like the Mamas today. They know the names of places, the interconnections, the articulations, the interruptions and growths of the earth like a vast female body. The lakes above are the elder sisters and the sweet water that accumulates below, are the younger ones. They know they are intimately connected. They follow the bloodlines all the way from the top, down, like two sisters that marry the same man and breast-feed the same children, they know how to read the signs.

“So what is the difference?” I repeated. He replied without hesitation: “That while the Mamas are guarding and nourishing those sites, the guaqueros are desecrating them.” But it was clear from Y’s account that the difference was not so obvious.

Section 7.2

As the early morning sun began to rise behind the mountains, I saw white figures moving about enthusiastically all around the house: “Uwa milei” “Ah! Uwa Narlei.” A celebration: “it dawned?” “Yes it dawned!” When my friend Paulina came with me to Bogota, it was the same. We were sleeping in the ninth floor of my mother’s apartment building with the curtains closed and at 4:45 AM her phone began to ring: “Uwa Milei” “Ah Uwa Narlei,” her children and family wanting to celebrate dawn with her. But in this particular morning we were in between the sea and the foothills of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, with ten Mamas and the family that inherited the titles to this property.

“The reason for us to be here, is that our laws of origin oblige us because this is part of our traditional territory,” said the Mamas. “You and us,” affirmed the Kogi governor: “we are not of different worlds but we are of the same world: this world, we are children of the same Mother. It is here that we grow and it is here that we die.

564 Field notes from Diary of 2009
565 This is a Kogi salute in the morning
However, our shibulama is different, so we have to make agreements with our neighbors in order to live well. Together but not mixed: lice with lice and ticks with ticks.”

The family of four sisters observed this was a land inherited from their grandfather, a terrain imbibed with their childhood memories and sacred to them. There was the black sand by the boulder, which for them, as children, was the playground of the super SPA, as they magically spread this fine humid black sand all over their bodies until they became unrecognizable. For Mama Santos this black sand was used for protection from negative forces in sacred sites around the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. There was also the Shark stone and the Submarine stone in front of the house where the sisters when young would play at immersing themselves amidst dangerous and fantastic creatures of the sea. It was here where they proved their abilities to dive from high altitudes as the adults watched. And there was the big boulder that Mama Santos said is the Mama standing at the tip of a round bay encircled by coral reefs, mysteriously gathered in a perfect circle as if a giant had placed them there. For the sisters, it was precisely this Mama or Sun that so delighted their father who referred to it as “the Diamond.” Once you swim far enough to reach it, you see its white surface shimmering all around, a magical boulder where couples of vultures came to perform their beautiful courting dance and where a multitude of colored stones could be seen shining through the water in the cove. This, Mama Santos pointed out, was the Mama and all his vassals were gathered around him in the temple, where the rough waves of the open sea became so smooth, tourists in

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566 Shibulama, extensively discussed in Chapter Three, refers to the ancestral materials as much as the understanding that grows in them from one generation to the next. This inheritance is the medium by which the Kogi Mamas are able to concentrate the necessary life force on Earth and connect with their ancestors.  
567 Field notes from Diary of 2011
the Tayrona Park referred to it as “the Swimming Pool.” It was in this nujue, said Mama Santos, where great beings were sitting thinking with the universe.

We looked out onto the sea extending in front of the two-story house where we were staying. One of the sisters said excitedly that when she opened her eyes that morning right before 5:00 AM she felt little threads of cotton wrapped around her eyelashes, and then realized that it was the Kogi guests dressed in white who were moving about the house. “I don’t know what it is about these people” commented another one of the sisters, “but since they’ve been here I feel my heart bigger than my body.” There was radiance all over as we experienced this unusual moment in which a traditional elite local family was gathered with an indigenous Kogi group trying to think through their sacred and figuring out in which ways it was possible to develop a strategy by which to recover the fertility and strength of this territory.

The eldest sister who was in charge expressed her feeling about seeking guidance: “we are worried to see trash everywhere without the infrastructure, without...” As she spoke and searched for the words, one could hear the poporos concentrating around her thought until she articulated the words: “...without clear guidance.” She said she saw the beach, the places where she learnt to swim, and she could still feel her father’s sense of awe as he carried her on his shoulders and manifested his feelings towards that place. “This is where he lived the happiest moments of his life,” she said. “For us this place is equally sacred,” she pointed out, “and we want to exalt it. It is no coincidence that we are at a moment in history when we are both able to sit and think together around the same question: what is best for this place?” For the eight Mamas who had gathered there, this territory was sacred in the most intimate sense, not because of their personal memory, but
because of a memory of centuries that is carried through their shibulama, inherited through bloodlines. Mama Jacinto commented: “it has been a century since we had left our grandparents here... How good that we have come back to visit our Mother, our Father, and our spiritual brothers in Teyku.” To restore those connections is to be invested with the power of history, of shibulama.\textsuperscript{568}

\textbf{Figure 31. Mama Santos sitting in the center, while we all salute the sea}

Teyku was in charge of making the gold. He was the younger brother of Teyunna or Ciudad Perdida.\textsuperscript{569} You can see his terrace with the trace of miniature steps, such as a god would leave his footprints marked upon a stone like the feet of a toddler. This is where Teyku would sit and concentrate his thought and spirit to such an extent that he was able to make the most detailed gold figures: feminine frogs, masculine snakes, frogs

\textsuperscript{568} For more on shibulama, see Chapters Three and Four
\textsuperscript{569} For more on Teyunna or Ciudad Perdida see Chapter Three
that call the water, snakes that release it, bats, birds, armadillos, sainos, guaras, guartinajas, prawns exactly like the ones one finds in the wells. He must have been very small not just because of the footsteps that lead up to his work place, but because of the intricate detail of the tiny gold figurines as if seen magnified by someone of the same size or smaller than the fluttering hummingbird, the moving prawn, the singing frogs and crickets that he made. Teyku would work hard. But there came a time when this also had to change.

Over five hundred years ago, Teyku was sitting in concentration one day, doing his divination, when he picked up something immensely menacing heading in this direction. It didn’t have a name but he had to warn all the other great Mamas like Teyunna who lived further up the mountain. He said to them that it was time to leave, cross over the horizon to where the ocean ends, and find other grounds to concentrate their thinking and to plant their spirit. But when they gathered to speak in the nujue no one agreed to go. “If we abandon this place then who is going to look after it?” they asked. And with that state of mind, they remained guarding their sites, sitting and concentrating their thought through the course of time. Now the Kogi Governor was echoing this mission to protect the sacred sites, as he translated what the Mamas were saying: “If there is a thought that is coming together here in order to revive, rescue what nature is... we encourage it. But if you are not going to understand, we don’t want to be a tourist attraction, nor heritage of humanity. No, that is not our role. We want to open a means of communication that bears our identity with our territory.”

