

JUAN CARLOS ORRANTIA
PRODUCING THE LAND OF OBLIVION. The Politics of Place in the Sierra Nevada
de Santa Marta, Colombia
(Under the Direction of Dr. J. Peter Brosius)

The Kogui are a group of indigenous people that live in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta mountains in northern Colombia. They have come to represent one of the maxims of indigenous traditionalism and environmental wisdom thus constituting one of the greatest myths of Colombian anthropology. This association of place and people now occupies a special place in conservationist milieus. The purpose of this ethnographic text is to inquire on the process through which the conservationist discourse in an association with (anthropological) representations has produced this image of a fixed place and culture. Considering individual and collective agency I further consider ways in which these representations are contested, negotiated, and re-appropriated in various contexts that intertwine the national and transnational realities of contemporary environmental politics.

INDEX WORDS: Politics of Place, Conservationist Discourse, Representations, Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Kogui, Colombia.

PRODUCING THE LAND OF OBLIVION

The Politics of Place in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Colombia

by

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DEDICATION

To the people that really live the realities we write about.

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I start by thanking, yet not naming in the sake of privacy, those who made the sharing of a place an ethnographic experience worth writing about.

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All translations from originals in Spanish were made by the author. I also assume responsibility for the statements and any possible misunderstandings.

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INTRODUCTION. MEANDERING PLACES OF POWER

Recent anthropological scholarship on place has seriously questioned the notion of “culture” and more so, the idea of culture as bounded in or to place (Appadurai 1996, Feld and Basso 1996, Gupta and Ferguson 1992, 1997, Marcus 1995, Rodman 1992, among others). Following these ideas this thesis is concerned with the process through which the conservationist discourse in an association with (anthropological) representations has produced an image of a “Kogui culture” that articulates a form of life with the sustainability of the surrounding natural environment, the Sierra Nevada mountains in northern Colombia. Considering individual and collective agency I further inquire on ways in which these representations are contested, negotiated, and re-appropriated in various contexts that intertwine the national and transnational reality of contemporary environmental politics.

Scholarship on contemporary environmentalism articulates a variety of subjects that include ideas of power, place, and identity among many others. In this line of thought Brosius recently suggested the need to problematize the way “[t]opologies –constructions of actual and metaphorical space- are discursively produced and re-produced” (1999a: 281). This thesis is thus an approach to the ways the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta has been produced, reproduced, contested, and negotiated in local, regional, and transnational fields. By approaching this reading from the stand point of environmental politics I wish to address the issue of how certain aspects of environmentalism such as conservation articulate the politics of place.

My attention to these processes involved in place-making is concerned here with the relationship among them and today's conservation apparatus, that contemporary block of ideas and practices that have as their axis the conservation of nature. This apparatus is thus characterized, but not defined solely by conservationist NGOs, donors, government agencies, advertisement campaigns, diverse forms of knowledge on nature ("scientific" and "local"), mapping and other assessment technologies, among others. Scholarly attention has increasingly been brought to this context (see Luke 1995, Neumann 1995, Proctor and Pincetl 1996, Rutherford 1994, and Zerner 1995) opening a view to the complexities of power within them.

In recent years such intricacies of conservation have started to surface in Colombian conservationist milieus. My attention is focused particularly around these issues in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. This is an isolated tropical mountain located on the northern coast of Colombia that has gained a prominent name among those interested in conservation, both biological and cultural. Rising from sea level to heights that reach nearly 6000 meters the Sierra Nevada contains almost, if not all the ecosystems in this altitudinal scale¹. The exoticism of these ecological characteristics has been intertwined with the indigenous peoples that inhabit it, primarily with the Kogui shifting agriculturalists that mostly occupy the northern slopes of the mountain. The Kogui have hence been idealized in an image that portrays them as the possessors of a special kind of ecological wisdom that grants them survival in this tropical haven. How this image responds to a particular history of representations is one of my purposes here, as well as

¹ It is also the highest isolated mountain in close proximity to the sea, making the distance from the shoreline to the snow peaks approximately 42 Kms.

how this idea intertwined with the contemporary discourse of conservation thus laying the grounds for a jumble of environmental and other forms of contemporary politics.

In November 2000 in a letter addressed to the principal local conservationist NGO Fundación Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, the Indigenous Territorial Council of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta² declared their disagreement with a series of conservation oriented projects. They demanded that the projects concerning a GEF, biodiversity conservation- and a Learning and Innovation Loan LIL-World Bank grant that seeks conservation and sustainable resource use through participatory management in the Sierra Nevada were stopped until further notice. They demanded respect and recognition for their indigenous authority and territoriality.

Almost a year after this complex process had began I arrived to do anthropological fieldwork on notions of place. Acknowledging the recognition of indigenous authority by the Colombian government embedded in the CTC, my permission to “do research” with the Kogui families in the Buritaca watershed where I had worked with before was denied. The indigenous authorities of the Sierra Nevada have undergone a struggle with the notion of “research” regarding the recognition of their own voice and authority in the establishment of scientific investigation in their territory. In my conversations with the Kogui leader representative to the CTC the names of the World Bank, the NGO Fundación Pro-Sierra, the Colombian Institute of Anthropology, the Parks Unit, came up constantly. “They all have also been required to stop”, was the argument; “We must make a point in telling people that the authority conferred in us is real”. As I would further learn from interviews with members of the NGO Pro-Sierra and

² This is a very recent, one might say not totally yet established, indigenous organization that seeks to encompass the four traditional indigenous organizations of the SNSM.

World Bank officials, the members of the Consejo Territorial de Cabildos de la SNSM, CTC, claimed a disregard for indigenous authority on the establishment of these conservation oriented initiatives and projects. This action taken by the indigenous organization has made visible the complex process of how environmental politics are articulated with other forms of contemporary politics in these so-called Third and Fourth World contexts. As such, the ecological complexity of tropical forests is juxtaposed with issues regarding land tenure for both indigenous and peasants families, problems with tourists, growing coca fields, guerrilla and paramilitary fights over territory, and the like. Thus indigenous authority(ies), conservation institutions and their donors, peasants, paramilitaries, researchers, advocates, state agencies, indigenists, and anthropologists form part in the composition of power strategies that are part of conservationist contexts such as this one. Specifically then, this controversy is a clear exposure of the relationship between forms of authority over place and environmental politics.

This thesis is hence my initial way of approaching these issues of contemporary environmental politics. My approach to this context considers aspects of Escobar's poststructuralist political ecology, for which I follow his definition of it as "[T]he articulation of biology and history [which] examines the manifold practices through which the biophysical has been incorporated into history –more accurately, in which the biophysical and the historical are implicated with each other" (1999: 4). Thus a historical perspective is applied to the relationship between forms of representation and the conservationist discourse, with a particular focus on the Buritaca watershed, in order to approach the articulations between place and power.

This relationship between place and power is based on the idea of place as an outcome of the politics of history (Foucault 1986), as a site of theory and politics (see Bender 1993, Escobar 1999b, Moore 1997, Sharp et al., among others); ultimately place is an act of power, of the entanglements of power (Sharp et al. 2000). This idea questions traditional dichotomies like “here-there”, “traditional-aculturated”, “concealed-exposed”, “dominator/dominated”, etc., and hence the Sierra Nevada and the Buritaca can be seen as a place of interaction of concepts, images, and interests all of which are components of a web of strategies and relations of power (Moore 1997, Sharp et al. 2000). These relations raise the issue of considering the way social groups endow space and place with amalgams of different meanings, uses, and values, and how these differences can create tensions and conflicts within society over the uses of space, and over the domination of the space by the state and other forms of dominating power (Sharp et al. 2000).

I here then read conservation as a discursive form that is diffused in different contexts, silently present as are to other notions and ideas of place, power, and knowledge in this process of the re-production of place. My attention to the conservationist discourse is thus explicit when tracing its genealogy for the Sierra Nevada, and implicit in other chapters that make reference to the multiple and political expressions of this place; as such I understand the discourse of conservation in the same way Foucault considered power as a capillary set of forces insinuated through all social activity (Foucault in Sharp et al. 2000).

The non-coercive power of the conservationist discourse is present in various forms, notions, uses, and other implications that the use of a created place brings about. As will be further treated (see chapter 4), certain aspects of the production of place result

in the creation of categories of threat, such as notions of biodiversity richness that derive from global conservationist initiatives like UNESCO'S Biosphere reserve program. These categorizations tend to legitimize control over the threatened areas thus creating tension over the uses of place. If the Sierra Nevada is a biodiversity hot-spot or not is really not at stake in the controversy exposed above, whereas who is in control of the more palpable aspects of these conservation oriented projects such as control over funding and territoriality, is. As such, implications of place creation and fixation are entangled with other forms of authority under different guises that too form part of the politics of conservation.

When discussing my initial proposal with Arregoces –the current leader of the Indigenous [Kogui] Organization Gonawindua Tairona-, he suggested I go directly to the old ethnographies made by Preuss and Reichel-Dolmatoff where I could find the “real knowledge” of the old wise *mamas*³. A lot of what was the real Kogui wisdom was to be found in those accounts. This exposition of the contemporary transformations of fieldwork led me then to situate this analysis in what has been called modernist/experimental ethnography (Marcus 1998). Thus the starting point for this ethnographic text is a rereading of Kogui ethnography, at least the most “well known” works –those that have permeated the public and have triggered a somewhat rooted idea of Koguiness in Colombian [anthropological] thought-. Examining the intellectual history of the authors that have provided the anthropological support for this history of representations provides an approach to the articulation between knowledge production, place, and environmental politics. They are of course guided by my own bias to what ethnographic representations of environmental issues are in these ethnographies, and as

³ *Mama* is the Kogui term for male religious leaders.

such incorporate my perspectives on the current environmental/political situation of the Sierra Nevada.

This rereading also includes my own past, albeit short, ethnographic experience with some Kogui families in the Buritaca watershed. Parts of my own previous work have thus been recontextualized in this thesis and combined with other sites and locations recently visited that together form the contemporary Sierra Nevada. For this purpose multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995) was used in order to “follow the metaphor” of place from what Buritaca villagers had to say on “nature” and “place” as well as conservationists, donor representatives, archaeologists, and anthropologists. For this I follow the ideas that have contested traditional views of place and culture as bounded entities, and their anthropological consequences of “peoples” and “cultures” (Appadurai 1996, Gupta and Ferguson 1997, among others). This notion acknowledges the interrelation of these “places” with contemporary processes of global flow, mass media, advanced capitalism, and post-colonialism. I therefore consider the localities treated in this thesis as multiple and mobile, as an aggregate of separate parts, discourses and locations (Escobar 1999, Haraway 1988, 1991, Marcus 1995, Raffles 1999, Rodman 1992).

As a result the tropical mountainous terrain situated in the middle altitudes of 800-1200 (m.a.s.l.) of the Buritaca watershed, where Kogui families have established their dispersed villages creating a patchwork of tropical forests with shifting cultivation plots of maize, taro, beans, squash, and coca, come together in this text with offices, texts, and film. Through expressions of each of these locations I approach the historical processes that articulate anthropological and colonial history, everyday narratives of nature,

compelling concerns over deforestation and land degradation, identity politics, and, aspects of the current Colombian nation's conflict all under the rubric of place.

As a way of expressing this array of personal experiences and ideas of power and place, I have wanted to incorporate the idea of "The Land of Oblivion". This is the way Colombian musician Carlos Vives has referred to the Sierra Nevada as a place that represents Colombia as a forgotten land of cultural and biological richness, forgotten by the constant shadow of violence that has characterized the nation's internal conflict. As such it represents a popular and widely accepted view of the Sierra Nevada and thus represents the articulation of place, essentialism, marginality, and biodiversity, subjects present in the history of the representation of the place here depicted. It is also a reminder of my own commitment to the history of the power of representations and its relation to the history of those with whom I have shared a part of that intricate present. This then engenders my own interests and concerns with the genealogy of cultures (as opposed to culture) where there is a current tendency to consider that "[a]ll associations of place, people, and culture are social and historical creations to be explained, [and therefore] cultural territorializations (like ethnic and national ones) must be understood as complex and contingent results of ongoing historical and political processes" (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 4).

The thesis is laid out in three main parts, all composed by a variety of subdivisions that crisscross a diversity of issues regarding the politics of place and conservation. In the first part I am concerned with the genealogy of the conservationist enterprise in the northern face of the Sierra Nevada and its relationship with anthropological representations of culture and place. Here I wish to shed light on the

history of ideas and processes that led to the configuration of a conservationist discourse based on anthropological representations and its relationship to the contemporary conservationist practices in the Sierra Nevada. This is historically located in the watershed of the Buritaca in the northern parts of the SNSM, which has been constructed by a variety of actors and processes that include peasants, indigenous communities, archaeological sites –understood by some as cultural patrimony, and as tourism sites and sacred sites by others-, ex-marihuana and current coca fields, illegal para-state armed forces, environmental authorities, anthropologists, etc.; thus it is an aggregate of social, plural realities that has been constructed through historical and political processes.

The history of these processes entails then the idea of the Sierra Nevada as a marginal place. Hence my intention in the second part of this thesis is to approach forms of tacit negotiations of the politics of marginality (Tsing 1993). A conflict over the authority of conservation opens a view to a conflict of marginalities where the state's goals of conservation oriented politics are negotiated by local, ethnic forms of renegotiated authority over place. My attention is aimed towards the language of conservation and nature as the expression of a discourse that not only shapes place but situates itself in an mobile place. This is not part of a dominators agenda but a result of historical and political processes of representation of marginality. In doing so the opened window allows us to see and listen to a place of contradictions that involve claims of dispossession and reinterpretation of marginality while using the language of conservation. This entails the acknowledgment of issues of translation (Brosius 2001) in a zone where intercultural displacement is set in terms of the current Colombian nation's conflict.

In the third part I address aspects of the transnationalism of place, considering the mobility of the local (Appadurai 1996, Gupta and Ferguson 1992, Marcus 1995, Raffles 1999) and the relationship between knowledge and information in contexts of contemporary cultural production. This is done by applying the idea of cultural producers to filmmaker Alan Ereira specially to his 1991 film From the Heart of the World; with this I intend to read this form of production where the Sierra Nevada is used as knowledge and information as a way of political authority in transnational contexts.

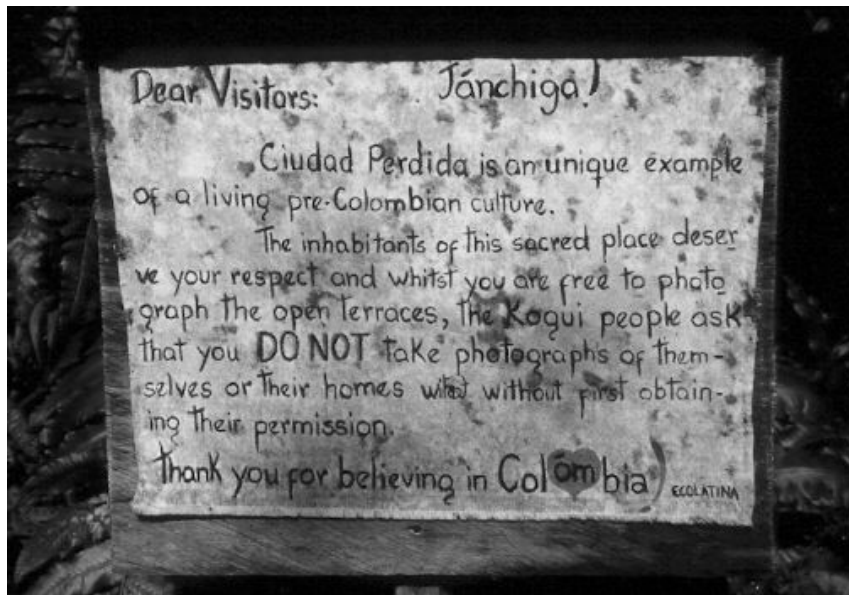
This approach to cultural producers follows the ideas of Marcus (1997) who considers cultural producers to be the contemporary version of the intellectual, and more so, its Gramscian derivation, organic intellectual. Due to the fact that the latter is more associated with the theoretical frameworks of modernity (i.e. derivations of Marxist thought), cultural producers diverge from it in the sense that they are part of professional middle classes who work in the production of mass media, yet are still embedded in processes of cultural critique and activism. The term itself signals the so-called crisis of representation and serves to designate and signify a cross-cutting blurring of genres of media and their activities. However, unlike the Gramscian notion, the term cultural producer highlights ways in which these kinds of intellectuals, more than the “organic” ones, are involved in both media production and its embodied associated practices.

My attention is focused on the process of articulation of representations of representations present in the film as knowledge/information production and circulation. By this I wish to point out certain instances where the film has served as a form of control and regulation of political authority of Kogui imagery. I conclude that this form of

cultural production is thus a site that entangles the claims of the subaltern in the same field with the complicitness of post-colonialism.

PART 1.

A HOT-SPOT IN THE MARGINS



“Ciudad Perdida is unique example of a living pre-Colombian culture. The inhabitants of this sacred place deserve your respect and whilst you are free to photograph the open terraces, The Kogui people ask you DO NOT take photographs of themselves or their homes without first obtaining their permission. Thank you for believing in Colombia. Ecolatina”

This sign was set up by a British-Colombian eco-tourist company at the entrance of the indigenous dwellings of Kogui families living in the archaeological site Ciudad Perdida. (picture by the author, June 2001)

1. Locating the Conservationist Discourse in the SNSM

On the northern Atlantic coast of Colombia lies a pyramid-shaped mountain where one can experience a particular sensation: seeing the ocean and making it seem just a few feet away while standing near the snowline. This place has been incorporated into Colombian society as the land of the wise Elder Brothers, the Kogui. It is a land of archaeological ruins enmeshed in moist tropical rainforests controlled by indigenous peoples that have the wisdom of how to run them, and apparently, on how to obtain a world balance; this is the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. Independent from the Andes Cordillera it rises to a height of 5,775m at a distance of only 42km from the Caribbean coast in northern Colombia. It is the highest coastal mountain in the world and covers an area of 17,000 km² (Fundación Pro-Sierra 1998). This isolation and mosaic of ecosystems allows it to shelter various endemic animal and plant species, that together with the numerous water sources that flow from its snow peaks and páramo lagoons create an ecological complex that has strongly attracted conservationists.

The Sierra Nevada is also the place where Kogui people have been idealized in an image that Uribe has described as one where the Kogui are typified as the maxim of indigenous traditionalism and wisdom, that makes them “[w]itnesses of a way of being and living that hasn’t yet been contaminated by the multiplicity of evils that come along with the Western way” (Uribe 1998: 2). An image that has been supported on tradition (Bocarejo 2001), and as such has been deployed, transformed, and negotiated.

Although this image is similar to that created for and by other indigenous groups⁴, Kogui “wisdom” has been given a particular status of higher wisdom, sometimes even sanctified. It is a powerful image that is not bounded to Colombian ethnographic imagery; it has been transnationalized and as such exemplifies the Kogui as the Elder Brothers that live in the “Heart of the World”: As British filmmaker and Kogui advocate, Alan Ereira put it:

*We are the Elders.
We were the Elders of all.
With greater knowledge, spiritual and material.*

The speeches of the Elder Brothers are rooted in an archaic past. For four centuries these people, the last surviving high civilization of pre-conquest America, have watched in silence from their hidden world in the mountains of Colombia. [T]he Elder Brothers believe that they are the guardians of life on earth. They see the world as a single living being which they have to look after and care for. Their whole way of life is dedicated to nurturing the flora and fauna of the world; they are, in short, an ecological community whose morality is wholly concerned with the health of the planet (Ereira 1992: 1).

The Kogui share the Sierra Nevada with three other ethnic groups –Arhuaco, Wiwa, and Kankuamo- being organized in scattered villages along different watersheds. Although the Sierra Nevada has undergone various processes of internal migration (Part 2) Kogui settlements are mostly located in the northern slopes; this is where my attention is concentrated, especially in the Buritaca watershed.

Due to the presence of steep ridges the Buritaca doesn’t easily rise to the high areas thus being inhabited mainly up to 1200mts. There exists a gradual settlement organization with peasants in the lowlands and Kogui –and some Wiwa- families in the upper region. Deforestation is higher in the lower regions due to a history of timber extraction and marihuana fields. Thus the attention generated by conservationists to these areas has been extremely high considering the remaining forests a principal target of

⁴ Some famous representatives of this image are the Kayapó in Brazil, or the Penan in Borneo.

preservation. As a result the peasants as well as the Kogui have been enmeshed in a complex categorization linking forested lands to indigenous ways of thought and deforested lands to peasants, resulting in a mosaic of deforestation and “pristine” forests, ethnically tied and represented.

The Kogui population of the Buritaca is not very high (20 families approx.) although apparently rising. They survive on shifting agriculture in a pattern that links mobility through various farms within their territory –range-, and some families rely on certain levels of wild meat hunting –mainly rodents like agouties-. Higher levels of forests and lower levels of population make this Kogui landscape somewhat different to other more “typical” and “traditional” Kogui watersheds of the northern face, having smaller villages, lower levels of commercial cash crops –especially coffee-, and very little ownership of grazing animals like bulls and mules. Together with a more or less regular presence of tourists due to the presence of the archaeological park Ciudad Perdida, the Buritaca is thus an assortment of representations of forests, ethnicities, and the material cultural past.

Having other areas similar to the above as well as other more diverse, the Sierra Nevada as a whole has been historically located in the juxtaposition between biodiversity rich *areas* and the *countries* that encompass them. Colombia’s delicate political situation has led to profound social problematics –some of which include processes of reterritorialization that derive from the armed activities of paramilitaries and guerrillas, forced displacement of peasants and indigenous groups due to threats, massacres, and in some places an imposition of para-state laws and control-. Thus the Sierra Nevada lies in a region that is the result of a history of centralist oriented politics that created a geo-

political map characterized by the fragmentation and creation of “marginal areas” (Tsing 1993)—most of which coincide today in being biodiversity rich areas-.

In the last decade the country has undergone Neo-liberal oriented politics that brought radical transformations like the 1991 Constitution; with it processes of decentralization, appreciation of a multicultural country, and the consequent recognition of indigenous forms of authority have been introduced. Notwithstanding, regions like the Sierra Nevada are still areas of sociopolitical antagonism. They are localities where there is presence of para-state (armed) forces and other illegal activities like the cultivation of coca which have led to major habitat destruction and social devastation.

Contexts like these therefore make the Sierra Nevada part of what has become one of today’s greatest dilemmas; the dilemma of the Tropical Third World, of how to conserve, protect nature and more so in these tropical geographies where biodiversity reaches its richness peaks, in troubled, poor, underdeveloped “Third World” countries. This is a question raised in different milieus, many of them in the (political) north, where people are troubled by ideas that relate poverty, “social degradation” to the deterioration of rainforest and other biologically endangered areas. The SNSM is thus an example of the conservationist/social problematic that has been a constant inquiry for the “bio-cultural-political complexity” (Greenberg and Park 1994, see also Peet and Watts 1996), of that engagement that has been situated by scholars in the realms of [discursive] inequalities-especially between First and Third World discourses (Escobar 1996, Guha 1989, Martinez-Alier 1991, Moore 1996).

Particularly then, the problematic in the SNSM has been historically, socially, and environmentally defined in the following terms:

The different indigenous groups mastered the management of water, creating systems whose characteristics can be admired today in the remnants of their stone cities, roads and other constructions. They also developed a sophisticated cultural and spiritual social system that still survives in some of their descendants...In the 1960s the systematic looting of sacred Tairona sites also weakened the traditions of indigenous groups. In the seventies the introduction of illegal crops (marijuana), due to international demand, resulted in the removal of more than 100,000 hectares of forests to provide place for the new crop... This context of widespread conflict triggered a chaotic process of land occupation and unsustainable use of natural resources (water, lands, forests), and the continuous violation of human rights. In addition the indigenous groups were once again displaced to higher lands. In 1990, just 18% of the original forest cover remained, and it was threatened by the expansion of the agricultural frontier, with the consequent and adverse effects on the availability of water (FPSNSM, N.d.)

My purpose in the following chapters of this section is to trace the merger of ecological characteristics with anthropological representations of culture that have resulted in the image of the Sierra Nevada described above⁵. I inquire into the history of anthropological concepts that form part of the constructed *ethos* of the Kogui that have served as an axis for the establishment of a discourse that relates a form of life with the sustainability of the surrounding natural environment. It is a look at the history of ideas, images, and practices that have subjectively been presented by individuals and institutions in the form of anthropological representations and further, how this has been linked with broader globalization oriented discourses such as conservation.

⁵ Following Slater (1999) I consider the word image to refer to not only graphic descriptions but also figures of speech and ideas.

2. Representations. Towards a Portrait of Place and People

Hidden transcripts in Colombian Anthropology

I am not the first, and will not be the last to say that the Kogui are not the possessors of some kind of special and divine knowledge of how to save the world. Neither is the purpose of my inquiries to set any form of judgment on it. I too have marveled at the beauty, the magnificence of this place and its people. This is not a process of desacralization; it is an insight to the complexities of forms of cultural production. The following then is the review of a genealogy of Colombian anthropology in the context of ethnographic representations of the Sierra Nevada and “its” peoples. It is a review of the construction and transformation of ideas, practices, and the people who produced them.

In 1987 Colombian anthropologist Carlos Uribe opened a debate on the idea and imagery of the Kogui. With a paper presented at an Environment and Culture seminar in a town outside of Bogotá, Uribe publicly exposed an idea that is present in Colombian anthropology that everyone knows but doesn't openly like to say; that the inhabitants of the Sierra Nevada are not the chosen saviors of the world, that they are just “human beings that were confronted with, and had to resolve the demands of their surroundings” (Uribe 1988: 10). He thus examined the historical construction of the westernization of the Kogui ideal in the writings of naturalist voyageurs and “scientific” anthropologists. The resulting idea is therefore one that intertwines a vision of “a Kogui knowledge and wisdom” with the magnificent surrounding ecosystems. This idea that resembles a 21st

century portrait of the finest 19th century naturalist representations, essentializing a so-called Kogui culture as one whose knowledge is crucial for the sustainability of (global) biodiversity, is that to which I will from here on refer to as Koguiness.

Uribe's work illustrates how the late 19th century brought to the Sierra Nevada groups of people that included varied representatives of Enlightenment-based ideas such as the French anarchist Elisee Reclus, as well as other colonial travelers with ideas of progress and development—in their very best 19th century expression-, like count Joseph de Brettes and Colombian military-naturalist Col. Joaquin Acosta. The group is complemented with missionary priests such as Father Rafael Celedón, and romantic, liberal poets like Jorge Isaacs. They all visited the Sierra Nevada and left ethnographic records of the people they encountered. All these travelers were touched by the beauty and splendor of the Sierra Nevada and they all tinted the landscape with their colonialist and romantic ideals that paternalized and/or denigrated the people they encountered. This idea of the people of the Sierra Nevada—and I say people for it involves both the Kogui as well as other ethnic groups that live and lived in the slopes and the lowlands surrounding the Sierra Nevada- began to be slowly replaced by more essentialist oriented notions present in the writings of anthropologists beginning in the 20th century.

In the writings of Euro-American anthropologists such as Swedish Gustaf Bolinder, German Konrad Th. Preuss, Americans J Alden Mason, Gregory Mason, and Austrian-born and Colombian nationalized Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff a kind of exaltation of the Sierra, and mostly of its inhabitants started gaining momentum. Some of these authors approached the past of the Sierra by means of archaeology and then concentrated on the contemporary inhabitants, mainly the Kogui. The Sierra Nevada thus

has a genealogy that corresponds with the times it's been embedded in, and therefore colonialism, development, and nativeness have been part of the "people", of the Kogui for quite a while now⁶.

Unfortunately the paper discussed above has been somewhat neglected in Colombian anthropology, maybe because of the giant to which it stands against, and maybe more so, because the power that the representations of Kogui(ness), because this cultural production of the Kogui and the Sierra Nevada seems at times much grander than critique itself. Therefore I wish to continue where he left off, and concentrate on what I see as the mayor outcome of Kogui ethnography, the idea of the "Elder Brothers".

The Elder Brothers are rooted in tradition; "tradition" is a word that somewhat seems to come along with the word Kogui. A certain timelessness has thus been characteristic of a representation that has through the years prevailed. An enduring depiction that goes as far back as to not only link the current Kogui with the prehispanic inhabitants of the Sierra Nevada known in the archaeological literature as the Tairona, but more so the Kogui as the possessors, as the heirs of a complex and profound system of thought and practices that, apparently, characterized Tairona culture. This idea has been now severely questioned (see Bocarejo 2001, Giraldo 1999, Orrantia 1999, Uribe 1990), and the creation of this link has been thus examined in the works of J. Alden Mason, Gregory Mason, Preuss, and especially Reichel-Dolmatoff. In a brief and somewhat caricaturesque summary, this link originated from a presentistic contextualization of the archaeological artifacts these authors found in use among the Kogui and tautologically framed them in a linking argument to the Tairona. Although as mentioned this has been

⁶ I will not go much more back in time, but it is relevant to mention Uribe's (1990) work on the integration of the Sierra Nevada to the world system since the 17th century, a process he closely examines.

now deeply and I might add, gracefully analyzed under Sahlins' ideas of indigenization (Bocarejo 2001), political economy (Uribe 1990), or in the history of archaeological theory (Giraldo 1998), it is something to be kept in mind for it still prevails in a popular image and is still part of the current environmentalist discourse.

This anthropological representation of the Kogui is hence based on the articulation of two main concepts, *The Mother* and *Fertility*. Together they represent a “Kogui essence” that defines “a” culture whose spirituality guides a particular [sustainable] relationship with their natural environment.

The Mother was thus described by Preuss as:

The first mother [is considered] the mother of all things...therefore [her] obligations are vary varied. But the predominance is her relationship with fire and with the *fiestas* [ceremonies], and in general with the work of the mamas. She created the sun by the name of Mameuman that is derived from *mama*, sun. The demon *Kasundukua* is formed of the menstrual blood of Gauteovan [one of the names of The Mother] and is probably too a being of fire or the sun (Preuss [1919] 1993: 96).

This origin, this begging of everything was set to impose order, to control chaos...

In the beginning, it is said, there was no universal order. The sun wondered around through the heavens without any fixed course... then, in accordance with The Universal Mother, nature itself spoke to man and told him how she should be treated ...this way The Mother made the “Law”. It is the grand preoccupation of the Kogui that this “law” is maintained so the universal disorder does not return, and with it, the “End of the World” (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1985: 240).

And then Reichel-Dolmatoff proceeds:

Kogui religion is based on the cult to fertility. The concrete expressions of this fertility are women as mother and the crop soil. Women and soil are thus synonyms, the same as coitus and planting, sperm and seed, children and fruit. Sexuality and nourishment have in this a common base. ... To this cycle of plowing, being born, dying, and rebirth, the Kogui refer to as the “Law of the Mother”... the concept of Mother, *Haba*, personifies in first instance the biological principle of development of human life through its successive faces (1985, II: 81-86).

The Mother is also taken to be the mountain, the Sierra itself. The spiritual powers of the deity are thus embodied in the land itself, a relationship that is defined by the

concept of fertility. The latter implies a sense of constant re-birth, of eternal perpetuation of spirit and matter. The combination of these two concepts implies then an idea of spiritual control over and for the material land, usually depicted under the idea of a sacred knowledge that determines cultural and ecological behavior. Thus I would suggest that historically *The Mother* as a concept has been structurally centered at the core, that is a symbolic, meaningful, and even determinant core of Kogui society. It has been established as a principle that combines the natural surrounding, the cultural past, and the social present. It is a means of controlling that which needs control like natural disasters, crop plagues, sickness, and in a sense, Colombian society depicted under the idea of the “younger brothers”.

In opposition to the idea of the Elder Brothers, non-Kogui, especially westerners, have been defined under the term “younger brothers”. The term comes from the idea that *The Mother* gave the Kogui a corpus of sacred knowledge of how to maintain this sacred balance; since we (us) westerners were not capable of higher wisdom we kept things like technology (and any other associations of modernity). The Kogui are then our Elder Brothers. Hence as will be seen later on, this idea also serves to control the image of an encroaching modernity. But in doing so it also falls in what Ortner has seen as the unacceptable problematic of structuralism: the denial of the relevance of an intentional subject in the social and cultural process, and the denial of any significant impact of history or “event” upon structure” (Ortner 1994: 382).