“The problem at the moment is that we have two different visions,” continued the Kogi governor. On the one hand, there was the family that had made alliances with a

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570 Transcriptions, July of 2011
group of venture capitalists trying to capture foreign investment. On the other hand, the indigenous political organization of Gonawindua Tayrona wanted a percentage of that land to give them access to the sea. “At the end we have to come to an agreement” he said, “but in the meantime these are different interpretations.”

As we sat face to face in a circle, the sisters spoke about the chaotic growth of tourism, that doesn’t have infrastructure for accommodations or a proper sewage system. “The land is now losing its gloss,” they continued, “its energy and life. We now see black plastic bags all around the camping areas... and we don’t want it to deteriorate to the point of no return.” As things stand, insisted the head sister, everyone is destroying this so we want to develop a well-structured business plan to help conservation and sustainable development and to benefit the local community. In the process of developing such a strategy, the sisters wanted to work hand in hand with the inhabitants of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta on the one hand, and with foreign consultants on the other.

The guest speaker who had been invited from the United States recounted places such as these, as if he had found a treasure trove: “thirty-nine places left in the world, only 39” he repeated. “The ideal, of course” continued the world’s leading expert in sustainable tourism, community based enterprise and sustainable practices, “is that you target a very exclusive group that can get the right people in the right places.” And he would know, for his work and travels had taken him to more than 125 countries across six continents, he had seen it all. The expert talked about his “Virtuoso life” magazine that gathered 4,000 of the most exclusive agents in the world that work hand in hand with the Top 1000 hotels and resorts. Its consumers do not choose this magazine but on the contrary, the magazine picks them by looking up the users of a special Centurion Card, a

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571 Field notes from Diary of 2011

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black American Express for people who spend $1 million dollars or more: the highest of the highest-end tourism. “We want to make this place a kind of sanctuary,” added one of the investors enthusiastically, “a very exclusive one for maximum two hundred people.”

As I heard him speak, I began to visualize “the highest of highest-end” buildings in the tourist district near the airport in Santa Marta. It’s here where I would spend many vacations with my father when I was growing up. The hotel where we stayed had little bungalows surrounded by palms and green flora that would attract all kinds of wild life. The owner said he built those there because he wanted to capture the sound of the wind blowing, the songs of birds and the roar of the sea. Now his descendants wanted to capture investment instead and have thus, marked the boundaries of their property with two very tall intelligent buildings that offer air conditioning; broadband Internet and plasma television with ever brighter screens that amuse the children as they watch Animal Planet, the Disney Channel, Discovery Kids or swim in X-boxes instead of the sea. Since the sea has such a high content of coal from cargo ships that linger for days as they wait for their turn to pick up the shipload from the coal mining industries, it is no longer recommended for immersion and so the special guests can watch it from their individual terraces with Jacuzzis as they enjoy the view from the heights of their suites, penthouses and apartments. It is at the base of one of these buildings where I remember holding my father’s hand while we stood by the wall of the dock discovering starfish, crabs, sea horses and sometimes jelly fish when it rained. Now there are sports utilities instead, like motorboats and jet skies as well as All Terrain Vehicles for those who prefer speed on the beach instead of in the water. With a dutiful accumulation of points like

572 Field notes from Diary of 2011

283
miles, you can secure this entertainment every year during one week of vacation until the year 2,048.

As this tourist district grows, ever-expanding buildings abound everywhere. The last time I went past it in a taxi from the airport to Santa Marta, the taxi driver proudly announced they were finally building a mall with proper chain stores. When I asked why this pleased him so, he said: “everything is about projection now-a-days.” This seems to fit perfectly with the current government’s objectives to bring in more investment into the area and turn improvised tourism into organized zones with infrastructure, security and technology, as we project into the future. In this tourist district near the airport, there’s a vast wetland. The owners of the properties thought it would be a good idea to landfill it and turn it into a golf resort with at least eighteen holes for select tourism. As I heard this, I remembered a young man’s story when I went to visit the property that my friends wanted to acquire above Bonda. He told us about a group of indigenous people that came down to this area to deliver some offerings by the wetlands which are now covered with towers where people from Bogota, Medellin and other urban centers in Colombia spend their vacation on time shares. However, the guards didn’t allow the Mama to complete the rendering. As they tried to push the Mama off the boulder that is now the base of the tower, he asked them: “Do you think you could climb up the Sierra with bundles of stones on your backs?” “No” they answered. “Well this is how this land feels now. It cannot bear to hold so many buildings upon its back.”

“But this highest of the highest-end tourism” continued the consultant from the United States in the beach where we remained sitting in a circle, “is different. This is

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573 Please see Chapter Six
574 Field notes from Diary of 2011
more exclusive than anything you have ever seen here, it’s as exclusive as you can get: a sanctuary” What we want is to make a place where the most privileged of the world can encounter themselves, barefoot, no news, pure air, clean water, authentic culture, sense of place, he pointed out. According to him, it is by targeting ever more select groups around the world that the situation of environmental deterioration can take a turn, and benefit “the local community” in the area by teaching them sustainable practices and how to purify water.

“You say you are concerned about where consciousness is heading and what we need,” responded the Kogi governor addressing the “family of investors,” as he referred to the group of yalyi575 investing in the land that belongs to the family of sisters. “We are indigenous people of a millenary culture. We know how to live together with the water, with nature, and with biodiversity, that is our culture. But where we speak of cultures, you see development. As an indigenous person what do I see?” continued the Kogi governor. “A few months ago I was on my way back to Santa Marta in the car with Mama Jacinto here,” he continued as he pointed to him.

When we saw they were dredging the Manzanares River right in front of the highway,576 he suddenly cried out: ‘stop!’ and started examining what was happening. After a while, he grumbled: ‘Oh those Little Younger Brothers! Always the Little Younger Brothers!’ ‘But why the Little Younger Brothers, didn’t they invent the very car you are riding in right now?’ I asked joking. And Mama Jacinto insisted: ‘No, look at this!’ as he pointed to the place where they were changing its course. He said to me: ‘why do they have to do that? The river has its natural course from where it originates up in the mountain... That river is going to be furious, it is going to react!’ So I looked but replied that they were simply widening the course of the river so that it could flow down more beautifully. However, he was right; the Manzanares River has come down dragging houses and everything with it! You have seen what is happening now

575 Yalyi or non-indigenous people
576 This is the same place where N and I were walking near the Troncal in the Once de Noviembre, see Section 7.1
that they have interfered with its natural course. It’s flooding the whole Avenida Libertador. Soon the river will dry up and people won’t have any water left.

When I asked in Santa Marta who had been responsible for this, they told me it was the owners of the Marine that feel that they are the owners of everything. ‘Now they want to take the rivers and the sea as well,’ they said. ‘The bay has been Santa Marta’s for centuries; can they really take it away now?’ I asked.