In the remaining parts of this chapter I wish to explore the anthropological roots of this conceptualization, especially in the works of Konrad Th. Preuss and Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff. Although other authors are mentioned when necessary, I believe it is

their works that have had a greater impact on the Kogui representation and its acceptance. As such, Preuss' works on myths centered the attention to the knowledge embedded in "Kogui spirituality" and Reichel-Dolmatoff's ideas on nature-culture deeply influenced the way the Sierra Nevada and the Kogui are conceived.

The Germanic legacy of Konrad Th. Preuss

Konrad Th. Preuss, trained in the German tradition of Ethnology, visited Colombia and the Sierra Nevada in 1914. He traveled Colombia for six years and left important observations of most of the places he visited. Although his 3 month fieldwork among the Kogui was not very extensive, he collected a vast and very valuable series of chants and myths. This emphasis on myths can be seen as a result of his training with Adolf Bastian –which is to whom the book on the Kogui is dedicated too-. This is what has led Uribe to define Preuss' academic enterprise as a "functionalism of a particular style... [one] of a certain Hegelian component, that obliges the German ethnographer to probe into the spirit, the *geist*, the soul of a people—a metaphysical spirit that is found in the core of a particular culture" (Uribe: 11 in Preuss [1919] 1993) .

Preuss dedicated his stay among the Kogui to the "recovery" of myths from which he could further develop the core of Kogui culture, which in his own words is something like this:

Thus as the Kagaba⁷ tribe has remained in their mountains in a certain way as a natural monument of old times, protected by a belt of tropical forest that surrounds their territory in the lowland regions, an insurmountable gap separating it from our western vision of the world. A marvelous world of beliefs, in which the foreign flowers and fruits of the irrational thought make bearable and attractive the crude reality of their experience, has adapted in such a way to the nature of the mountain that it seems that myths and chants

⁷ Kagaba in the Kogui language means people. In the ethnographic literature there are several ways of naming these people, the most common ones being Kogui, Kogi, Cogui, or Kággaba.

would've only been created on this ground. These Indians have remarkably managed even to adopt a lordly stance in the middle of the majesty of the cordillera, that can seem comical to us, the representatives of an exclusively rational way of thought, and hence, alien to man, if we did not clearly have in front of our eyes the positive value that is conferred to life by the Kagaba. Their capacity to internally control the demoniac forces of nature is not the most notorious of their spiritual life, but their great cohesion, *of how everything is fused unitarily with their conception of the Universal Mother and the first human priests, their ancestors, and first bearers of the culture, that has determined the totality of their social life through today* (Preuss [1919] 1993: 17-18. emphasis added).

In this statement it is rather evident how Preuss' perception of the Other clearly follows the line of Bastian. His work was shaped by the ideas of this traveler and thinker, that in the genealogy of the German Enlightenment via von Humboldt established the study of the fabric of the natural world and the human mind as one unitary notion, the so-called psychic unity of mankind (Koepping 1983). As such, Preuss' approach to the Kogui reinforces the idea of a way of life that incorporates the natural environment, and explains it in religious terms. It is thence in Bastian's legacy to Preuss that one can find part of the founding principles of the relationship that has prevailed, that of religion and environment, that of the control of the material by controlling the metaphysical for the well being of humankind.

This understanding is thus related to similar anthropological approaches that also genealogically descend from this Germanic tradition, such as ideas from Boas⁸ and Weber. This congregation of Germanic philosophical expressions of the *geist* is important to consider, for Preuss' works have become an significant source of the Kogui ethnographic archive, and therefore played a notable role in the establishment of a view of a Kogui culture with a particular, spiritually oriented *ethos*. It is noticeable that the ethnographic references that Preuss left on the Kogui are very much derived solely from

⁸ Particularly one can see this in Boas' initial approaches to geography, or as Speth (1978) has called it, the Boasian anthropogeography.

the recollection of myths. One could argue that the emphasis on spirituality has been highlighted due to the prominence that religion had for the understanding of society in this ethnological tradition. Thus Preuss' work supported on the German philosophy of the *geist* and their particular attention on spiritual expressions as elements that defined society, can be said to have played an important part in the establishment of Koguiness. This spiritual mean of social cohesion, though taken different facets has pervaded to our time in an image that establishes a Kogui way of thought based on a complex spiritual understanding and management of the social and material worlds.

Francis Nicholas and Gregory Mason

I briefly wish to introduce certain aspects of other authors that also visited the Sierra Nevada in the first half of the 20th century, where I believe there are certain expressions that also build into the construction of Koguiness. One of these expressions is that of Francis Nicholas, a U.S. citizen that owned some land in the surrounding areas of Santa Marta (Giraldo 1999). In his work we can find some interesting insights for the shaping of the Kogui portrait:

In the elevated fastness of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta live the remnants of a once powerful tribe. Their country overlooks all the great territory formerly occupied by the Indians of the lowlands. These mountain Indians are known as the Aurohuacas⁹ and are such a peculiar people, differing so completely from all others I have seen near the Caribbean sea, that they must be the remnants of a very ancient and much more highly developed people, who at some remote time were driven to take refuge among the higher mountains because of incroachments and violence of more savage neighbors (Nicholas 1901: 637).

⁹ The name "Aurohuaca", now Arhuaco, though today refers to another ethnic group in the Sierra, was once generalized for all the indigenous inhabitants. As will be made clearer in the ongoing chapters, the reference to the name he uses is also to be considered. Nicholas says the name came from the combination of Spanish *oro* -gold- and *huaca* -Indian burial- resulting in "hidden gold".

If the sources of information were either direct or indirect is not clearly stated in Nicholas' report, but what is somewhat evident is that the Kogui themselves were already playing their part in an interesting game of imagery and representation that still prevails; a condition that relies on colonial views of the Other, as well as [most probably] their own views on other indigenous groups, in combination with the exploitation of the surrounding natural environment. Ultimately, a relationship between the vastness of an isolated snowcapped mountain that lies in heart of the Tropical World and the ancient secrets contained in it that are revealed to us only by the magnificent ruins that eventually show themselves through the jungle as reminders of the secret and powerful knowledge that the current inhabitants are therefore to have.

Nicholas was referenced by another Kogui ethnographer, Gregory Mason. Having been originally trained in anthropology at Columbia –though he received his doctorate from the University of Southern California- Mason visited the Sierra Nevada, and particularly the Kogui in 1931. His was more of an ethnographic expedition that wanted to obtain ethnographic objects for the Museum of Philadelphia and the Museum of the American Indian, Haye Foundation, New York. These expeditions were his way of gathering the material for his doctoral dissertation, a treatise on the “indisputable” link between Tairona and Kogui. Following a recommendation by professor Marshal Saville his purpose was then to investigate the Tairona material culture based on the study of a living modern tribe believed to be descendant from the Tairona, that of the Kággaba-Arhuaco (Mason 1938, 1940).

In Mason's work one doesn't only find this relationship ethnographically deployed, but also finds bits and pieces of the genealogy I here seek to trace. This is

made explicit in his accounts of the way he was enmeshed in the powerful imagery that the Kogui had among the Colombian peasants of the surrounding settlements; as unexplainable as it were to those “[r]eckless, drunken, hilarious, Spanish-speaking mulattoes” that inhabited the surrounding coastal villages, Kogui magic was so powerful that eventually he himself was driven to believe in it (Mason 1940, and see Uribe 1998). Thus the Kogui are presented as controllers of some kind of immaterial knowledge that is powerful enough to swathe even the most rigorous scientific thinker.

Another aspect in Mason’s Kogui accounts that involves him in this genealogy of anthropological representations is his reference on totemism. In a brief passage where Mason discusses the rare possibility of totemism among modern Indians in South America, he draws on insights from the Guajiros, a group of seminomad pastoralists and merchants that live in the desert peninsula of the Guajira, the northeastern boundary of the Sierra Nevada. Based on the account of a figurine obtained from his archaeological excavations, and by the way a recurrent figure in Tairona artifacts, he proceeded in saying that although he believed the Kogui did not have clans the Tairona did, and it was probably a trace that had been passed on to the Guajiros. Guajiros are known for a matrilineal clan organization, and according to Mason therefore a clear expression of Tairona totemism. Based on the amount of animal representations found in archaeological figurines, Mason thus proceeds:

I am convinced that these representations are not the haphazard result of the free play Indian whim. Indians never give play to their imaginations. Every stroke in an Indian drawing, every geometric line incised on Indian pottery means something. ...Totemism is founded deeply in magic, whether or not one accepts the theory of Karsten that it is founded in animism. That is why I suggest the animal figures found in Tairona art are eponymous symbols of matrilineal exogamic clans, such as are found among the Goajiros today (Mason 1940: 309).

This paragraph on totemism in an ethnography whose main purpose was to prove the relationship of Tairona and Kogui is enriched by the fact that just a few years later Reichel-Dolmatoff's structuralism would consider one of its main contributions a passage on totemism itself. Let me then contextualize professor Reichel-Dolmatoff.

The Kogui: By Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff

The anthropology of Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff is one of the two diffusion points of Colombian anthropology (Uribe 1981, 1986). Professor Reichel's anthropological interpretation can be seen regarding various trends, though all are interconnected. As stated by Uribe (1986), his initial articles on the Kogui were guided by culture and personality ideas, a period he combined with Tairona archaeology of a somewhat cultural-historic perspective (Giraldo 1999). In his later ethnographic period (1970's and 80's) he focused on symbolic reinterpretations of his original Kogui material and some new fieldwork (see 1975); it is here where he established a form of structuralism *a la* Levi-Strauss with tints of symbolic ecology that mainly developed from his famous piece "Cosmology as ecological analysis"(1976a)¹⁰. To this one might add his commitment to an objective, scientific, fieldwork oriented anthropology, and his not explicit but certainly political stance on behalf of the Indian population in Colombia (see Giraldo 1998)—as well as that of his colleague and wife, Doña Alicia Dussán (Dussán de Reichel 1965)-. Together they committed to elevating the negative image of the Indian that was somewhat prevalent up to the 1960's in Colombia.

¹⁰ See specially Reichel-Dolmatoff (1982) on cultural symbols and ritual control as adaptation in the SNSM.

Reichel had his own view of anthropology, which according to his pupil Alvaro Soto cost him many enemies and an image of an “elitist fascist”. Professor Reichel considered that one of anthropology’s aims was that, as a science it had to break the image of indigenous people’s as inferior beings. Through science he thus took a strong political stance at time of strong conservatism in Colombia. His idea of anthropology and anthropologists considered that “[a] real anthropologist cannot be someone who is in economic need. Anthropology is not to get rich or even to make money; one needs it, to make anthropology, [but in the end] a dug out canoe, notebooks, maybe photographic machines, and time, were all one needed” (Soto p.c. 2001). This was a strong position that was not accepted by his colleagues who in the mid 1960’s followed the idea that the state’s purpose was to integrate indigenous peoples so that they could have access to the benefits of civilization (jungles and other “wild” places were seen the same way) (see Bocarejo 2001, Dussán de Reichel 1965, Uribe 1980).

It can be said that Reichel did indeed carry out his idea of changing the indigenous people’s image. Through anthropology he critiqued aspects of Colombian society that would startle anyone today. Notorious is his outrage and condemnation of the tragic episode known as La Rubiera (1964) –a known Indian slaughter, whose murderers further argued they had done nothing wrong, for killing Indians was the same as killing animals-.

Reichel’s academic reputation began to be established in the 1940’s. Together with his wife the Reichel’s established in Santa Marta and did ethnographic and archaeological fieldwork. Based on this ethnographic material he wrote the first edition

of The Kogui ([1950] 1985)¹¹. In the 1950's they moved back to Bogotá where Reichel-Dolmatoff founded the first department of anthropology in a Colombian university, the Universidad de Los Andes. A few years later he began fieldwork in the northwest Amazon; this is the period where his intellectual explorations of Levi-Strauss and Freud really took form. He began to deal with concepts such as “symbiosis” and other symbolic related ideas that linked religion, or religious activities and meanings to the surrounding environment (see Reichel-Dolmatoff 1976a). As I will further explain, it is this involvement in Amazonian ethnography that deeply influenced his reformulation of his original Kogui material. After spending some time involved in Amazonian ethnography, he returned to the Sierra in the 1970's and completed a series of articles, maybe his most influential material on the Sierra Nevada, where he explored and developed systems of resource use and management structured on cosmological and symbolic perceptions of the world (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1975, 1976a, 1978, 1982a, 1982b, 1990, 1991).

Although the Amazonian period was very important in his intellectual shaping and thinking of indigenous peoples, Reichel's encounter with the Sierra Nevada and particularly with the Kogui seems to have had a deeply emotional meaning. In his own words:

However, for me the decisive event was to encounter the Kogi of the Sierra Nevada...They gave the impression of being a society of lordly traditions, but of a totally anti-materialistic cast. This was in itself an extraordinary phenomenon...I did not want to look at the Kogi with what Andre Breton called “le regard *glace de 'l ethnologue*”; I aspired to be their interpreter, to give them a voice in our world... Here were no stoic Indians; indeed not. Instead, there reigned an intellectual attitude, spiced with a good lash of cynicism, by which these men gave one to understand that they felt superior to their

¹¹ Which at the time was not really accepted and apparently confronted by the state, which can be seen, as Giraldo (1999) reminds us in the lack of government support for the publication of the second volume at the time. This is according to Giraldo, because the ideas there exposed “... undermined the prevailing racist assumptions and ideas about what the Colombian Nation should be about. The Indians were not simple-minded creatures, savages that had *deserved* and in fact benefited from the civilizing mission of the Spanish Conquest, but philosophers in their own right” (1999: 35).

circumstances, carrying with them the certitude of belonging to a society that, centuries previously, had attained a vision of the world and of life that satisfied their aspirations. I realized that there were philosophers among the Kogi, and priests as well, that there were thinkers posing existential and theological questions of unexpected profundity, and that even phenomena contradicting extant normative situations were critically discussed. [thus] Many are the facets of the Kogis' intellectual world, so to comprehend their world view we must first understand their mythic bases, for these explain just how the Indians conceive of the universe and how they adapt to it in ecological, social, philosophic, and psychological terms (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1991: 81-86).

These ideas were academically explained by Reichel with a model that described what he understood as the expression of a psycho-ecological-cultural complex that determined Kogui thought. This model is known as the food/sex metaphor, a kind of psychotic expression of the calamities of living in a harsh mountain environment threatened always by "outside" cultural change.

The food/sex metaphor is based on an interrelation between social organization and cultural-ecological adaptation. Reichel developed a model of Kogui social organization that for him was at the base of this metaphor. This model is based on the so-called *tuxes* and *dakes*, considered by him as a form of totemic organization where masculine lineages, *tuxes*, are totemic descendants of particular animals, and feminine clans, *dakes*, are the food chain correspondent animal. Thus the food/sex metaphor is complied in through kinship where men of certain clans could only marry women of the corresponding *dake*. And this is what according to Reichel is an expression of that inner relationship that establishes the sameness between eating and sex; this is further elaborated in a process of female meaning where the Sierra as a female entity is infused with fertility, and thus when a man plows the land he is at the same time having sexual intercourse with it –her (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1985, Uribe 1986). Thus a symbolic, sacred

bond is established between the land, the soil, the Sierra itself, and Kogui society at large. It means more than it says, and more so, its legacy has overrun academic interpretations.

The adaptational aspect of the mentioned metaphor is explained by Reichel as a response to the severe historical consequences of the Spanish conquest. According to the professor the northern face of the Sierra Nevada was inhabited in pre-Columbian times by a group of regional chiefdoms with a strong commercial relation that allow an access to a broad range of resources. As a result of the Spanish colonial viciousness inflicted upon the Tairona tribes a resettling took place; thus the remaining scattered tribes concentrated in the higher areas of the Sierra, something that resulted in their change of subsistence patterns from intensive irrigation agriculture –as evidenced by the extraordinarily elaborated terraces and settlements- to mixed, starchy –mainly introduced- crops. The last consequence of which was an agricultural regression in technical complexity and a complete reorientation of crops and hence, diet. This forceful change resulted in a weakened, unbalanced diet that has been dealt with through a high and strong cultural and spiritual belief system. This not only explains the relationship between priesthood training and other sacred oriented practices and the prevalence in these of immense dietary restrictions (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1976b, 1990), but mainly it orients us towards what he calls “[t]he overcoming of the disintegration period by adaptive mechanisms of great efficiency” (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1982: 292); according to Reichel, Kogui adapted in the best of ways, through ritual, through the control of altitudinal migrations between family fields, thus having access to a variety of altitudinal niches under a strict control based on sacred knowledge (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1982, Uribe 1986).

The Sierra Nevada is hence perceived –in these representations- as a complex set of female representations controlled by ritual experts, the *mamas*, those leaders that still have anthropologists debating over whether they are political, religious, or as Cayón (2000) has recently proposed, Human Gods. This is why ecological knowledge is thus equivalent –in Kogui ethnography and most of its readings- to sacred knowledge.

The food-sex metaphor that according to Reichel-Dolmatoff defines Kogui culture—and hence a particular relationship with their natural environment- responds to a model that was prominent in South American social anthropology, especially (Amazonian) lowlands ethnology. Under a very strong influence of Levi-Strauss many ethnographers visited the Amazon in the 1960's and 70's and developed a strong emphasis on social organization and the relationship of this with the complex ecology of the Amazon basin. Further developments of these Levi-Straussian ideas provided a very broad literature on cosmological perceptions, social organization, and ecological regulations that characterized the ethnographic period of the northwest Amazon of the 1970's and 80's (see especially Arhem 1993, Descola 1996, Jackson 1983, Hugh-Jones (Christine) 1979, Hugh-Jones (Stephen) 1979, Viveiros de Castro 1996). This corpus of theoretical approaches characterized by the association between kinship, territoriality, and land (or relationships to the environment) was engendered from Levi-Straussian ideas and applied to societies living in complex tropical (Amazonian) ecological settings. This is hence the model that stands at the basis of Reichel's food –sex metaphor; it is thus an interpretation of Levi-Strauss' theory that together with explorations in Freudianism Reichel developed during his “Amazonian period”.

With these ideas in mind Reichel-Dolmatoff returned for his later fieldwork in the Sierra Nevada, and as mentioned before, it was then when his most well known arguments on the Kogui were developed. This structuralist derived “Amazonian” framework was then adapted by Reichel to the Sierra Nevada. Contrary to Amazonian ethnology where these ideas have been questioned and reformulated into contemporary debates in Amazonian ethnology (Viveiros de Castro 1996), the lack of an ethnographic consistency in the Sierra Nevada in the years after Reichel left his structuralism and nature-culture interpretations nearly unquestioned. As mentioned before it wasn’t until the late 1980’s with the works by Uribe (1988) that Reichel’s ideas were academically interrogated. But even so, the powerful image of being one of the pillars of Colombian anthropology has maintained Reichel’s interpretations in great popularity¹².

Although he was neither the first nor the only anthropologist to have visited the Sierra Nevada, his works are among the most prominent and well known. Part of this is due to the way he treated previous ethnographies in the Sierra Nevada. For instance, even though Reichel mentioned his use of Preuss’ works as useful in his fieldwork he also discredited the German ethnographer:

Preuss gathered a large number of myths and stories in their original text, material that further allowed him to analyze the language in a very detailed form. Although the linguistic aspect in Preuss’ work is probably the most complete that has been written on an aboriginal language in Colombia, the rest of his chapters that relate to religion, myths, and social conditions don’t reach the same level. Actually, the fundamental mistakes are so frequent that it would be almost impossible to try and fix them one by one (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1985 I: 10).

This strong opposition to previous ethnographies, together with the late translation into Spanish of Preuss’ work, the late recognition of Mason’s works, Reichel’s influential position in Colombian academe and social life, and his recognition in international

¹² Only recently and mainly in undergraduate monographs have some of these ideas come into question.

circles¹³ helped establish Reichel's idea of the Kogui as the most prominent, or at least the most popular. There is yet another factor that has significantly aided in the establishment of this idea of Koguiness. It has to do with Reichel-Dolmatoff's influence on what later developed as an environmental movement in the Sierra Nevada. A historical relationship and legacy among people and institutions thus constituted the background for the reappropriation of these ideas in environmentalist milieus.

¹³ Reichel-Dolmatoff was an invited professor at UCLA for a few years in the early 1990's.

3. The Scientificity of the Portrait . From Archeology to Indigenism and Conservation

The intellectual ideas that underlie the concepts of *The Mother* and *Fertility*, and more so their relation to the land, the Sierra Nevada, their sacred character and their essentialist implications were at the basis of the anthropological approach to the Sierra Nevada in the late 1970's and 80's. Reichel's book The Kogui was published in a second and much more widely distributed and accepted edition in 1985; an interesting year, for had not only Reichel already steered his theoretical ideas towards structuralism and ecology, but the archaeological site Ciudad Perdida was in the air, and the Tairona-Kogui connection was being magnified by this discovery. Additionally we must consider the fact that the Ciudad Perdida project, and in general the anthropological attraction to the Sierra was being directed by one of Reichel's direct pupils, Alvaro Soto.

Alvaro Soto was trained by Reichel in a manner that resembled the importance in European education of the mentor-pupil relationship. Professor Reichel took Soto with him on his field trips, on archaeological digs and ethnographic journeys. In the long nights he told him about the Sierra Nevada, about its people, about nature and culture. Those conversations were further developed into his own idea of anthropology, one that: "[a]s opposed to a 'theoretical juggling act', is one that assumes culture as the understanding of people in and within the environment. Thus, what one must do is 'de-anthropologize' and have a holistic view of humans *and* their environment" (Soto p.c. 2001).

After settling in the direction of the Colombian Institute of Anthropology (ICAN¹⁴) Mr. Soto pursued the establishment of a project that he called “Anthropological Stations” (Soto 1975). This was a project that looked for the extension of the scientific study of Colombia and its people, with an understanding of the country as “[a] privileged scenario from an ecological and geographical point of view, where social groups developed positive solutions and strategies that resulted in a correct interaction with the natural surroundings” (Soto 1984: 17). Thus the ICAN wanted to make presence in marginal areas through the establishment of research stations from which scientific understanding of the regions could be developed in order to obtain a correct knowledge of the areas and its people, and thus prevent development processes that were discordant with the cultural identity of its inhabitants. In his own words, “[T]he main goal was to overtake the country (*asumir el país.*). Go to the places with multidisciplinary teams, know the regions, meet the real reality” (Soto p.c. 2001). In this line Mr. Soto considers that the real gain from the Anthropological Stations was the training of area specialists; as a result the people that are today the most knowledgeable of a certain region were trained in that specific regional station. Thus the politically committed students of the 1970’s found in these anthropological stations a way of doing active, positive –and I may add positivistic- scientific action in these so-called marginal regions.

Mainly because of monetary deficits that some expressed were due to the preference in budget resources to the Santa Marta Station, specifically that of the project Ciudad Perdida (Herrera de Turbay 1978, Sociedad Antropológica Colombiana 1977), the Anthropological Stations project was abolished in the mid 1980’s. For this reason

¹⁴ The institute was recently renamed Instituto Colombiano de Antropología e Historia, ICANH. I use the old initials –ICAN- when I make reference to the Institute in historical contexts.

many of the members of these research teams found in the figure of the NGO a possibility for the continuation of their ideals. As a result the leading conservationist NGOs in Colombia are today constituted by those same groups of people.

The Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta Anthropological Station was first constituted in the early 1970's by a team of archaeologists sent to the field for a regional reconnaissance project. Their purpose was to map the many archaeological sites that were known to exist and were [apparently] rapidly disappearing by the increase in tomb robbing. This team of young anthropologists thus encountered a vast region full of archaeological sites, along with a complex sociopolitical reality that was on the rise, that of the illegal; the so-called marihuana bonanza, and the illegal commercial trade in archaeological artifacts— that at the time was so strong it even had a ongoing project to establish a workers Union-. Out from a network that included gossip, popular myths, and scientific personnel came knowledge of a wonderful site called the Green Hell. After a group of archaeologists finally made it to this place the archaeological site known as the Lost City, Ciudad Perdida came to scientific and public light. This was a magnificent site, a prehispanic urban settlement with stone paved roads, terraces, and stairways that lay in the middle of the jungle in Kogui territory.

In accordance with Mr. Soto's objective of the establishment of a real scientific enterprise in Colombia, Ciudad Perdida seemed the perfect place to link a national identity with the national reality. He wanted the place to become a symbol of the country, and he believes it did¹⁵. It was a first of its kind, being a place to show Colombians they also had places of "prehispanic identity" like the archaeological ruins of Mexico or Peru.

¹⁵ Although the nature of the project itself as one of a nationalist archaeology is severely questioned. For a detailed analysis and critique of this archaeological project see Giraldo (1999). I am here concerned with the ideas that shaped the conservationist movement, not the archaeological endeavor itself.

Considering the possibilities that the site seemed to offer, Mr. Soto considered at the time that the budgetary sacrifice of the other research stations was worth the trouble.

This project marked the territory in ways that are still conflicting. Not only did it have economic repercussions for the other stations, it also had political, institutional, academic, personal, and ethnic consequences among others. Expanding on all of these is not my purpose; what I want to raise here is the fact that this project left historical marks for this place that created and established ideas and ways of action that have shaped the context we observe today.

First of all the presence of a genealogy of academic thought present in Mr. Soto's directive position of two of the main anthropological institutions at the time, the ICAN and the Department of Anthropology at Universidad de Los Andes, was grounded in the objectives of many of the projects his pupils undertook. ICAN researchers settled in the site together with many undergraduate anthropology students who did their theses in Ciudad Perdida and other adjacent sites. With them, workers, army personnel, international researchers, the media, and many others were attracted to the region. Through Ciudad Perdida the Sierra Nevada gained a momentum that would take it to the top of a national and international recognition for which it was not prepared, and as such, is still dealing with the pains of fame.

This came with the legacy of the 1970's, a time when Marxist and Maoist groups found their intellectual support in academia in a continent shaped by colonialism, deep conservatism, and class racism. These were the times when anthropologist and California hippie ideals met and intertwined, and the exotic nature of the Indians was to be

protected, not as museum pieces for the sake of science, but on the contrary, they had to be protected from the oppressive state and its intellectual machinery.

The Archaeological Project Ciudad Perdida can be seen as having three main stages, each one characterized by a group of people, most of them Universidad de Los Andes students and researchers from the ICAN. During the first two stages the emphasis was mostly on the site Ciudad Perdida itself where archaeological information was obtained together with the reconstruction of the ruins. Archaeological reports of this time reinforced the idea of the Kogui-Tairona connection. They had a particular focus on architecture and prehispanic agricultural systems and their sustainable adaptation to the complex ecological and geographical conditions of the middle altitudes of the northern face of the Sierra Nevada (see Giraldo 1999, Herrera de Turbay 1985, Soto 1988 among others). Many of the archaeological interpretations were based on ethnographic comparison, particularly on the Kogui; most of them were based on Reichel's material, and a few (especially in the later stages of the project) were done directly by the members of the project (Sylvia Botero p.c. 2001).

As these stages developed so did a crisis in the ICAN over the budget and control of the site that eventually ended in a political debate in the Colombian Congress. Mr. Soto left the ICAN and assumed the direction of a private Foundation that in juncture with Los Andes University would continue research in the Buritaca. In 1979 the Tairona Culture Foundation assumed research in the area surrounding Ciudad Perdida with a spatial, regional analysis objective. For this they established research camps in other nearby archaeological sites—some of which are still active today due to the presence of NGO

Pro-Sierra Nevada¹⁶-. This third stage of the project was characterized by a strong multidisciplinary component that brought biologists, engineers, photographers, and cultural anthropologists together on joint teams with the archaeologists. The reconstruction of the site was practically finished and, based on Mr. Soto's idea of culture, that is the integration of social expressions and the surrounding environment, the surrounding forests were thus considered a primordial preservation task (Soto 1984, 1988, Vollmer 1983). Many of the sites to where the project expanded served a double purpose; as they shed biological, ecological, and of course cultural information, they were strategically located to act as frontier posts (one of them is precisely called *La Frontera*, The Frontier,) against the expanding colonization and the cutting of forests for illegal crops.

This was a time when Colombian anthropology had practically fractured itself between an activist, politically oriented project, and a positivist, scientific, intellectual enterprise (Uribe 1980). Therefore the people involved in this stage of the project were practically committed to the preservation of a threatened place, of its sites and forests, and with them the Kogui communities that inhabited the region. As one of the [cultural] anthropologists on that team relates:

At that time we changed the whole structure of Ciudad Perdida, the whole view; we thought that excavations were not possible, and thus prohibited them. We decided that an archaeologist was the same as a grave robber. Then the Indians started to come, and we realized they were the wise people's of the place, and not the scum of it. They were beings that had not been appreciated, and for us, the most important of all, were the Indians.... We started to learn the Kogui myths, started wearing *aseguranzas* [a kind of protection amulet], built a Kogui hut, and started performing *pagamentos* [Kogui ceremonies]. Together with the Indians we created an anti-grave robbing front. ... [thus we] mobilized all over the territory, and since we had the army we could confiscate the grave robbers' tools. We began to understand that the Kogui world was really the most important thing that the Sierra had, the Kogui view over this place, over the jungle. Under the jungle we realized that it is very fragile, and that it contains an outstanding

¹⁶ See Chapter 6.

exuberance and richness, and realized that if something was (re)moved, the jungle moved all that is sacred; this was not archaeology, this was the living history of a people. And then we came up with a name, we created the *Parque Histórico y la Reserva Natural del Alto Río Buritaca –Historical Park and Natural Reserve of the Buritaca River*. (p.c. 2001).

The mentioned political debate ended in 1982 with a ruling that returned Ciudad Perdida's control and legal administration to the Colombian government through its social sciences research institute, ICAN (Soto 1984). With this the project Ciudad Perdida came to an end but a new way of conceiving the Sierra Nevada and its people had been developed¹⁷. The interest in the scientific recovery of the sites and places had intertwined with the political and somewhat essentialist ideals of students and other people. A “marginal region” (Tsing 1993) had been uncovered and with it the mysteries of the Kogui and their profound knowledge on sacred management of these exuberant, endangered forests. As a result of this project a strong movement of concern with the risk of the ecosystems and the people that lived in them was generated. In doing so, the project served to articulate the anthropological representations of the Kogui with ideas of threat and risk. Together then, place and people were categorized as something that deserved protection.

The archeological site started being referred to as *Teyuna*, its name in the Kogui language. According to the Kogui this is a sacred place where *Teyuna*, a son of *The Mother* first made material things come to life. The story itself has many versions, but the point is that it became a political issue; some indigenist activists started requesting that the site be returned to the Indians, for a “school of *mamas*” was to be established there. The media now spoke of a sacred site, of a place that belonged to the Indians and should be returned to them (Comité Interinstitucional de la SNSM 1987, ICAN 1987, El

¹⁷ The project itself did but not the ICAN's research and presence in the area.

Colombiano 1988, El Espectador 1983, 1987, El Tiempo 1987). This is a political quarrel that has not yet faded.

After the dissolution of the Tairona Culture Foundation in 1982, a few years passed and its members were congregated in different institutions. Some went to the Parks Unit, others to the ICAN, and some just wandered trying to figure a way in which they could fulfill their dreams of cultural and biological conservation in the Sierra Nevada. This was until in 1986 President Belisario Betancur (1982-86) introduced the figure of the NGO for small groups of people who wanted to do something positive for the country. Thus the Fundación Pro-Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta was founded, led by photographer Juan Mayer. The purpose of the NGO was then to preserve the threatened ecosystems and the ways of life of the people living in them. Since then this NGO has been the leading conservationist institution in the region. It has taken the image of the Sierra Nevada –at least one of them- and exposed it in international conservationist settings. The Nature Conservancy, the European Union, German Cooperation Agency GTZ, World Bank, and other well known international conservation donors have heard their pleas.

4. Creating a Hot-Spot. A View from the NGO

It was about coexistence, [about] reflecting on one's own lifestyle. It was even a transformation of one's culture, its actual state, because if not there was no possibility of ever understanding the Kogui. One cannot understand this if one is a "young brother", square minded, graduated from Los Andes with a beautiful ethnological theory. One has to undergo a transformation. The idea was then that living in the Sierra had to produce a transformation that would express itself in the whole external world, because there was a contribution that the Sierra had for civilization. That was our dream. That is still valid...It is not just respecting the water, not just lowering the [agricultural] frontier, it's not just leaving a state program inside, obviously not! (founding member of Pro-Sierra, p.c. 2001.)