When the great Mama Valencio was still alive he asked the government: ‘why do they have to make themselves the owners of water if water already has an owner? Why do they have to monetize the water?’ But the government never replied.

FIGURE 32. MAMA JACINTO IN THE KOGI TOWN OF PUEBLO VIEJO

“You are talking here about investment,” continued the Kogi governor, Jose de los Santos. “Investment doesn’t see the collective, the body.”

The Mamas understand, the indigenous authorities and the leaders comprehend, that there can be a bridging in order for us to communicate with each other on both sides. On the other hand, if there is no understanding, then why waste our time?

We, the indigenous people, don’t want to lose our time. We want people to listen to us, to analyze what we say, and if there is a tool, a fundamental element that will lead to something, then it is welcome, and then we can work together. But if people are seeing the indigenous groups as something to be ‘civilized’, then we aren’t here for that.

“How can we repair 2,000 years when it is hard to repair a single life?” pointed out Jose de los Santos as he referred to the sacred sites.
The thought, the consent, the spiritual and physical order in the life of one person is worth a lot, so how are we going to repair the life of the ancestors that are thousands of years old? This place is one of the fifty-one posts that are holding up the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. Without them the whole structure collapses. Each post is like a person so we are talking about the spiritual and physical order not just of one person but of many people. The sacred stones, the terraces, the trees, the rivers were left by Jaba Seinekan and Jate Serankua as interconnections. There is a principle in nature here, a principle of life, which is energetically interconnected in the earth, in the stones, in the sea and in the sacred ground. This is what the Mamas have been saying for ages and we want the world to reflect upon how we are going to continue living? Because as we observe from the very principles of nature, we see that everything is complaining. The Mamas have been saying: ‘the tree is talking, the water is talking… and they are like people whining. Nature is going to react.’

Just now, the Mamas were saying to me: ‘the waves of the sea that we are hearing here are complaining.’ Likewise, the trees are complaining and the land is also complaining. They were saying that the sacred grounds are being used. Those who shouldn’t be bathing in the sea are bathing until late. This is a problem. The Mamas were just asking: ‘But how are we going to explain this to them? It’s better not to tell them because they aren’t going to pay attention to this,’ they said. And I replied: ‘No, things have to be spoken out.’

So I will now tell you what the Mamas were just telling me: when they arrived here the first day there was a signal, a bird warned them. They were going to take a certain direction and the bird said: ‘Don’t go! Don’t go!’ So they had to take out their yatukuas to begin the divination. The yatukuas said: ‘the head of all this is up there is in Jaba Seilungama and Teyku.’ ‘Oh, I see!’ the Mamas replied. ‘Up there is where one concentrates the spiritual part and that is where the main head resides. We call this place Teyku.’

A few weeks before this encounter, I had seen Mama Jacinto looking for the first house of Teyku by the sea. As he entered a rocky zone, he started calling Teyku’s being, like one would call a bird in high pitch: wuuuuuu, wuuuuuu, wuuuuuuu, wuuuuuuuuu. He found the portal of a cave that seemed to fit his size. He pointed out this was Teyku’s house down below, and there was another house up above. He concentrated his thought,

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577 These posts are the standing base for the sacred sites
578 Jaba Seinekan and Jate Serankua are the Mother and Father of this Earth as we know it after the rising of the sun
579 Yatukuas are divination gourds (see Figure 5)
580 Teyku is known in Spanish as Pueblito or The Little Town
581 Transcriptions, July of 2011
resonating in a place that we did not know but that we had entered through little kernels of thought gathered in coiled up cotton. Mama Jacinto had distributed the pieces amongst us, and as we held them in between our fingers we concentrated all the thoughts that rushed into our minds.

These cotton pieces looked like they had two wings spreading out, as if they were ready to take flight the moment they touched the surface of the water in the receptacle that was communicating with the ancestors in the place where they sat, in aluna. When the coiled up piece of cotton, with the offering of thought wrapped inside it, stood on its head, in between the spirit and the body of water, a rendering of movement would turn into nourishment. If the coiled piece turned over its head on the surface, bubbles would begin to surge and a reading with the ancestors would occur.

![Figure 33. A Kogi man and a Yalyi kid concentrating with Teyku](image)

When Mama Jacinto finished concentrating at the entrance of the cave below, he stood looking down at us and said, “This place is like a wired connection that lights up.”

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582 In aluna or in thought and spirit
In the following days we were to learn that there were other outlets to this connection, one of them in Teyku’s house up above in Pueblito or Jaba Seilungama. Mama Jacinto brought back bundles of offerings that people gathered in the town of Pueblo Viejo up in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. Once Teyku received these offerings, we were ready to journey from the base all the way up to Teyku’s stone house above. At first we walked fifteen minutes from the two-story house to the stone guardian in the path below. Mama Aluntana concentrated to ask permission to pass through. After a while he announced: “okay” and as we spiraled through the circular portal, with one guardian stone grounded behind another, like giant rooks in a chess game, a whole opening into what felt like a gigantic umbilical cord, came alive. As we followed this connection all the way up, we climbed up huge roots of trees and boulders with intersections, encountered more guardian stones, rock chiefs and rock vassals standing by further portals into zones that remained unknown.

Figure 34. Mama Aluntana on his way back from Teyku
When we reached Teyku’s house above, Mama Santos, Mama Aluntana and Mama Jose Maria first distributed more pieces of cotton in order to cleanse everybody’s dreams, memories and thoughts related to Teyku. Then we stayed there for a while visiting Teyku as if we had arrived at an old friend’s living room, everyone sitting around the cove: Mamas inside, yalyi outside, engaged in free conversation. It is in this cave where I was told many years ago that when Mamas and Saxas fulfill the passage of adulthood, they are rendered their poporos and their spindles with a tiny gold piece, which is to be their spiritual dress from there on. I wondered if Mama Teyku could see the gold from where he sat. For unlike the other Mamas in previous centuries, this being who was the owner of all Tairona gold did leave. It’s said that when he detected the menacing force that the place was announcing, Mama Teyku traversed over that great ocean that extended before our eyes and reached another site. According to Mama Jacinto, the place where he lives is surrounded by fire. It never turns dark there and at certain times in the year, when a celestial body in the sky appears and glows red, people in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta step out of their temples or nujues to light a fire outside. It is said that where he sits, Teyku can see the scorching red of the pieces of ember burning. He knows then that generations after generations in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta are remembering him. They are holding him in their thought, just like he is holding them in his thought. “Like this, like this” would say Mama Luca to me taking the tip of my hand with his fingers swaying up and down but never releasing, as he showed me what it meant to be held in thought. I could travel far, I could cross over the ocean all the way to Europe, he said, but he would be holding me in his concentration as

583 Field notes from Diary of 2003
if pressing my hand. And so it is that through Teyku’s thoughts that are planted all around this territory the Kogi Mamas were signaling to him: “we are here as you are there.”