This contribution that the Sierra Nevada had for civilization found an echo and a direct application in 1978 when the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta was declared a Biosphere Reserve as part of UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere program; it would thus be a way to

[Biosphere reserves] demonstrate to public opinion and the world community practical ways to resolve land-use conflicts and to ensure protection of biological diversity. They offer opportunities for education, recreation and tourism, and help create a consciousness of solidarity among all peoples of the world to sustainably manage the biosphere (UNESCO 2001).

This globalization figure was conceived by UNESCO for the purpose of achieving the major goal of obtaining "[a] balance between the apparently conflicting goals of conserving biodiversity, promoting economic and social development and maintaining associated cultural values" (Ibid). Thus protecting certain places and the ["traditional"] cultures that possess the knowledge to harmoniously exploit them deserved major attention before they forever disappeared. Notwithstanding, in 1982 (although it must have been written earlier) an article by Reichel was published in an international journal where he claimed the need to consider the Sierra Nevada and the Kogui under this new

figure. In this article Reichel-Dolmatoff expressed his ideas on Kogui vertical management of the sloped topography and the exploitation of altitudinal niches as an ecological adaptation, founded on the *mamas*' religious authority and knowledge, as an adaptive strategy to the threats of modernization. He therefore proposed as a "priority treatment" the "[u]rgent need to establish the Sierra Nevada as a biosphere reserve as envisaged by UNESCO's MAB program, where Kogui would be protected against destructive influences while long-term research could be carried on teams of specialists in ecology, plant geography..."(Reichel-Dolmatoff 1982: 295).

In 1987, just a year after its creation, the NGO FPSNSM officially established its international links with the conservation movement through a UNESCO conjunct project. Based on Reichel's ideas, and most probably also his personal support¹⁸, the new NGO wanted to implement an Organizational and Management Plan in what Biosphere reserves call the Core Area¹⁹ which was defined in the interior of the 1964 declared and 1977 expanded Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta National Natural Park²⁰.

As in many so-called Third World areas these park reserves are juxtaposed with indigenous territories. In the Colombian legal system this wants to be mitigated by acknowledging that in these protected areas the only human populations with a legal status to inhabit are indigenous communities. But, as long as they depend on their "traditional" land and resource use systems, as long as their traditional practices

¹⁸ Reichel-Dolmatoff was part of the scientific founding committee of FPSNSM, although I was not told as to what point he had direct influence on this particular project.

¹⁹ "The core area needs to be legally established and give long-term protection to the landscape, ecosystem, and species it contains. It should be sufficiently large to meet these conservation objectives...Normally, the core area is not subject to human activity, except research and monitoring and, as the case may be, to traditional extractive uses by local communities" (UNESCO 2001).

²⁰ The Park covers 383.000 hectares, including the Buritaca watershed.

contribute to the conservation and protection of the nation's natural patrimony (Article 7 of the 622 Decree, 1977, in Arango and Sanchez 1998: 234)²¹.

With these global and national, legal and institutional figures the FPSNSM began its enterprise on the Sierra Nevada, and more so, it supported itself on the structuralist history with its particular cultural ecology emphasis, that legacy of the Sierra Nevada's anthropology. Thus is not at all surprising that we find statements like the following in the "Foundations" section of the mentioned project:

[T]he SNSM is home to three indigenous groups: Kogi, Ika, and Sanha, that inhabit Resguardos [reserves]. The respectful management of the natural environment by these indigenous peoples responds to the millenary tradition of one of the most developed cultures in America – the Tairona Culture- based on the exploitation of a great variety of resources from the different altitudinal zones" (UNESCO-FPSNSM 1987: 3-4).

An idea that still prevails as was explicitly stated in a speech delivered by Juan Mayer at the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) International Directorate's Program on Population and Sustainable Development (PSD) in 1995 on "Human Population, Biodiversity and Protected Areas: Science and Policy Issues":

The Kogi, direct descendants from the old Tairona, still maintain their own traditions as a result of their isolation after the Conquest. Their contact with western society has been sporadic, leaving them with a high level of autonomy. For the Kogi, the Sierra Nevada is "The Heart of the World". Their laws, based on the "Law of the Mother", refer to nature and man and to their harmonious relationship, which is defined by the movement of the stars... (Mayer 1995).

Thus the foundations for a long-term project were established, and with it the territorialization of the Sierra Nevada continued a process of creation and recreation under legal and institutional grids. A well intentioned conservation and sustainable

²¹This was further emphasized with the 1991 Constitution's recognition of Indigenous authorities, and further in the First Latin American Congress on National Parks and other Protected Areas in 1997, with the establishment of the recognition of indigenous forms of authorities such as territorialities, etc (Arango and Sanchez 1998).

development project was thus elaborated based on a Regional Integral Diagnostic Plan undertaken by the FPSNSM as of 1987. The conclusions of this diagnosis came out at time when President Barco's (1986-90) decentralization process was underway with the new figure of the *Plan Nacional de Rehabilitación*, National Rehabilitation Plan; the purpose of which was to establish state presence in those, again, marginal underrepresented regions. Pro-Sierra was thus hired by the government to undertake what is known as the *Estrategia de Conservación para la Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta*, the Conservation Strategy for the SNSM, which itself contains the NGO's Sustainable Development Plan for the SNSM..

The publication of the Sierra Nevada Conservation Strategy begins with the transcription of a narration delivered by a Kogui *mama* in a particular locale: a government sponsored workshop on the Sierra Nevada's natural resource management. This speech talks about how before the coming of the *younger brothers* the Sierra Nevada was one whole forest without any major clearings. It refers to how the Kogui used to live sustainably with this environment. The text draws on the mentioned references to the Sierra as a female body, and also on how the Kogui used to have cars, which they eventually rejected in order to protect the Sierra Nevada. It ends with a claim, a reference that the Sierra itself is making: that it is threatened by the "return" of western – modernization- technologies and therefore must be protected: "Now we have a lot of money, but what good is this? We cannot let the Heart weaken. The Sierra is calling us to protect it" (FPSNSM, 1997: v).

Indigenous, and particularly Kogui expressions like this are thus intertwined with sustainable development ideas and views of a region, or in terms of this thesis, place,

where peasants, corporations, and a wide variety of actors wanted to speak of their afflictions. The Sierra was recognized as a place of refuge of marginalized populations – like displaced peasants- and their socioeconomic problematics, all with regards to environmental degradation (FPSNSM 1997: XIV-XV). The main problems defined were ethnically grouped among indigenous and peasants. For the first the main problems identified were the loss of traditional territory, the violation of sacred sites, and the cultural “un-balance” due to external intervention. For the latter lack of information and education, violence resulting from the armed conflict, and the lack of state assistance and economic alternatives prevailed. Although these non-Indian populations are recognized as important inhabitants of the Sierra, the Kogui’s sacred relation with the environment predominates:

It was possible to recognize the importance of the traditional indigenous cultures, and how they constitute the best option and guarantee for the environmental and territorial management of the Sierra Nevada, based on their ancestral knowledge. Notwithstanding does the present document begin with the words of one of the principal Mamas of the Sierra Nevada who illustrates us with his vision, “When the Heart is Ill” (FPSNSM 1997: XVI).

Bearing this in mind it is then relevant to consider how the ideas that people have on place and culture relate to the practices on place. As such, these ideas on the Sierra Nevada and the Kogui guide the strategies and tools used for the application of the Conservation Strategy. One must hence consider that what is presented are subjective forms of knowledge, in this case a subjectively, discursively created place. The image of the place presented for conservation is thus a response to a historical process of representations that were further legitimized by the use of tools such as maps and other forms of technological visualization that give life, that make visible and legible this set of (subjective) ideas.

As has been recently mentioned by Brosius and Russell (2001), many conservation initiatives and programs are based on the idea of risk. These authors, applying Scott's idea of legibility— that is the way in which state power makes societies legible and hence manipulable- to conservation initiatives, have raised the issue of questioning the tools and methods of risk assessment and visualization so common in current conservation. This leads to questions that address the fact that there exists “[a] relationship between the technical and the political that must be acknowledged” (Ibid: 16-17). In the case of the Sierra Nevada the constructed idea of fixed place and culture and its association with notions of marginality and its articulation with ideas of global threat was visualized as a result of a Rapid Ecological Assessment project supported by The Nature Conservancy (TNC).

Using GIS maps, information regarding politico-administrative divisions, information that related township and different economic activities as well as the type, origin and diverse organizational ways of natural resource use exploitation were correlated with a population factor and the impact of these on their surrounding environment was established. The survey's information was then correlated with an accessibility category that related to the connectivity of these areas with major urban settlements. This information was incorporated into a GIS data base and a gravitational model of human influence was determined and thus the human element for the categorization of “critical” areas was established. This was further correlated with biogeographical information that mapped and categorized biological and ecological information such as ecosystem types, levels of endemism, conservation status of species, etc. The information was further understood with regards to the sociopolitico-

administrative entities that have influence over the Sierra Nevada in order to create management coordination between the different legal figures that have influence of the Sierra Nevada (FPSNSM 1997).

After crisscrossing the different information in this spatial modeling process a set of digital maps that determine levels of criticality was obtained. Thus “critical areas” were established based on the intersection of the variables of biological criticality²² and socioeconomic impact categorizing the landscape in values that range from 0-10 (FPSNM 1998: 88).

The application of a Rapid Ecological Assessment project supported by the process of mapping, reinforced the link of this image of a created place with the conservation apparatus, and hence transnational legibility of the Sierra Nevada. As a result the produced image of marginality was articulated with ideas of global threat. Through the power of maps (Harley 1989, Orlove 1991, Peluso 1995, Rocheleau 1995) place, and more so, and endangered place was legitimized and set forth for protection. A protection that legitimized the ideas of threat by modernity was made precisely based on modern ideas of nature and place. A gridification process so common in modern state forms of power (Scott 1998) reproduced, recreated images, locations, place(s), even non-palpable levels of threat. (Satellite) observation, digital reproduction of space was made palpable through a surreal set of images that seem to condense the immensity of the universe in colorful representations.

Through the use of maps and tools of the conservationist discourse the inhabitants of the Sierra Nevada came in direct contact with that Other, the “expert knowledge”; this

²² Areas considered of biological criticality are those of high biological value –i.e. high diversity, in a geographical location where human use or population is high or increasing.

produced a form of postcolonial contact where representations of place are intertwined with sustainable development, conservation, socioeconomic welfare and threat. Under the global figure of the Biosphere Reserve the Sierra Nevada and its people were placed in a transnational category of threat, and hence considered an international biodiversity “hot-spot” to which attention, money, and scientific efforts must be guided.

In doing so these practices discursively legitimize the idea of a marginal area. When the anthropological representations of an integral cultural view of society come together with the scientific legitimating, mapping, and documenting of levels of criticality, the ideas of a marginal area and people are reinforced, and with it a need to conserve and protect them is set forth. As exposed before, this then creates a terrain that legitimizes forms of intervention, whether by the state, experts, or any other forms of dominating power. This itself then creates tensions over the authority, uses, and meanings of place, and thus we can see how this has set the stage for controversies like the one that is currently taking place among the Sierra Nevada’s conservation milieu.

Notwithstanding, it is important to consider Anna Tsing’s (1993) statements of marginality leading away from orthodox accounts of power as a dichotomy between colonizer and colonized; this opens the possibility for the understanding of subjective processes of negotiation from the margins, and most importantly within these margins or borders. This allows for an approach to the complexity of issues of translation, of the ways environmental rhetoric is used as a means of translation (Brosius 2001) as a form of political negotiation of marginality.

PART 2.***“LISTENING TO PLACES”*, NEGOTIATING MARGINALITY**

“The Mother gave me the power to work for her children and her grandchildren. And the grandmother then taught him how to handle every animal, all nature. The grandmother thus gave him the history and with it, the mothers and fathers of animals” (Lorenzo Lozano in Hernandez and Saenz, 1991: 24-25).

5. Places of Hybridity

Having been exposed to some of the anthropological representations that are part of a conceptual process that links notions of place and culture together with personal and institutional actions, we thus face a form of cultural production, knowledge production of “a” place and “a” people. Considering as Gupta and Ferguson proposed that “[a]ll associations of place, people, and culture are social and historical creations to be explained, [and therefore] cultural territorializations (like ethnic and national ones) must be understood as complex and contingent results of ongoing historical and political processes” (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 4) this part of my thesis looks at various ways in which this idea of place is renegotiated in multiple terms. This follows the lines of place as a form of power, but of a mobile and multiple non-orthodox account of power (Sharp et al 2000). Thus attention is paid to the way people negotiate and re-produce place and its representations in order to contest, accept, and/or recreate their position in place.

In recent years different ways of deconstructing the idea of the Sierra Nevada as a closed immobile entity have been proposed. They seek an understanding of the Sierra Nevada as part of a continuum with the broader western society. As such, from a political economy standpoint the already mentioned work by Uribe (1990) proposed the idea of understanding the Sierra Nevada from a historical perspective that connected Kogui society to capitalism since colonial times. More recently Coronel(2000) and Bocarejo (2001) have taken a similar stance but with different objects and perspectives. The former seeks the removal of that image of timelessness by analyzing the Sierra in its created

image as a place of biological and cultural antiquity witnessing a process of conversion into a selectively transnationalized locality over failed projects of spational and populational continuity-; the latter introduces the notion of “tradition” as a dynamic tool that is constructed for and from the present as a way of extending territoriality in a continuum from and to the Sierra; thus Kogui and Arhuaco *mamas* have actually extended their territory and knowledge through the incorporation of western images, objects, and places, and reintroduced them as part of their “traditions”.

I wish to consider a similar yet contrasting view by acknowledging the idea of marginality and borders (Tsing 1993). As a result of these continuous extensions and transformations, hybrid places come about creating new forms to look at marginality; these are thus zones of multiple reinterpretations of power and difference where identity and place are negotiated as a form of power as opposed to hegemonically, usually oppressed places. Thus one can see ways in which people “[a]ctively engage their marginality by protesting, reinterpreting, and embellishing their exclusion” (Tsing 1993: 5).

This idea of margins is intertwined with that of borders as Tsing also calls them. It suggests places where traditional notions of culture are questioned, and of places where national and individual identities are continually contested, shifted, and accommodated (Alvarez 1995, Gupta and Ferguson 1992; 1997). In this case the history of the Buritaca watershed entails processes of migration and cultural politics (Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar 1998) that have situated in this recently populated area contrasting notions: recently formed Kogui villages with young *mamas* in charge of archaeological ruins that have been reappropriated in a Kogui political discourse of ethnicity and rootedness as the

sacred site *par excellence*. As discussed previously this is also an area where environmental rhetoric has been exceptionally prominent; therefore these and other issues thus lay out a place where identity is negotiated with environmental politics creating the possibilities for hybridized identities that recognize a history of anthropological representations of place/culture and locate them in a shifting, meandering context of tourists, violence, anthropologists, conservationists, and political leaders among others.

My approach to hybridity is hence done through an ongoing re-reading of concepts and places that have played an important role in this history of culture and place in the Sierra Nevada. I do this by approaching the politics of translation in indigenous environmental narratives and their situatedness in contexts of claims and dispossession; this therefore sets the stage for an understanding of the mobility of place, to ways in which people negotiate marginality.

My attention is focused on cases that take place in or with reference to the Buritaca watershed. This part of the Sierra Nevada has a recent history of multiple migrations –indigenous, peasant, scientific, para-state armed forces- that have strongly shaped the meanings of the place. Its history of exposure has also located it in a prestigious place among eco-tourists, political leaders, conservation donors, and other agents that visit this mosaic of archaeological ruins, indigenous villages, and tropical forests. Its two indigenous Kogui villages, although recognized by the Kogui organization do not hold the reputation of traditionality that other older and larger villages –like those of the San Miguel, Palomino, or Don Diego- have. The relative constant presence of tourists hiking through the area on their way to Ciudad Perdida has created a sense of threat to tradition imposed on the Kogui individuals that inhabit the

area; actually, I was told more than once by tourist guides that if I wanted to know the “real” Kogui lifestyles I should go to other watersheds.

Thus this is an area with a recent history of displacements that has brought together different actors and meanings. Different concepts of place and its relationship to the Koguiness representation have been reappropriated by different individuals and entities, therefore creating a set of multiple possibilities for the use of place. It has then resulted in a sense of hybridity that questions the notions of purity that the Koguiness representation assumes, while at the same time maintaining this ideas of traditionality and marginality reinforced by “the” Kogui way of life.