Follow the ancient path of stones and you will find “Teyku’s library” as Paulina explained to us, “where the ancients store all the information.” This is where Mama Santos communicated the words that he had learnt from his father, the great Mama Don Juan. Once he finished, he said to the place: “Thank you very much!” And turned around to tell us to “Repeat: Thank you very much!” So we all thanked the place in one loud tone and then focused in on a little stone that sits grounded there, no bigger than a baby. “This is Shkuaxala,” continued Paulina. “It holds the whole world together.” The ancestors’ ability to concentrate thought covers such a vast range of space and time, that centuries ago, they already knew how to make a telephone about the size of a metate that Mama Jose Maria pointed out, communicates with ancient sites in Mexico, Peru and Bolivia.

As we spiraled out of each of these zones in Teyku, the last place we visited was “Matanza” or the site of the blood bath, where Paulina translating the words of the Mamas said people would present themselves here and if necessary they were sacrificed spiritually. They would put them on the stone, cut them in pieces and cook them in spirit. “But only in spirit, right?” we asked the Mamas, without comprehending the bearing that this ancient site holds.584

Once we began to return to the sea below, everyone discussed the details of a possible construction, both groups unleashing their imagination. The sisters were envisioning dwellings inspired on flying manta rays, starfish, turtles and all the fantastic

584 Field notes from Diary of 2011
sea creatures that resonated with their childhood fantasies: inverted spaces, extensions, bodies within other bodies, spiraling around staircases and slanted balconies that would allow you to contemplate the sea below and the stars above all at once. All in natural materials like the ones that the Kogi were describing as they pointed out that they made their houses out of nature. Instead of using concrete or iron, they said they asked the ancestral owners of trees for permission and used wood, palm, bark and lianas instead. “Nothing can be removed here,” pointed out the Mamas as their divination gourds reaffirmed they had to be especially careful with the sacred stones and terraces that couldn’t be touched and the big trees that couldn’t be cut. If an ancestral piece pops out of the ground, affirmed Paulina, a Mama has to be notified immediately so as to return it back inside the earth.

![Mama Santos by the beach](image)

**Figure 35. Mama Santos by the beach**

When the group of Mamas started walking about together with their divination tools, they all stopped at once as if they had sensed an invisible wall. “This is a boundary that is like a magnet,” they indicated. There are rocks here below the ground guarding
“against catastrophes, hurricanes, nature’s illnesses and epidemics” \(^{585}\) and communicating with the sacred family sites or “eysuamas” above. This is what the Mamas call the Black Line. The Mamas would make a nujue above this point, two hours away in Seilungama, in order to continue healing there, while the yalyi would remain sleeping below the Black Line. “You cannot touch, remove or erect anything here and if the tourists are going to climb up then they have to be very respectful,” they pointed out. The Kogi governor explained that ascending beyond this point is “like entering a surgery room where there are patients trying to heal, this is how one must understand this zone.”\(^{586}\)

As everyone spoke, the owners of the house looked into their own readings of the territory with maps and screens of their GPS. The Mamas were teaching the sisters that it was the sacred bond between a living body and the thought and spirit that was growing in the sites left by the ancestors all around, that would bring firmness to the foundations of the dwellings. The sisters and their husbands rendered the materials that the Mamas requested for these offerings. Not just sexual fluids for cleansing, but also pubic hairs extracted from the left and right genitals of their feminine and masculine bodies, the breeding parts where the life force continues from one generation to the next. It is the intimacy of this bond between the family and the sacred sites, which would bring about the steadiness of the construction for many generations to come. “I’m going to fly up in a helicopter to your house in the tundra region and bring you a sack full of gold!” joked

\(^{586}\) Field notes from Diary of 2011
one of the husbands as he referred to the cotton wads filled with semen. Mama Santos burst out laughing as he hugged him.

![Image](image.png)

*Figure 36. The sacred sites above are connected to the sacred sites below*

“But where are these Little Younger Brothers from?” asked the Mamas. “Did they come from afar?” and the Kogi governor answered: “No. These Little Younger Brothers have been in Santa Marta for over 250 years.” And Mama Jacinto pondered: “It must be then, that their thought has been penetrated by the energy of nature and that now, it is nature itself that is summoning them. Could it really be true that you are coming to understand the importance of this place?” asked the Mamas as they continued to read their divination gourds.

However, just as Teyku had sensed something coming from elsewhere more than five hundred years ago, so the Mamas began to listen to a disturbing signal. There was something, “something in the air.” The divination was indicating that there was a site ill at ease. As we returned back to the house by the beach, I saw the barbed wire separating it from the path that an hour earlier had been filled with tourists filing through the forest, as if they were walking through an airport terminal trying to get from one wing to the

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587 Cotton wads filled with semen which is nourishment for the ancestors.
other. They were asking for the camping area, two bays away. Now the crowd had dispersed for it was getting dark and the Mamas decided that the next morning at dawn they would go and look for the aching site towards the North of the house.

When they arrived, they said they noticed at once a place where something was trapped and claiming a debt. It’s the same debt, they said, that has caused numerous deaths and violence in this region, not just in this generation but also previous ones. When they went past it the black dog that was following them around sprinted away and a jaguar roared. “The jaguar is angry,” noted Mama Jose Maria. “There is a greater authority here that we all have to acknowledge,” pointed out the governor. “This is very hard for you to understand,” pointed out Paulina. And as the family tried to unravel what this thing could be, the negative was unleashed. Like a person, the place began to expel a force, something horrible oozing out of it and how repelling the ugly face of unforgiving nature can be: the sacred claiming a debt.

In the abstraction of investment there was no reading for this kind of debt. In the minds of the venture capitalists, the life force that bridges or breaks the intimacy of one’s thought, energy and activity to one’s material surroundings has no bearing on the investment. For the investors participating in this project, this was an outstanding business plan that had to be “shielded” or in Spanish: “blindado.” As I heard this term, I felt like I was suddenly riding inside an SUV bubble with black bullet proof windows and air conditioning, looking outside but not seen. The transparency that characterized the sisters was threatened not unlike that site announcing “something.” However, in the understanding of the head sister this land was no abstract entity, it was a place alive with recollections and a living history of its ancestors, whether indigenous or not. Relentless,

588 Field notes from Diary of 2011
she stated there was no room for mistakes here, and the moment she saw the double face of participants that far from being interested in recovering the place, were going after the profit and power that they could gain from extracting the magic of its wealth, she began to retract. “There is no room for misinterpretation here,” she affirmed. “It would be devastating to look fifty years from now and realize that we made a mistake.” As I heard her say that, I remembered a phrase that she read somewhere and continued to repeat thereafter: “at the end we will be judged not for what we have created but for what we have refused to destroy.”

“You cannot have your heart set on an investment,” commented an expert businessman who is also a family member but did not join the family of investors. “Either it’s business or it’s a social cause,” he pointed out. “If you have your heart invested, the business gets ruined and then you are putting at risk things that are of far greater value to you.” To leave the sacred as personal understanding, as part of the private realm separate from the communal, is what I began to see reflected in the project by the beach. As genuine anxieties began to encroach with negative events, the intimacy grew at a personal level, but seemed to be irrelevant for the project’s materiality. This sacred intimacy of the history of the members was extraneous to the investment. No matter what, it remained a fact that in a portfolio where there was an investment plan in a place of such bewildering beauty, with a rainforest, archaeological sites and the participation of the actual living remnants of that culture that represent a surplus value, not unlike the top ten music hits, this surely puts this project way up in the top 10% list of exclusive investment projects.

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589 Field notes from Diary of 2011
590 Field notes from Diary of 2011
As in the case of the Mamas vis-à-vis Mr. BR and the Gold Museum, two contesting worldviews were evidenced here. Both the Mamas and the Venture Capitalists thought at the universal level; both had particular elucidations as to how to use the energy buried in the earth to make the world go round, one in the form of offerings or “pagamentos” as they call them in Spanish, literally translated as “payments,” and the other one in the form of capital; both tried to negotiate their own terms; both held theories as to how to deal with the planet’s ecological disasters and raise consciousness; both made use of their own communication technologies and both perceived the other’s spirituality as essentially material. From the point of view of the Mamas, this yalyi family seemed to ignore the presence of the spiritual ancestors to the point that they built their two-story house upon one of them: a boulder that holds the second floor. And from the point of view of the yalyi family, the Mamas were so concentrated in materiality that they kept asking them to gather wads of cotton with sexual fluids extracted from their bodies in order to feed the sites.

A question asked by one of the most rampant investors was enlightening here. When gathered in the circle around the Mamas, the investor asked: “How did you manage to survive the Spanish Conquest?” And the answer was “our shibulama,” our wisdom and tools that we have managed to pass on for generations, this is our wealth, our inheritance that Jaba Seinekan left us. As had been evidenced all those days, the Mamas had their means for divination, their powers and knowledge, which they didn’t abandon for an instant. Perhaps this investor asked the question in order to anticipate “the project’s message that would be communicated to the outside world.” I imagined something

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591 See Chapter Three
592 Field notes from Diary of 2011
along the lines of: first, you can see the magnificent samples of Pre-Columbian Tairona objects in antiquity shops, luxurious auction houses and museums all around the world, but now through high-end tourism, you can actually experience it for yourselves, the living original and resilient Tairona culture. It was clear that in this business plan there was no room for any kind of intimacy except my commodifying it. In other words, now that we had turned their ancestral gold and precious materials into commodities, we were ready to commodify their very culture, all of which in the eyes of the Kogi Mamas was part of their shibulama. The transformation that came about through diminishing risk and increasing profit was independent of the transformation that came about through expressing one’s living thought, activity and understanding which is where the very concepts of aluna and shibulama arise like the thread of life force that grows on the spindle that Mother Seinekan planted in the beginning of time. In other words, now that we had turned their ancestral gold and precious materials into commodities, we were ready to commodify their very culture, all of which in the eyes of the Kogi Mamas was part of their shibulama.

The irony is that as difference is commodified, by the same move the indigenous culture becomes readable as an “authentic native belief.” In this way, what the Mamas world view loses as “cultural thing”, in this form gains power amongst alternative groups and New Age trends such as the neo-Muiscas that Mama Luca encountered, environmental NGOs, film makers and even Dalai Lama supporters, or particular individuals who are wealthy, influential and attracted by “the authentic” like private collectors, donors of land or particular music and film stars. President Juan Manuel Santos did not gauge this when on August 7, 2010 he decided to celebrate a symbolic

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593 I am grateful to Xenia Cherkov for her ideas and feedback here and throughout this writing.
presidential possession in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta to attract press attention. He landed in a helicopter in the Kogi town of Pueblo Viejo, where the governor Santos gave the President Santos some stones that had been prepared by Mama Santos, Mama Jacinto and others. There was the stone of water, the stone of air, the stone of the earth, and the stone of nourishment. “You must guard these four elements,” said the Kogi governor to the President. “The president accepted the necklace, promised to fulfill this and all the Santos⁵⁹⁴ remained happy... however it has been six months since... and this green speech that he promised cannot be seen anywhere.”⁵⁹⁵

The Kogi governor Jose de los Santos pointed out that this necklace “means a lot. Without these stones there cannot be a spiritual and material base upon which to construct; without these there cannot be good governing through which the sacred places will be nourished.” But more than thinking about the stones through which he could connect himself to nature, President Santos was smiling at a camera that amidst a display of technology, was projecting his image on a giant screen in the Main Square of Bogota and on TV screens where everybody could applaud this new President disguising himself as “ecologically friendly,” clothed in white with his family and the Kogi Mamas in Pueblo Viejo.

For every destructive mining license and ecological disaster with mega development projects that have followed since, journalists like Maria Jimena Duzan in her article titled: “What Would the Kogi Say?” question his pledge to the Kogi. Sneaky manipulation and no transparency or political will is how many seem to perceive the current President’s ecological policies, who following the steps of President Uribe has

⁵⁹⁴ This phrase is a pun on Santos which means Saints.
continued to grant licenses in places of great environmental wealth, that are sacred, vulnerable and in need of protection.

“How can we do that to them?” Echoed the press as it released the news about a touristic project targeted for “the rich” in the Tayrona Park. Hundreds of articles and TV news broadcasts followed raising a general voice of protest that advocated for the rights of “our indigenous cultures who are the real owners of that Park.” One of the hundreds of articles published in relation to this topic was written by Duzan who notes: “The Kogui say that when their Little Younger Brothers betray them, the spirits of evil leave their graves while plagues, problems and natural disasters begin. I’m not going to say that the problems that this government is already facing are a product of an incantation. But the Kogui must be doing something for the government to have to face so many social protests and ... one of the worst rainy seasons ever.”

In the meantime, Mama Santos, Mama Jacinto, Mama Jose Maria, Mama Aluntana, Mama Luis and many other Mamas have continued visiting and delivering offerings to Seilungama and Teyku, with or without investment projects, for what mattered here was the fate of this major sacred site that like the base of a temple sustains the sites above.