From offices and other political locations

In order to understand the relevance of the reinterpretation of the people of the Buritaca I want to start by exposing the way in which the constructed representations have been incorporated and framed in collective terms in contexts of claims of dispossession. The Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta indigenous communities have organized themselves in political organizations in order to act and represent the authority granted to them by the state. This is actually an interesting process in and of itself, for it involves the transformation of authority, identity, and other cultural processes in these communities (Uribe 1998, Rubio 1997, Ulloa p.c 2001). My concern here is with the way place has been framed in the political discourse of these organizations, particularly that of the *Organización Gonawindua Tairona* ,OGT, which controls the Buritaca from its Santa Marta based offices, and some of the consequences this has had on the establishment of meanings in the Buritaca.

The OGT was created in 1987 to thwart the power of the Arhuaco indigenous organization, the *Confederación Indígena Tairona*, CIT, that had since then been the political representative of the Sierra's indigenous communities at large. Being located in "Arhuaco territory" in the eastern parts of the Sierra Nevada, the CIT was confronted by the Kogui's need to establish their own political voice and control within their own turf. Thus the OGT was created and established in Santa Marta, the urban-political center of the northern face of the Sierra Nevada. Since then it has been controlling the relationships between the state and the Indians, and more recently the relationships between all foreign actors and the Indians—with a Kogui majority-.

The name itself introduces us to the creation of (political) meanings in place: according to the first editorial of the OGT magazine, the name Gonawindua represents the most sacred mountain peak of the Sierra. The word itself is composed of a set of meanings that have to do with the discussed concept of fertility:

GO, means *birth*, NA, *to come*, WIN, *movement (when the child moves in the mother's womb)*, and DUA, *seed, semen (fertilizing concept)*. This mountain peak is like the symbolic center of the Heart of the World, the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, of that rock that has been born of all living species, and all the things that currently exist in this world. Everything has been slowly differentiating and organizing from this sacred mountain. Thus the *mamas'* oracle said that this was the most adequate name for the Sierra Nevada's triethnic indigenous organization (*Zhigoneshi* 1995: 3).

As stated in the OGT's establishing documents, "*Gonawindua*....the mountain peak has much significance...before there was nothing...but the Spiritual Mother sent it for Nature was going to be missing. Spiritually, everything is in *Gonawindua*"(Rubio 1997: 57). When discussing the etymological-symbolic meaning of the Organization's name Rubio then suggests that this relationship of fertility is related too as an identity marker, that of the "true people"; only those who have originated from *Gonawindua*, from *The Mother*, will be the "true people". An essentialist notion that brings together

notions that relate to the sacrality of these peaks, their surrounding lakes, and in general, an intraethnic hierarchy that relates the closeness of villages to these peaks, and thence links sacred knowledge with political authority and geographical location (Rubio 1997, Uribe 1990). Authority is thus attributed and located in the Organization by the intertwining of place, landscape, land, and territory with sacred (political) knowledge.

This authority is part of a sociopolitical process of what Uribe (1993) had called a constant state of fission and fusion of the Sierra's indigenous communities, both inter and intra ethnic. According to him historical processes of continuous contact and reinterpretation have led to a reconfiguration of indigenous forms of authority that range from the *mamas* in the high mountain villages to new forms of authority called *líderes*, leaders. The latter can be in a sense characterized by not being of "traditional" *mama* lineages, not the "typical" figure of authority, but a new one where certain individuals, usually *vasallos*²³ that due to their proficiency in the Spanish language and/or their interethnic diplomatic abilities have established themselves in city dwelling positions and forms of political representation such as the case of Gonawindua Tairona. These personages have thence acquired the power of authority and are usually the ones that control the relationship and politics with the state and other non-indigenous actors.

In resemblance to what Parajuli (1998) had referred to as ecological ethnicities, some authors are suggesting (Ulloa 2001) the presence of these ideas in contexts of interaction of cultural politics and social movements. Thus the OGT is setting forth a discourse based on constructions of "cultural nature". The relationship between landscape and sacred knowledge, and more so, between the sustainable management of that

²³ This is a term that is used among the Kogui to refer to the majority of the population, in a sense, the "populace".

landscape and indigenous beliefs has been recently set forward in political contexts; it is thus part of a homogenization strategy in environmental narratives of claims and dispossession²⁴:

The importance and priority of this text is the conjunct manifestation of a way of thought that unites us from a single origin, and that never the less, allows us to be distinct (indigenous) peoples with a way of thought and norms also diverse; here lies the distinctive feature of identity and reason of difference that we have before the other society. Our nature is of a different belief, and our aspiration is for this to be acknowledged and recognized by the other [western] conception. Therefore, from a spiritual point of view it is impossible to conceive or accept the divisions of municipalities and states to interfere, and thus be motives of social divisions in our interior (OGT 1999: 1).

Specifically, places have been used for a long time now in the Sierra Nevada's indigenous discourse in terms of sacredness as means of political claims. Maybe the most obvious example is the case of the *Línea Negra*, the Black Line. This is a line of sacred places that creates a territorial demarcation around the Sierra Nevada. This concept has been incorporated in indigenous claims of dispossession in an intertwined resemblance to the western representation of the Kogui –and to this political extent to the indigenous peoples of the Sierra Nevada as a whole-; and further it has thus been located in environmentalist rhetoric terms:

[the *línea negra*] is not just a limit. Instead they are cultural signals that tell us what we have to do in order for the environmental management to be in accordance with the education that makes us indigenous peoples. It is the norm to follow in order to obtain the coexistence among different peoples and cultures, among men and nature. (OGT 1999: 6)

Where lies the power for the claim? The archaeological sites in the Sierra Nevada are considered sacred by the indigenous communities (Uribe 1990, 1998, Reichel-Dolmatoff 1982, 1985, 1990). They are places of the past, places of old wisdom, places of origin. They are where ancestors live, but more so, they are places of communication. Thus they are houses of mothers and fathers of all things, places where *mamas* deposit

²⁴ I thank Astrid Ulloa for bringing this document to my attention.

material and spiritual offerings that are part of a complex ritual of communication and interaction between the sacred and the material, between life and death, between order and disorder. These materials –among which the most common are archaeological stone beads- are considered sacred and powerful materializations of spiritual forces. They have a wide variety of meanings and uses (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1985, Uribe 1998) that relate to sacred balance, power, and the control of many events and phenomena.

One of the most renowned sites in these claims is Ciudad Perdida. Known in the Kogui language as *Teyuna*, sometimes also referred to as *Tairona*, or *Teyua* [the language of the *Tairona* which according to Preuss, Mason and Reichel-Dolmatoff was an old ceremonial language which only the highest *mamas* could speak]. *Teyuna* is also a son of *The Mother*, or in Rubio's terms, a son of *Gonawindua*; this site as well as its embodied meaning is thus the father of the sacred beads and other archaeological elements, many which are usually found in these archaeological places. These beads together with the ceramic vessels, gold ornaments, and in general the range of archaeological artifacts associated with prehispanic burials form a complex association of sacred representations of deities, gift giving, and sexuality.

This relationship has been seen by anthropologists as part of Reichel's complex of sex and food, where these offerings which are sometimes composed of sexual material and/or meaning represent the sacred food offering, the sacred copula with *The Mother* – sometimes *via* her sons and daughters- (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1985). This relationship has also been read by Uribe through Mauss' essay on The Gift and notions on ritual – specially Hubert and Mauss, and Bloch (Uribe 1998)-. Thus Uribe sees a ritual practice of sacrifice where these archaeological and other sacred places (that range from crevices,

caves, places in houses, mountains, lakes, even the ocean) act as sacred altars or stages for this ritualistic activity creating a complex set of sacred geography. This relationship is thus embedded in a complex of power sharing and controlling where the person (place or deity) that receives the offering is thus receiving the power of the gift. In Mauss' terms "[t]he Kággaba endow its owners with a special *mana*. That is the *hau*, the force of the given thing that makes these gifts very precious, as well as feared, for the Kággabas" (Uribe 1998: 69).

But Ciudad Perdida is definitely not the only place. There is a long list of sacred places that form part or are related to the *Línea Negra*. These markers of territoriality, many of which now lie in the surrounding urban centers of Santa Marta and Valledupar want to create thus a sense of separation between the "white man's territory" and the "Indian territory" –where the sacred power of balance, the Heart of the World, lies-. In the ethnographical accounts of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, physical as well as non-material places and spaces have been recorded, following in general the tendency that situates them in the realm of sacred-symbolic topography. The classical ethnographies of the Sierra Nevada (Preuss 1993 [1919], Reichel-Dolmatoff 1985, 1990) are filled with references of similar places that express mythological symbols and meanings. Thus the relation of places with events –especially mythological- is not new for the Sierra Nevada. These places have mainly been read in their role in a wider rhetoric of narratives of land claims through their reenactment under the rubric of "tradition" (Bocarejo 2001, Orrantia 1999, Uribe 1988).

Thus the notion of claims in sacred terms as the one evoked in the name of the indigenous organization are forms of power embedded in (sacred) places that seek

territory. They reproduce forms of authority exposed in a language that is easily understood in the terrain of Koguinness. The timeless millenary tradition represented by these places is thus framed in contemporary forms of sacred knowledge. This idea can lead to an understanding of the use of these places in these terms as “political tools” that are somehow deployed by the indigenous organizations to give a stronger tinge to their claims for territory.

Mimesis, place, and migration in environmental narratives

The “oldest” village in the Buritaca is not more than 25 years old. According to Uribe (1990) the Kogui land concept has undergone a transformation and become a commodity of use and exchange value. Thus in this political-economy context Uribe proposed that vertical cultivation and high-altitude herding –the two main subsistence activities in Kogui economy- were slowly disintegrating and therefore leading to eventual forced migrations of Kogui families to less utilized lands in the Sierra. At the time he proposed the Buritaca as an ongoing example.

The Buritaca was thus seen by some Kogui families as a place where they could reestablish land and villages. In the early 1960’s a few families coming from the Don Diego and Palomino watersheds established themselves in the Buritaca, but it wasn’t until the early 1980’s that a village as such, *Koskungena*, was established (Hernandez and Saenz 1991). It was therefore after Ciudad Perdida had been set in the public eye that these Kogui families set up a territorial marker. A few years later another town was established, *Mutainzhi*²⁵, this time in the lower areas near the colonization frontier. These towns have since then been reorganized into the sacred context of Ciudad Perdida,

²⁵ *Mutainzhi* is also the Kogui name for the Buritaca watershed.

Teyuna, as having been founded in places that “need to be looked after” for they are the places of origin of sacred materials and events; together these places in the Buritaca watershed are therefore considered as guardians of *the* most sacred place in the Sierra Nevada, *Teyuna*, “the first material place that *The Mother* created”. Thus there is an ongoing process of reterritorialization that can be read in the narratives of those Kogui individuals that established here.

The following is an extract of a recording by an anthropologist working for the FPSNSM (early 1990’s) on the mythical reasons for the establishment of Kogui families in this particular area as expressed by one of the founding members.

The story situated in “origin times” begins by describing how deity *Teyuna*, a son of *The Mother*, had been rejected by the *mamas* from the Kogui towns of *Makotama*, *San Miguel*, and other towns considered as the “most traditional” Kogui towns of the northern face of the Sierra Nevada. The story thus depicts *Teyuna* as a wise *mama* who had been embedded with the power to build, to manufacture stones, beads, gold, and other elements in a material way. But as he got to every town wanting to share his knowledge he was rejected by the ruling *mama* until he finally reached the Don Diego watershed:

In Don Diego lived *mama Kasigui*. He listened to *Teyuna* and invited him in. What power did the Primitive Mother give you?, he asked. And *Teyuna* answered: -*Mother* gave me power to work day and night, and you *mama* can be the sun, and your wife the moon. Then *mama* said; -we will help you...but *mamas* didn’t want to be with him. So they chose a place where he could be alone. We will send him to *Mutainzhi*, over there where there is no *mama*, where there only lives and old woman that is about to die. So *mamas* sent *Teyuna* to *Mutainzhi*, and he thought “I will also be expelled from that place”. Thus *Teyuna* got to *Sukuingaha* [a place in the Buritaca watershed]; there was cave of *antiguo* [term to reference the prehispanic past], that was *Serankua’s*²⁶ *cansamaria* [male ceremonial house]. In the morning he met the old grandmother; she had every animal from the forest. And she asked him –do you come to visit me, to ask me the history, or do you want, like me, to have all the animals?-. *Teyuna* answered –yes, I want to have everything, I want to organize everything. *The Mother* gave me the power to work for her

²⁶ Serankua is considered the first son of The Mother, that with whom she later copulated to give birth to the Kogui people (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1985).

children and her grandchildren. And the grandmother then taught him how to handle every animal, all nature. The grandmother thus gave him the history and with it, the mothers and fathers of animals (Lorenzo Lozano in Hernandez y Saenz, 1991: 24-25).

The story then continues and explains how the grandmother gave *Teyuna* every animal, which he further made into gold and ceramic figurines. When the old lady died *Teyuna* placed her body in a ceramic vessel and buried her in the ground. The story ends with how *Teyuna* was thus embedded with the power to preserve all animal species, to be in charge that water and the forest would never “never dry out”.

Another instance of the meanings of place and its close association to these process of migration and displacement can be seen in the renaming of some of the sites and landmarks. As indigenous families, both Kogui and Wiwa began populating the Buritaca and the neighboring watershed of the Guachaca places were named –or in indigenous terms, re-named- and with them their sacred character was enhanced. For instance, Ciudad Perdida has changed from the grave robbers’ Green Hell, to the archaeologists’ Buritaca 200, the nation’s Ciudad Perdida, the Indian *Teyuna*, and now it is for the Kogui of the Buritaca *Tewímaku* or *Setewímaku*. A brief insight on the etymology of this last name clarifies the point: *Tewímaku* is said to refer to the moment of the birth of light. Before there was darkness, and then came the light. The prefix *se* related to the first origin is here present accompanied by the word *maku*, usually used to refer to a kind of spiritual chief or leader. As such, other places in the Buritaca have recently had their names changed.

These origin stories and their places have further been reincorporated and reframed in ecological terms. Paraphrasing my own conversations with Buritaca *mamas* on *Teyuna*:

Teyuna is like the seed bank, *vivero*, of all things. The first animals, plants, beings, etc., were all set here by *Teyuna*. Thus the terraces are the houses of the mothers and fathers, they are the places of communication with the Mother. If they are mistreated and violated the whole (natural) system of the Sierra Nevada will fail. This is why when the beads, that is the mothers and father of animal, of tress, plants, everything, are taken away the Mother suffers and she will cause pain -storms, landslides, bad crops, deaths, illness, etc- (see Orrantia 2000)

This association of origin and environmental narratives in terms of setting claims or expressing a history of migrations and displacement has different manifestations.

When discussing animal conceptualizations with a Kogui *mama* in the Buritaca I was told that there are certain animals that are considered of origin; the snail, *Nukuba*, and another one called *Tagbisankala*, which literally translates as snake head. These two animals are said to come from the first semen, both feminine and masculine, being *Nukuba*, female and *Tagbisankala*, male. Both of them have sexual connotations for they are also the representations of the penis and the vagina respectively. Therefore eating snails is not only good for *thought*, but also good for preventing sexual diseases. Reichel-Dolmatoff mentioned the snake as being an origin symbol, as being one of the most important sacred animals. “She [snake] is the symbol of the *se* side of the world, phallic symbol and death symbol” (1985 I: 269), but on the same page Reichel also mentions how some myths refer to the snake as being the second wife of the sun. I’ve also heard similar mentions of snakes as a feminine symbol, where snakes represent women, specifically referred to as being *Teyuna*’s daughters.

The other origin related animal is the bat. Bats are said to have been born from the first menstruation of *The Mother*, they represent menstruation, the idea of fertility sometimes referred to as fertilizer. Menstruation is the earth’s fertilizer. But, whether bat, snake or snail, the point here is that these animals represent this idea of reproduction and

(female) fertility in a complex set of associations that involve *thought*, to think, a traditionally male task recurrent in Kogui ethnography, that could also be a representation of the reproduction of thought, of Kogui idea(l)s. In those terms, the structuralist interpretations of Reichel and his peers serve as an example of the metaphor of food and sex. But where is it exactly located? What does it mean? What does it imply?