Section 7.3

As I wrote this in March 22, 2014 my phone rang. It was anthropologist Peter Rawitscher whom I had not talked to for more than a year. He was worried because Mama Luis was currently trying to recover the star of water around Cerro Kennedy with creaks and rivers that fed into the Toribio, Manzanares, Cordoba and Gaira rivers. The

596 Duzan, Maria Jimena. “El Coto de Caza de los Ricos” in: Semana, October 14, 2011, p. 40
597 Anthropologist that has been working with the indigenous organization of Gonawindua Tayrona
place was referred to in Kogi as “Jaba Nakulindue”\textsuperscript{598}, the Mother of Water. Mama Luis had come down expressly to plant a female and male “ñi kuitsi,”\textsuperscript{599} meaning the crystal quartz tumas. By joining the female tuma with the male one, and singing in a deep sustained voice all the way to where the owners of water sit, Mama Luis was bringing the springs back to life. He did this as he followed the family lines of white quartz all the way from the lakes in Jaba Nakulindue in the tundra region to the wetlands below.

![Figure 37. Mama Luis with his staff and other Kogi men around him](image)

“But there isn’t a single ñi kuitsi to be found,” continued Peter on the phone. What a tragedy that so many tumas have been dug out all around the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, that as the water dried up, it was now necessary for the Mamas to find someone who would buy these tumas for them in the city and even then they were scarce. I asked Peter if he had tried Barbas’s Antique Shop and he told me that was the first place he called. Barbas replied that if he had telephoned him two weeks earlier, he would have

\textsuperscript{598} Nakulindue in Kogi is referred to in Spanish as Cerro Kennedy
\textsuperscript{599} Ñi kuitsi is a crystal quartz tuma: Mother of water. The female one, “hembra” has a hole while the male one, “macho” doesn’t.
found “vases full of white tumas, but the Arhuacos took them all away.” I remembered my last visit to “the Arhuacos” as Barbas referred to the Ika, when in Windiwa I told Mamo Mondo about my research. He listened with interest and said those sacred sites “are everything, but very complex and hard to understand. What you want to do is not easy,” he pointed out. “You would have to follow the lineages,” he continued as he referred to the family lines through which these ancestral materials and knowledge are inherited. In Kogi it is called “shibulama,” while in Ika it’s referred to as “kunsamu.” The first literally implying an elongating cotton thread: “shi,” and the second, a growing tree trunk: “kun.”

I gave Mamo Mundo the gifts I had brought for him: muchuru and zirichu shells, the first feminine and masculine people from the sea that are used to baptize newborns. He found it interesting that there should be so many more feminine muchuru than the masculine zirichu that according to the Wayuu where I bought them in Riohacha, are very scarce lately. I gave him a stone from the sacred salt mine in Zipaquira, near Bogota; some colored cornelians imported from Czechoslovakia; and finally, I handed over white quartz, as I said “ñi kuitsi” in Kogi. He corrected me in Ika: “ye kuisiri” and added: “you know it’s used where there is heat or rage. You plant it in a site in anugwe and water comes, it rains, you understand?” The heat and violence was rising in bodies everywhere around, so the human as much as nonhuman bodies had to release somehow

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600 Fieldnotes from Diary of 2011
601 See Chapter One
602 In anugwe, meaning thought and spirit
603 Field notes from Diary of 2011
and explode. Now it’s needed everywhere. Then he looked at me with inquisitive eyes to see how much I comprehended.604

My friend Paulina called me from Pueblo Viejo. “Jaba, the Mamas are worried,” she said. “There isn’t a drop of rain to be seen. It’s not even halfway through the year and the earth has already shaken eight times here. They say that if we don’t follow the laws of the eysuamas605 all the water is going to dry up.” I read the national newspaper and found a very particular description of a “funeral parade” of 23,000 dead chiguiros,606 “an animal on the verge of extinction,” noted the journalist. What occurred in the Casanare “is an anticipation of what awaits our children,” he pointed out. The water dried up completely and as a consequence, we saw: “carcasses of chiguiros, rotting babillas, cow skeletons, bones of bears, all kinds of birds’s corpses, fish buried under the mud, turtle shells agonizing... Quevedo described it 371 years ago: ‘... I didn’t find a thing to lay my eyes on that wasn’t a reminder of death.”607

Santa Marta has been rationing its water for months now and there are devastating images of droughts and fires, not just in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta and its surroundings but all over the country.608 One article titled: “The Days are Counted for the Sierra Nevada,” predicted that with the most recent fire near Cienaga, which lasted fifteen days and burnt 3,500 hectares, “it is now confirmed -said the President- that in

604 For more on this, see Chapter Three: Mama Luca’s recovery project of refreshing thought and spirit planted all along the Buritaca river basin
605 Eysuamas are the sacred sites above connected like family lines to the sacred sites below, where the Black Line runs by the sea
606 Large rodents
608 It is normal for the seasons in Colombia to oscillate between the Rainy season and the Dry season, however, every year the fluctuation is becoming extreme to the point that there are overpowering floods and then unmanageable droughts that continue to produce numerous catastrophes
2030 the Sierra will not be Sierra Nevada.”\textsuperscript{609} At the level of the Equator, this glacier has receiving the world’s impact of global warming and is losing 3\% to 5\% of its area every year. The recent fire, continued the article, confirmed that there is greater radiation than ever before. “If these conditions of global warming persist as they are today,” stated a member of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, “then in twenty years there will be no glaciers left.”\textsuperscript{610}

The very spiraling thought and spirit that in the native Sierra’s cosmology connects the head to the feet; the top of the mountain to its base; will have melted. “Can a body live without a head?” asked Mamo Norberto who inherited the Ika bloodlines to pay the offerings all the way from the sacred sites in Nabusimake to the ones along the bays in the northern coast from the Guajira to the Magdalena region. He has been fulfilling this responsibility for more than fifty years now. He said every Ika man received a poporo and a white cap on his head or a tutusoma, because his mind is ready to concentrate the life force all the way from the snow peaks down to the sea.\textsuperscript{611}

I remembered Mamo Enrique’s reaction when he came to visit Santa Marta for the first time. He lived in a kankurua or temple in Nabusimake, surrounded by his extensive family, including his children and grandchildren, where refreshing water descends from the snow peaks and emanates around the primordial guava trees and stones that have stood amidst the crisp cold air of that valley since ancient times. He was now seeing the sea for the first time and he was in awe. To stop and think the thought of the sea! First he sat in the hammock and looked over the balcony, then in the seat and

\textsuperscript{609} El Espectador. “Los días contados de la Sierra Nevada,” April 4, 2014, p. 2
\textsuperscript{610} El Espectador. “Los días contados de la Sierra Nevada,” April 4, 2014, p. 3
\textsuperscript{611} See Diazgranados, Jose Luis and Rozo, Cesar. “Pensamiento y Ritual, Recorrido por Sitios Sagrados de la Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta con el Mamo Norberto Torres,” Documentary, 2008
looked, then he stood towards the veranda of the balcony and looked, then back to his seat and looked again, the whole time with his poporo in hand as if trying to process the idea of the vastness of the sea and the universe that it comprehended. He wanted to know what in my opinion “could be below the surface?” I asked Mamo Enrique how he could communicate with the most ancient sites that are inside the sea if he has always lived in Nabusimake. He replied: “through the lakes up in the snow peaks of course.”

As privatization takes over and the sacred is drawn within the boundaries of the personal, these vital connections are conjoined with the private, just like fortuna is. Mr. Barbas explained that if you go off to dig in the mountain you will be perceived as “a stranger.” “An armed paramilitary or guerrilla group will think you are an informant and that will be the end of you. So what comes out of the ground has to come by chance and within private property, either because you are fastening a staff in the ground when you are building your house, or tying up a herd, or because you are preparing a prairie for the animals to graze on or for planting yucca, plantain and other crops. If something pops out ‘por fortuna’” emphasized Mr. Barbas in Spanish, “then that is your private issue.”

After the Mamas had picked up on the menacing forces of nature that were charging a debt in the site by the beach, negative events spilled over to the point that once back in the city, the crisis continued to erupt. A vast malaise took these sound people running to the door of their house where they found a venomous rattlesnake. A peak at the “world’s darkening.” Panic exploded. “I can feel it here, here,” repeated one of the members desperately as he grabbed his chest. Nightmares, hospital scans, forced landings, unexpected immigration problems when travelling, events seemed to be out of

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612 Field notes from Diary of 2010  
613 Field notes from Diary of 2009
control as if someone had opened a dam of destructive forces that followed one crisis after another. I was shaken out of my dreams by the desperate voice of family members that needed help: “wake up, wake up, please! Something horrible something indescribable, something so strong is here that I’m even afraid to talk about it!”

As we experienced the negative in ways that we could not understand, I saw Mama Jose Maria trying to deal with these outbreaks as he ran from one house to another with his divination bottle in hand, cleansing the houses, the beds and the people. Three nights after our return from Teyku, I was drained and decided to escape from that situation by going over to P’s sister’s place in El Once. I commented to P that there are things happening around me which I cannot explain, that they seem to be negative and out of control. He’s not surprised. It’s also “por fortuna” that disasters occur and this is the zone that guaqueros are so familiar with for as Walter Benjamin points out, “the ideal of the shock-engendered experience...” which is the thrill of guaqueria “is the catastrophe.”

As they are “constantly raising the stakes, in hopes of getting back what is lost, they steer “toward absolute ruin.” The laws of the market instead try to diminish risk and increase profit while harnessing the unpredictable forces of nature. In this way, investment can only read the sacred as commodity, while guaqueros who journey between magic and market can experience it.

You know, said P to me: “you can ask the dead for things. They come back and they give you clues, they guide you,” he continued, as he took out three gold pieces that I had not seen anywhere before. Such perfect miniature gold nails, that they

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614 Field notes from Diary of 2011
617 Field notes from Diary of 2011
reminded me of Teyku’s hard at work on his terrace with his tiny and agile hands. I imagined them just like Mama Santos’s hands, his fingers extending as he helped me roll sisal to stitch my bag just like he used to help his mother when he was a child, he said. His hands carried the vestiges of having sowed seeds, healed plants, people and animals, helped women deliver births, called rain and gods, extracted tobacco paste or ambira to chew coca leaves. As I continued stitching I commented upon the situation that has overcome the family. “Jate, what can be occurring?” I asked. “You never know when you will die,” he answered. “Man takes the chicken to eat, the same way that sacred sites take man for food. I know all of this,” he affirmed, “Yo si me se todo eso.”

The ancestors take what they need, just like any of us would take.

I think back to that strange scene in which Mama Santos who had understood that this American consultant had come from afar to hear his words and counsel, wanted something from him in exchange, like his money. Up in his home in the tundra region, he can gather a harvest; down below in the city, what can he find? Money through which he can acquire a flashlight, a knife, a cooking pot, fish, cotton thread, beads, fabric, a blanket, any of which would please his wife or Jaba who he always mentions, for she has never wanted to visit the city. Instead, she patiently awaits for him to return from his collaboration with the Kogi governor. As Mama Santos extended his hands to receive something from this prestigious international expert on sustainable tourism, the expert was shocked and said he was sorry but this went against his ethics. He could have drawn anything from his pocket, a shiny quarter or a copper penny for example, would have delighted Mama Santos, for this too would have been useful for offerings. But this millionaire man didn’t seem to have anything to offer.

\[618\text{ Field notes from Diary of 2011} \]
Furthermore, now that I sat with P and his sister in the poverty stricken shantytown, they were about to give me gold. “There are things that cannot be sold for what they are worth,” said P, as he asked his sister to make a pouch for the three lumps of gold that he carried around with him. LM went into the room behind the curtain to look for green or red satin as she insisted it had to be one of those two colors or otherwise, it wouldn’t serve as a protection. She came back pleased because she found two tiny pieces of green satin and a white thread. I can still see her hands carefully threading the needle and sowing the pouch all around with the three miniature pieces of gold sealed inside. P then handed the pouch over to me and said: “take it, this is your amulet, this will protect you from all evil.”

In order to live in this world, you have to know the negative, continued P after giving me my amulet. “Salt takes salt,” he said referring to black magic, negative that repels negative. I wondered if by this same logic, positive attracts positive, like the gold that has to be guarded as the influence of the sites grows with the wealth of inheritance. But how to discern positive from negative had become especially difficult at this point, like in the case of the stunning site near the beach where there was a growing history of massacres, kidnapping, torture, rapes and illnesses, which either you heal as the Mamas were trying to do with an ever increasing number of visits and offerings, or you use it to combat more negative, as P would. How uncertain and dangerous an offering, can be when the sites remain dissatisfied, and like in the stone of Matanza that we had seen near Teyku’s house, you can be sacrificed spiritually as you present yourself.

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619 Field notes from Diary of 2011
620 Field notes from Diary of 2011
Mama Luca was seeing spiritual death as he glanced in grief through the pages of the Gold Museum’s book that my mother had given him to look at in Bogota. “Oh no! Oh my parents. Oh no, no, no” he exclaimed turning from one page to the next. My mother and I had planned to take him there while he was staying in Bogota, but he said to us that he couldn’t enter the museum because his Fathers and Mothers would ask him: “My son what have you brought us?” and after so many decades of remaining imprisoned without food or drink, how could he face them empty handed? Perhaps this was what Mama Pedro Juan felt when the current Colombian ambassador in Germany, Juan Mayr, organized a trip for him to visit the Ethnological Museum in Berlin with Juana Londoño and the Kogi governor.

The person in charge, Manuela Fischer, who has closely followed Konrad T. Preuss’s work developed in Latin America during the First World War, took them to the storage room below where Mama Pedro found himself face to face with two powerful masks. One of them belonged to Teyku and the other one belonged to his nujue in Seiyua, which he inherited through his family line or eysuama. It is with these masks that like Dugunavi, Mama Pedro Juan: deputy and dancer of Seiyua, transforms himself each time as he balances on the tips of his feet like a puppet held by strings and sees with the vision of the ancestors.