My first account of fertility was through Ramon Gil, a half Kogui, half Wiwa mama. When I asked him about *Teyuna* he first gave me a document that exposed the concept of *Sentura Gwiawimundwa*, one that starts with the *se* prefix, that in Kogui language is always tied with references to origin; this concept is a complex combination of syllabi and terms, that together refer to a constant rebirthing of thought. What matters here is not the concept *per se* but the location of it, its use by people, in a sense, its agency; the concept was thus exposed in a proposal for a Life Plan of the Sierra Nevada's indigenous communities –Propuesta de la Organización Gonawindua Tairona sobre el marco general para la formulación del plan de vida indígena para la Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta (OGT 1998). The articulation of origin and a “life plan”, the combination of fertility, reproduction and perpetuation is here emphasized through religion. This establishes the possibility of reappropriation, of reinterpretation through language; this a political act, a discursive practice. In this sense origin and fertility can be talking about appropriation, of identity reaffirmation, and here I leap ahead, they can be expressing themselves as cultural politics of a mimetic process, of an activation of the mimetic faculty through sexuality, through *The Mother*, the Sierra, territory, and place. This then is a concept that has the variability to be adapted to particular historical and political locations; this is something recurrent in the construction of the Buritaca as a hybrid zone.

Thus the rereading of these narratives is compelling to a closer attention to the historical contexts in which they are framed in. As such, migration and displacement are expressed in these narratives of (sacred) nature and as a result frame western notions of primitiveness (and nature) in indigenous rhetoric. They intertwine a sociopolitical history of colonial displacement in a constructed, westernized place. A place with a history of environmentalism where anthropologists, conservationists, and others have been focusing their gaze on protection and preservation. Therefore I believe the authors that described the story on the founding of the Buritaca quoted above, were also embedded in the environmental rhetoric. This hence led them to interpret the story as a “proof” that this watershed had always been part of the Kogui landscape, showing thence that it was not an empty place, which itself further proved that the Kogui were the legitimate owners of the place that had thus recently come back to reclaim their land (Hernandez and Saenz 1991: 25).

The framing of sacred places (and animals) in narratives of nature is not just a political act of claiming territoriality, but more so a subjective incorporation of (anthropological) representations of and by the (Kogui) people that were part of this milieu; as a result there is a moment of contact between western representations of primitiveness and their own Others (Taussig 1993). This means that there is an appropriation of the representations, that as a result of the historical (discursive) process of the Buritaca have been incorporated in different forms of politics—environmental politics and identity politics.

Place is hence embodied through sensuous knowledge; in the mentioned story it is actually embodied by the storyteller. The old woman, the Sierra, *The Mother*, *Teyuna* are

all references to a palpable, sensuous form of knowledge that finds its expressions in the landscape and in the archaeological beads and artifacts. Therefore the power of the beads, the power of the Sierra as the female body of *The Mother* is not just the fetishized metaphor of Mother Earth, but more so, it is the actual contact with bodies, it is an incorporation with the sensuousness of and by the body. Consider the reference in the story to the embodiment of the old lady in the ceramic vessel, the embodiment of the spirits of the animals in golden and ceramic figurines, and the references that Kogui make to grave robbery as a violation of *The Mother*. This last reference has such a strong connotation that some people refer to the process of digging and extracting the vessels and artifacts as a tearing of the *Mother's* vagina, and a violent extraction, a ripping of her uterus (Maria Ferro, p.c. 2000). An analog that is also used for the cutting of trees and pollution of water; thus they say “the rivers are the veins of *the Mother*”.

This is not a “generalizing principle” for it is channeled by the historical moments and subjectivities of the Buritaca watershed. Thus the displaced embody, or as Steward (1996) recalls, re-member their own migrational place through forms of sensuous knowledge. The Kogui story teller, like *Teyuna*, was ordered by the *mamas* of his home town, Don Diego, to establish himself in the Buritaca. And this he did, alone, and thus set up farms in the Buritaca, one of which is the place mentioned in the narrative called *Sukuingaja* (this is actually one of his kin's farms). He then established his kin as the guarding heirs of *Teyuna*.

In a similar way narratives on the meaning of animals can also be expressing notions of claims. Considering the sacred character of the archaeological beads one can see how they have been reinterpreted as means that not only embody the sacred forces

but these are specifically spiritual forces that relate to the sacred balance of nature. As such, *Teyuna's* sacred character is reinforced in the Buritaca where the site has acquired a special sacredness; it is the first original site where the material expressions of the fathers and mothers of animals and plants were deposited by the deity in sacred times. It thus articulates the sacrality of the place with an environmental knowledge and represents it in the idea that it is the *mamas* of the Buritaca that have the power and the knowledge of how to look after this site, and its animals and plants. This is an image that is actually being negotiated by the *mamas* of the Buritaca community with other “older” neighboring communities, thus seeking support for their role in the authority over the Buritaca; they thus want to be recognized as the protectors of the Buritaca’s sacred places.

These are then forms of contestation of the Buritaca Kogui individuals to the image of them as “less traditional”. It also reinforces the idea the people of the Buritaca as having a history that ties them to this place, framing it in terms of ancestral knowledge thus legitimizing their role and their place in “Kogui history”. They are ways of framing a troubled history in a language that has become prominent in the representation of Koguiness, the language of environmentalism²⁷. This is no curious association nor merely a political tool. This is an expression of dispossession and the power to claim, to ponder on in place in postcoloniality via the mimetic faculty:

I call it the mimetic faculty, the nature that nature has of creating second nature, the faculty to copy, imitate, make models, explore difference, yield into and become Other. The wonder of mimesis lies in the copy drawing on the character and power of the original, to the point whereby the representation may even assume that character and that power (Taussig 1993: xiv).

²⁷ What Slater (2000) has called *environmetalese*.

The power of the appropriation lies in the fact of embracing and becoming the representation that, as we have seen is part of a western production of knowledge. Narratives are thus expressing a form of knowledge that re-presents an embodied landscape and its historical and political meanings. The power of these narratives of place is thence translated in a way that frames the current problematics in historical terms; thus the needs for migrations are made invisible and the need to protect the sacred/environment is fore-fronted.

– J.C.O: And when the grave robbers came and took the figurines, what happened to the forest? Where they affected?

–*Mama: Sí.* Well, if they take away *cuarzo*²⁸, like the figurines, that look like water, that protects water. And the green beads, blue, like the figure of the frogs, like toads, that protects avocado. *Zalaxtashi*, protects avocado. *Auikuitsi*, protects the body, our veins, menstruation. *Mukuakuitsi*, protects the man's semen, but also the forest's semen and the forests' menstruation. *Kualaxtashi* protects the fields, plantain, taro, yuca. From there came the problems, [they took the figures] everything is drying up. Water is drying, avocado is drying, problems are coming to the fields..

Individual claims in a national context

The founding members of the Buritaca villages are mostly dead now. The leadership has thence been passed on to these people's kin, who have then needed to go from the Buritaca and marry with women from the larger and older villages in the neighboring watersheds. Within these marriages some were arranged with daughters of *mamas*, thus the sons of the founders of the Buritaca have begun a long process of *mama* training. Except most of it has been done by themselves, in their own *cansamarias* in the Buritaca, in a complex process of evoking the past, of learning from old histories.

Therefore there is an interest in having their stories written down (by anthropologists),

²⁸ *Cuarzos* are the way Kogui refer to the mentioned beads, to what Reichel-Dolmatoff (1985) had called *sewas*. Each of the mentioned beads, is a representative of a different stone bead of different colors. Thus green beads are related with forests, red beads with (menstrual) blood, white beads with water, and so on.

and an interest in the old *mama*'s wisdom that was that way recorded. Preuss and Reichel-Dolmatoff are thus present in the learning of these stories as their dampening pages act as recipients of old *mama* wisdom in some of these reviving "thatched huts".

This need to record the history has also been a widely present claim. It was thus presented as a need in Pro Sierra's diagnostic results (FPSNSM 1997), it is also the backbone of a current Pro-Sierra project in the Buritaca and Guachaca (Juan Londoño and Maria Ferro pc, 2001), and has also been present in the discourse of the OGT. As such, I was directed to consult Preuss and Reichel by the current OGT leader when asking for permission for what eventually became this text. Other more "public" approaches have been taken through the publication of a few books edited by the OGT with the help of an Italian development NGO –Ricerca e Cooperazione-²⁹ titled "Words of Mamas" (*Palabras de Mamas* –Proyecto Gonawindua 1997-); a series of recorded myths that make a particular allusion to the relationship between sacred knowledge and sustainability.

This process of recording, of the merger of representations that now includes anthropologists, conservationists, indigenous organizations, and, indigenous individuals is part of a process that is also tied to other more complex issues that involve more than a need for land and the respect of traditions. Thus the stories of today are not only framed in the land but also in the need to contest the violence that has in the last years escalated in the rural areas where most of these families live. As such, the political problems of the country are expressed in their Buritaca version and hence are dealt with in everyday life.

²⁹ This NGO established a sustainable development project in the Palomino watershed that includes agrosustainable farms, coffee, cooperatives, etc. They also have a strong pro indigenistic discourse and have been very concerned with the process of purchasing lands from the peasants for the Indians (see Colajanni 1997).

This of course, in addition to the burden that these young *mamas* now carry, that of caring for and controlling one of the most, if not the most sacred/political place in Kogui narratives of claim. The burden of “a Kogui” ideal has imposed on them a double responsibility: the care of a sacred/political place, and the living in a sustainable, balanced harmony with the forest (i.e. National Park!). The burden is implicit, for instance, in the way these representations create fixed images of the way individuals are expected to behave. When I was doing research on animal related practices a couple of years back, the Kogui mama I was working with was very reluctant to talk about hunting. In what later became a complicit experience I finally understood the need to maintain an image of conservationists in a context where tourists want to see and hear that the people they are seeing (the “natives”) do not hunt, and if they do, it is done sustainably. But more than this, the secret was to be held by not presenting pictures of dead animals hunted by us, for, according to the *mama* the administrators of the Park—the state- would condemn these practices. Thus the *mama* was not only unaware of the Colombian law that allows hunting by local inhabitants of national parks, but was also compelled in maintaining the Koguiness representation.

This non-exclusive and somewhat worldwide, everyday example, illustrates the entanglements of the transnationalized image with the national contexts of the representations. As such national state power and control over land and resources is sustained in the transnational imagery of constructed representations. What is exposed as Kogui ancestral sacred knowledge in the books and recordings mentioned is thus as much a burden as it is a political act. A way of claiming territoriality is also a way of becoming the subject of an imagined way of life. And more so when this imagined way of life is

amidst the threats of a national conflict that involves the escalation of violence. Hence the importance of focusing our gaze not on the apparent “reality” of the narratives of nature but also on the situatedness (Haraway 1988) of these.

Thus we are confronted with narratives that intertwine this history in the following terms:

That violence we are seeing here. It is killing people, it is burning rubber, it is firing its bombs. With it come the problems for the Indians of the Sierra Nevada, because that becomes the clouds, the rain, and when it rains over the Sierra Nevada it affects us because we drink the water and then sickness comes. Because of the grave robbing, they took away many figures, many golds, many beads, and because they feel as a person does, now they are locked up. If and don't let you walk, piss, you feel bad. The figure, the bead feels the same. That is why from every bead there is violence, they are sending violence all over the world, here and international. Because they took them away from this watershed. And they were all grouped together. Now they fight among themselves; that is why people are also fighting. That is where all the violence, the war, the weapons come from (member of the Kogui community in the Buritaca).

The framing, translating of these narratives of claim and dispossession, of intertwined representations is set in terms that resemble a conservationist rhetoric. As Brosius (2001) has mentioned, the framing of these claims in narratives that resemble the western language of conservation is thus a way of expressing power, the power embedded in resistance. Resistance to a history of displacement that has characterized the Kogui people of the Buritaca as “less traditional”. The significance is on the creation of places and the way they are framed in processes of intercultural understanding, on the way people use place as a means of cultural politics in contexts where power relations are constantly reframed and rearranged. Thus individuals have different forms of negotiating and incorporating marginality through a language of narratives that express the western representations of a Kogui sacred knowledge and management of the natural environment. They are a partial result of a history of representations subjectively

manifested in political narratives but culturally incorporated as means of negotiating, appropriating the marginality in which they -as individuals- have been situated.

All these are elements that come together in the indigenous Buritaca reinforcing marginality as well as contesting it. They make explicit the presence of elements such as (rural) violence that have been, at least in Colombia, historically associated with marginality or marginal areas. The fact that this is done through the environmentalist narratives that evoke Koguiness considers again the idea of how people negotiate marginality also as part of a national context. State power, national disorder, and, a nationally accepted representation come together as means of negotiating marginality.

The incorporation of violent events in indigenous narratives and their relationship to the sacredness of place can also be part of the engagement and forms of translation that are used “to speak across difference” (Brosius 2001). It is hence a way of reaching out, a way to stand up against and raise the issue of violence. When these instances are read as part of the complexity of the contemporary Colombian conflict, these references to violence in terms of environmental narratives can be read as a way of remembering something that one should not forget, and more importantly, be prepared to listen for in different means of expression, of re-membrance. Thus people use the discourses that have historically been constructed and situated, that have proven politically useful – creating attention, being a channel for claims, etc.- for various purposes that themselves respond and articulate the complexities of these zones of marginality to claim, to reappropriate, but also to contest and express reality.

6. “*Listening to Places*”; Amalgamation of Indigenous and NGO Subjectivities

James Clifford proposed the idea of movement, “[a]rguing that travels and contacts are crucial sites for an unfinished modernity” (1997:2); as people travel to and from, the idea of the hybridity of place is reinforced and with it new forms of experiencing the representations –alternative forms of negotiating marginality- are set forth. The implications of this for what is usually seen or heard from these marginal areas is crucial for an understanding of places of displacement and its inherent power, where complicit and subversive reactions to traditional hegemonic forms of authority are created.

The idea of hybridity in this history of the cultural politics of representations has not only set forth the possibilities of claims mentioned above, but it has also brought together different expressions in and of environmentalism. As such, this chapter wishes to expose the history of a place in the Buritaca that integrates expressions of indigenous claims and intertwines them with processes of resistance to the conservation apparatus. It is thus a site where different expressions of the environmentalist discourse have been intertwined reinforcing the idea of hybridity and more so, challenging the bureaucratization process that indigenist and conservationist institutions tend to go through (Ramos 1998).

There are particular instances of place making, knowledge production in/of place that not always get forwarded by the media into the flux of politics, but rather remain in a kind of controlled form of “local” authority. This is the case of a particular site in the Buritaca watershed that has not had as much public exposure as Ciudad Perdida, but is

also a site for the production of hybridity and as such another form of negotiating the power of the conservationist discourse from the margins.

Alto de Mira is an archaeological site where the FPSNSM originally established a research station. The place was first purchased by the Ciudad Perdida project for it was an archaeological site that stood at the edge of the approaching marihuana fields. It was then used by a state environmental agency (INDERENA) as an ecological research station which was passed on to the NGO after its creation. The FPSNSM then used it as a base camp for ecological and biological research projects, all under the idea of cultural participation. The quarters in the place were built in resemblance to the Kogui palm thatched huts, with an earth floor and a hearth in the center of circular dwelling places. Together with the workers and visitors quarters there are also a couple of Kogui huts built to allow indigenous presence in the site.

In rewarding its creation as such, a few research projects were undertaken under the banner of conservation and participation; nevertheless they encountered indigenous forms of resistance. For instance, a botanical project that was intended for agroforestry through the recoup of palms was “sabotaged” through everyday forms of resistance (Scott 1985). I was told the tags used to mark the trees were constantly being ripped off the trees. More direct resistance to these researches was later seen in the opposition by some of the Kogui inhabiting the area to a project that included putting tracking devices (bracelets) on agouties. Eventually this led to indigenous opposition and the cancellation of biological research in the station (p.c. Richy Rey).