It is said that Dugunavi would sit on a tree top all day to make masks, a talent he developed when he learnt to disguise himself as a vulture: a bird of gold dressed in black plumage. When he wore the mask of the river he could see the river as person, when he wore the mask of the fish that ate him in the sea, he could observe her face. The vision of the mask gave him the power to see with kunchawa, like this mask that Mama Pedro Juan

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621 Field notes from Diary of 2000
was now seeing. Mama Pedro Juan explained to Fischer that this mask is Mama Nuikuki Vakai: the deputy of his town.

Juana Londoño told me that both Mama Pedro Juan and Jose de los Santos were flabbergasted when they found their father, hanging there with all the other masks of the world. “My father has walked so far,” said Mama Pedro Juan in grief. He took out a carnival whistle that he was carrying in his bag and began to dance and move from one side to the other in front of the display window. Juana observed there was such a strong bond that the masks began to come alive, as they watched their father dancing behind the glass. When the museum executive refused to open the window she said: “you must understand that this is not simply a curiosity from the past, it is alive! The Kogi people are strong and expanding all the way to the sea where there are new towns that they have recently built. They are very much alive.”

But the display remained locked and Mama Pedro and Jose de los Santos practically said goodbye in tears. This was the most important story they told at their return about the amazing things they had encountered on the other side of the Ocean. “It seems that a German lady’s ancestor came to Palomino and took away the mask,” commented my friend Paulina who heard the news.

Fischer notes that Preuss at first did not understand why a group of live indigenous people would use archaeological objects for their rituals. Until he took the masks back with him to his museum in Berlin and they were able to take dating tests that proved these masks were from 1440 DC and 1470 DC, dates that coincide with Teyku’s premonition. Fischer quotes Preuss’s text written in 1926 in which he informs that the Kogi say these masks “use words to prevent disastrous illnesses or other malignant things

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622 Personal communication with Juana Londoño, 2014
from overcoming them. This was the role of the ‘Great Sun Mask.’ This is what our fathers and ancestors said”  

During their visit, continued Juana Londoño’s account, Mama Pedro Juan commented “this mask was made of wood and that we were mistaken to think that a gold piece was more valuable than a wooden mask, for the gold is the dress but the mask is the soul.” Stimulated by his understanding of the piece the museum members tried to extract more information about the mask, and proudly informed them that in 2019 these masks would be moved to an even bigger and more frequented space, as such pieces merited it. “When you display the mask, you are putting it at work,” pointed out Mama Pedro Juan. “If you are going to keep them, then you can’t put them to work without paying them. It is best that you keep them out of sight.” Jose de los Santos added: “for our masks it’s not good to be here. They feel prisoners. We need you to return them to the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta where we want to speak to them... consult them” But this falls outside the rationale of a Project like The Great Humboldt Forum, denominated Cultural Project of the XXI Century, where these masks will be displayed along with 500,000 other pieces from around the world. Without an official petition from the Colombian nation, emphasized the museum agents, the German nation could not proceed to consider restituting these objects. It was informed in a newspaper article that the chancellery and the ICANH in Colombia had not found time to process that petition, and without an official order, the Colombian Embassy in Germany could not appeal for them.

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623 Fischer, Manuela. “El largo camino de las mascaras a traves del tiempo y el espacio.” http://portal.iai.spk-berlin.de/Preuss.107+M52087573ab0.0.html
624 Personal communication with Juana Londoño, 2014
626 Salazar, Patricia. “El Tiempo propicio para rescatar patrimonio que tiene museo alemán.” In: El Tiempo, March 27, 2014, p. 19
As I found myself in N’s house, one of the most talented guaqueros, he dreamt of broadening his relations abroad. He wanted me to help him sell a gold guacamaya and when I told him I couldn’t, he asked me to take a photograph so he could send it to a possible buyer in Medellín. We went to the back of his house and behind a multitude of clothes of different sizes all the way from his baby grandchildren to his big built sons, hanging on clothes lines, he drew out from a shelf, a plastic pot filled with a lot of newspaper and inside it a piece of satin black cloth wrapped around a gold guacamaya that he caringly unveiled. I saw the gold shimmering in his hands.

N figured he could get $30 million pesos for it. He told me he found it with his eldest son G. “G is a real hunting dog for guacas,” he commented as I saw G smiling with that characteristic spark in his eyes. I asked G how he does it. He answered: “you just have to think like an Indian and concentrate your thought to get to where the gold is. The guaca is not constant,” he continued, “the guaca hides and to find it you have to concentrate the good thought and not the bad one.” “What is a good thought?” I asked curious. “It’s like this,” he continued: “good is when you are thinking something lively, “alegre,” like I’m going to find something good for all of us. Bad is when you’re in despair and thinking I want to find this guaca for myself. So that’s when the guaca hides, you understand?” G assured me that once you find gold, it has healing powers because for example, “I was very ill the last time we went out to Palmarito, with a really shitty diarrhea and a terrible fever. We had been there three or four months digging and digging but nothing. We only got a little pot and some other stupid things. But I could feel the gold was near. My dad said that if we didn’t find anything we would leave the next day. I don’t know where the hell I got the strength to dig and dig but I continued in a place
where I could feel the gold until I saw it shining. As soon as I hit it, I felt the strength back in my body, it was like I was a new man again, something that one cannot explain, the mystery of gold.«627

![Figure 38. P with N’s family](image)

Figure 38. P with N’s family

I wanted to say to him that it was precisely for this energy, this nourishing life force and fertility that it was best to leave it there. For P, N and their family clearly deserved the best possible fortuna. But for N and his son G, it’s precisely because of the energy and even more important, for “the excitement of guaqueria,” as N put it, that these pieces were a fortuna. Besides, most of these lands are private property anyway, so should one abandon fortuna and leave the riches for the rich to continue hoarding them, instead of extracting them and winning a sale, even if not the best one? How contradictory that independently of the life force through which we communicate with the earth that we inhabit, there governs in our daily experience a drive that leads us to draw bits and pieces of the Mother Land’s body so as to get closer to fortuna. Isn’t her strength precisely our fortuna? ask the Mamas like Mama Jacinto who pointed out to the “family of investors” that they were now seeing the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta young

627 Field notes from Diary of 2011
and beautiful, so they wanted her badly. But we can’t continue to treat nature as if it were an equal, he pointed out. “Humans are born and then grow old... But the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta can’t be like that, nature must always remain young.” We are exhausting nature. “If we destroy the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, then no one is going to want to be here because we will have destroyed the very being we sought.”

628 Field notes from Diary of 2011
Figure 39. El Morro, Santa Marta
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