According to a former director of the station these acts were not at all a “bad thing”. This same person thus told me how these acts led him to a rethinking, how it

“forced” the members of the NGO to redirect their gaze from the forests to the inhabitants of them. Thus they began understanding that the place was filled with meaning, with spiritual life, and that their western impositions were actually contaminating the site. A transformation was thus undertaken by some members of the NGO in a long process that included not only canceling “research” on the site, but it required a compromise with indigenous knowledge. Traditional conservation practices and tools –i.e. scientific research- were not good enough; instead, learning from the Other was what was finally required for the ultimate goal of safekeeping the Sierra Nevada, its ecosystems, and the indigenous cultures. The resistance to the projects engendered a process that established a different view of the forest, and thus one might say of how conservation could be approached. Thus they began talking about the energy in this site, about spirits, and forces³⁰:

For instance, in order to fix a problem here (Santa Marta) something needs to be done in Ciudad Perdida or Alto de Mira. This implies changes; one has to direct one’s attention to what is indigenous (*a lo indígena*), so that it is not contaminated, so it is respected. This implies that [the place] is managed on its own; thus the work is done there but it is actually being done for other places as well. Thus the space becomes a boundaryless thing...[the place] is sacred because one must go there to pay, but what one is actually paying for is a thing that is somewhere else (Pro-Sierra official, p.c.2001).

Alto de Mira is known in the Kogui language as *Shumnani*. Its meaning refers to a deity connected to spirits of the forest that inhabited this particular place. It is sometimes referred to as a father of animals or father of small waterfalls: “He was father of waterfalls, of places, [archaeological] terraces. He would nourish the forests and its animals with spiritual food”. But more importantly so, “He was the one that new how to

³⁰ Similar beliefs are considered for Ciudad Perdida by different groups of people.

communicate with father *Serankua*, with Bogotá, with the United States, and other countries” (*mama* Ramon Gil, in Ibañez, Martinez, and Jaramillo 1997: “History of Shumnani”³¹).

With this new consideration that derived from “listening to the Indians”, the idea of “projects” was transformed to a new meaning; it now meant “listening to the Indians”, listening to places. At least for some people in the NGO, specially those whose duties required them to spend time up in the mountain, walk it, and have been doing so for many years now. And the reason I bring this point to view is because the NGO has itself grown to a point where the pressures and politics of the conservation apparatus have overtaken it, setting it in the transnational mainstream of the conservationist discourse (Sylvia Botero, Juana Londoño, Richy Rey p.c. 2001).

NGOs are representatives of what Fischer (1997) has called the connection between the person and the political. They are sites that link the local and the global acting as new forms of power. According to Ramos (1998), NGOs, particularly those engaged with indigenist and conservationist goals, undergo a process of bureaucratization that results in the creation of particular subjects; subjects that are more real than the real subject. This raises the issue of questioning the way in which forms of power take various forms and facets; thus diverse forms of knowledge are also means of contestation.

The original motives for the creation of the NGO have thus been channeled into the mainstreams of conservation; the pressures of international donors, the state, and local people created a context where different interests are confronted and set forth in the bureaucratization process that NGOs tend to go through. This creates a particular tension

³¹ Note. This particular document does not have page numbers.

point of ambivalence between what different people at various levels consider to be conservation and how it should be undertaken.

As a consequence of the “new project” that responded to a set of petitions by the *mamas* that were living in Alto de Mira, the way “ecological research” is conceived by some, and only some, members of Pro Sierra has radically changed:

[The *mamas*] asked me to leave the place for a while. That the place needed be close for a while, because if not, it would eventually have to be closed forever. Parallel to this a purification job of the site was needed, spiritual payments, finding some [spiritual] reference points, payments, the Indian law. That is what the site called for. Leaving a little bit alone, a little bit still, listening to what the *yatukua*³² had to say, know what *yatukua* has to say of the trees, what *Kalaxse* [father of all of the forests] has to say, listen to who is not paying, what cannot be cut down, what cannot be looked at, what cannot be hunted; this means leaving the place alone, listening. This has actually done the site a lot of good. The place has much more strength, internally, spiritually it has more strength.

Not withstanding,

The place still is acting as the Ecological Station it was intended for. Except the management is different, it has a different form of control which is more spiritual. This has nourished the place immensely. There are many more animals, more birds, more snakes, more forest, more Indians; the place is healthy, it's been cleansed, the landslides, hurricanes, and other environmental problems have been diminished. Thus, seeing it from today this process has done the place a lot of good. Having listened, having paid attention brought good. And now, if one wants to make any project [here] one must consult them first.

This is a process of the re-production of knowledge. The images of the Other have been portrayed in combination with learnt interpretations, in a setting that is filled with images and meanings that have resulted from the particular historical and political processes taking place in the Buritaca. Thus different localities–anthropologists and their legacy's, migrant and displaced Kogui, conservationists, etc.- are forming a hybrid place within the fixed, rigid image of place commonly held.

³² A form of oracle used by the Kogui *mamas*.

The meaning that this site has acquired for some of the members of the NGO, those that work more closely with the Indians, and one might even say those that are more separated from the “expert scientific knowledge”, those that engage in non-conventional ways of conservation, is embedded in a process of translation and mimicry. In a process that intertwined indigenous and western forms of knowledge a hybrid way of negotiating marginality is set forth. It is not just the usual subaltern struggle of the Indians, it is also a way of contestation from the grass root level conservation to the bureaucratization process and its top-down forms of control. Learning and applying these new forms of conservation based on spiritual means learned from the “primitive” can be thus contesting the authority of that expert knowledge, and more so, doing it *while* using [being part of] the conservation apparatus. As such it legitimizes the image of Koguess in the form of a “hyperreal Indian” (Ramos 1998), in a disordered process that creates alternative forms of conservation within the structure of conventional institutions of conservation. With it the marginality of the Sierra Nevada, that which legitimizes forms of intervention is used as a means of legitimizing new forms of authority, identity, and are hence expressions of the complex realm of contemporary environmental politics.

This particular form of knowledge and meaning responds to a history that began with anthropological representations of Koguess. It was thus combined and readapted by the people that created the NGO, who in turn were the “intellectual kin” of many of these “Reichelian” interpretations. This was then confronted with the particular socio/politico/economic history of the Kogui, the processes of migration and displacement in which some families were embedded, and their own individual and collective reinterpretations and forms of claims for their new territory based on sacred

knowledge. Together all these expressions form part of an incredibly rich and complex place where representations are constantly representing themselves.

The mobility to which I made reference at the beginning of this chapter, the traveling aspect of culture and place is hence part of a wider process of the circulation of environmental images (Brosius 1999a, 1999b, Slater 2000). As a result of the transnational circulation of knowledge/information through circuits of free flow information in the new regimes of (post)modernity, place is situated in diverse settings acting in different ways. Considering the marginality of the place in question, the extension to which marginality gets negotiated is also a process that involves the regulation of political authority by actors situated on the “out-side” (if there is an inside and an outside of marginal areas). This is an issue that raises the malleability of political authority, in this case of place as means for and against identities, nationhood, and, conservation.

Consequently I wish to offer insights on what I consider one of the most prominent forms of cultural production and knowledge/information circulation that relates to the Sierra Nevada and Koguiness. This the BBC film From the Heart of the World. The Elder Brothers Warning.

PART 3.
A PLACE THAT FLOWS



“...cultural production is an entangled field of contradictions and complexities of [the] lived realities...”

Image from the educational pack, *The Kogi*. (University of Wales, Bangor. 2001).

7. Regulating Authority from the Heart of the World

The conservationist discourse and the anthropological representations on which it stands has been entangled within the transnational fields of media re-production. This process of environmental imagery circulation (Brosius 1999a, 1999b, Conklin 1997, Conklin and Graham 1995, Slater 2000, Turner 1991, Viveiros de Castro 1996) has raised issues of control of the imagery as much as it has acknowledged the double-way process of acceptance and/or use by the audience. In doing so the politics of authority over the use of these images questions notions of agency in/of environmental(ist) representations.

When situating these issues in my own concern with place and its relation to environmental politics the question of the media and place comes to mind. I then wish to engage a site of media re-production of this constructed place in order to re-read the representation of Koguess in its transnational localities as sites of political power; therefore engaging the reproduction of the production of marginality and the ways it [marginality] is negotiated at transnational contexts in a process that involves the transformation of knowledge into information. The latter instance is considered a political act, a form of regulation of authority.

This third part thus focuses on the flow of knowledge/information on the Sierra Nevada and the Kogui, specifically through Alan Ereira's BBC film From the Heart of the World. The Elder Brothers Warning (1991). This film relies heavily on the articulation of representations of culture and place, specifically of place as an essentialized and fixed cultural expression that is rooted in anthropological

representations of the Sierra Nevada and especially the Kogui. But more importantly it engages these representations as forms of, and for political authority.

Producing the Heart of the World

Alan Ereira was trained in law and history at Cambridge. He then went into filmmaking where he worked for the BBC for more than 30 years. He recently created his own filming company, Sunstone Films. Ereira went to Colombia originally while pursuing a BBC film on the Spanish Armada and its relationship with El Dorado, that golden myth of prehispanic art forms and colonial greed. By approaching this he was led to Tairona archaeology; to the Tairona gold that has attracted explorers, anthropologists, and other visitors to the Sierra for many, many years. He too was marveled by the place, and through it got interested in the Tairona and consequently on their “descendants” the Kogui. He thus was attracted to the understanding of the complexity of the ruins and the society they represented, and thus was confronted with the idea of contacting the Kogui:

[I] thought it possible that the Kogi Mamas might want to speak to the outside world. Perhaps they might see it as a way of allowing the Younger Brother in without having to tolerate tourism. Perhaps they might feel that they needed something from the outside, and this would be a way of communicating. Perhaps they might be able to explain their own culture and the meaning of the archaeological sites, and offer that as a substitute for allowing an endless stream of researchers. For surely there must be pressure for tourism and for academic research! (Ereira 1992: 32).

The film was thus undertaken with the approval of Kogui *mamas* in a process that lasted more than a year, where the Kogui divinated, debated, and finally agreed upon the need and utility of a film with Ereira (Ereira 1991).

* * *

Images of water with an indigenous narrative on sacred protection, with teachings of those who know are set forth from the beginning of the film. A sharp contrast is portrayed with the use of images of the city of Santa Marta:

The nearest “civilized” city to the Elder Brothers is Santa Marta, a steamy, violent little community wedged between the mountain and the Caribbean sea... Permanently stranded in the sidings are two locomotives, named after the city’s two most famous brothel “madams”. Their funerals were attended by the largest crowds in the city’s history” (Ereira 1992: 2).

“*There is a brief scene showing a body lying in a street and you may prefer to miss this out*”, is the recommendation of an educational pack of a British university education program inspired by the film (University of Wales, Bangor 2001). This scene is presented together with others of grave robbers, bums, and shanty towns; in a book published by the producer parallel to the film’s original release, Ereira described this in the following ways: “My hotel [in Bogotá] was as luxurious as any in the world, a quiet, civilized place that reminded me of some of the expensive hotels in Washington. The neighbors were evidently prosperous. Billionaires. White powder billionaires” (Ibid: 15).

This implies that the Elder Brothers and their mountain are threatened by violence, poverty and other elements that make part of the so-called Third World, that have led Colombians to acts of irrational violence:

-Scene: *Grave robbers laugh as the prehispanic Tairona vessel they are unearthing shatters to pieces*. A golden figurine is set next to the skull of the prehispanic deceased. But then again, says the narrator’s voice, this looting and profanation might be done by Colombian hands, but it is the market forces that are driving them to this. Thus the more reasons are portrayed for the Kogui to enclose themselves from modernity, to protect themselves from the modern Colombian stereotype. The separation of the Kogui territory, the closing of this place is presented as crucial for its preservation.

Through the politics of pleasure (Kondo 1997), with stunning photography of the Sierra Nevada's lands, forests, snowpeaks and lakes, this exotic beauty is portrayed possible due to the sacred ancestral knowledge that its inhabitants possess. This relation of place and culture is reinforced thus by creating a sharp contrast by the location of the place in racial/cultural representations of Colombia. This legitimizes the ideas of threat and marginality and its consequent forms of interventions through claims for international protection for these lands and their peoples; it also colonially represses the Colombian people and state for their apparent disregard of the marvelous treasures it has to protect and is apparently unable to do so.

-Scene: *Alan Ereira*: “*We are now entering the last functioning civilization of Pre-columbian America*”

-Scene: *Kogui mama*: “*Stop digging, you are ripping The Mother. Stop drying the water!*”

These claims for the need of isolation, protection, and respect are evoked directly by *Kogui mamas*. It is thus not a film on the Kogui, but a film with and by the Kogui. This is a point that is always reinforced by Ereira (see Ereira 1992, 2001). It is actually his main argument against the claims of portraying the Kogui as an “ecologically friendly” indigenous people. The following is an extract from an email exchange we had in June 2001, where after a set of questions that guided the interview towards the “image portrayed” brought about the following reaction:

The assumption that appeared to underlie your questions was that my film with the Kogi arose from my determination to make a film with an environmental message, which set out to show that indigenous people have a healthier relationship to nature than we do, and that I chose the Kogi as my vehicle. That idea is insulting to me and, more importantly, insulting and patronizing to the Kogi mamas. It denies their role as commissioning producers of the film. . this film was made by and for them....I have no sympathy with those who attempt to construct careers in guru-ism, “white shamanism” or academe on

the basis of information obtained from communities whose whole history is one of being robbed and exploited, unless they pay back at least as much as they take (so I was perfectly happy about the Università di Roma, but am much more suspicious of you) (A. Ereira, in email exchange with the author, June 2001) .

The film constantly shows scenes of *mamas* reciting narratives that explain Kogui symbolic systems and ways of thought in order for us to understand, or at least know of the relationship and effects that our so-called civilized practices have on them, and therefore on the environment of the Sierra Nevada. The viewer is exposed to issues regarding a) Fertility, and the need to respect nature and the use of gold as a vehicle and embodiment of fertility; water as a vehicle of communication between *aluna* (sacred spiritual knowledge) and the material world; therefore Gold + water = blood. Blood, menstruation, fertility. b) Weaving and thought. The complexity of the symbolism of the act of weaving. The man sitting in front of his loom; the sexual (fertility) meanings of the organization of the world in the loom are reminded to him with every thread he weaves into the cloth he will eventually wear every day. c) The complexity of the Kogui ceremonial house, its 9 layers and representations of the Kogui universe. d) A lesson on the importance on the practice of payments, and, e) the training and perpetuation of this knowledge in the training of the young *mamas*.

There seems to be a strong resemblance between the above topics and topics in the ethnographic archive, specially those by Reichel-Dolmatoff. Specifically I am referring to the articles “The Loom of Life: a Kogi principle of integration”(1978), “Training for Priesthood among the Kogi of Colombia” (1976b), “Astronomical models of social behavior among some Indians of Colombia”(1982b), “Templos Kogi. Introducción al simbolismo y a la astronomía del espacio sagrado”(1975) among others. This mention of the Reichel-Dolmatoff articles is by no means a demerit of the topics of

the film, but on the contrary, a way of raising the issue of an apparent constant in form of representations based on the exposure of traits that apparently define “a” or “the” Kogui culture.

Although Reichel was contacted by Ereira and apparently gave him anthropological support for the film (Ereira 1992), the fact that these topics are being expressed in the words of *mamas* themselves evokes the idea of subjective narratives in the construction of place at historical and political moments. It is not that there is a “set” of ideas that identify Kogui culture, but on the contrary, there is an important resemblance to what must be expressed to particular audiences at particular moments.

These narratives are intertwined throughout the film with a complex metaphoric imagery of the revival and perpetuation of colonial violence among the Kogui. The tranquility of the mountain, the everydayness of certain activities like the grinding of sugar cane in the *trapiche* (sugar cane mill) is quickly disrupted by a shifting focus of the camera to the horse that gives force to the grinding wooden barrels. Bearing in mind that together with the cane the horse represents Spanish legacies the viewer is confronted at very close range with the dripping sweat of the horse, its widely opened eyes, enlarged nostrils, and the sense of an almost uncontrollable inner fume from its rising fervor. As the animal runs around the circle the narrator again in a very evocative narrative gives sense to the images: “The Spanish *squeezed* the Indians everharder”. The camera dances around the quasi-galloping hoofs of the (colonial) animal while images of Spanish priests, of colonial ideas of Indian sodomy, etc. are evoked. We are then told how the Kogui have then had to deal with this for over 500 years.

The way the so-called Kogui “cultural traits” are juxtaposed with this powerful metaphor of a history of colonial violence is strongly suggestive of the importance of two way representations; in the Sierra Nevada the problem of the land has been prominent and thus these narratives of fertility can be framed in terms that are translatable to western topics. In Reichel’s time, structural ecology was a way of “showing” the complexity of indigenous understandings of the environment. In Ereira’s film, similar narratives are framed this time *by Kogui mamas* themselves to claim for a way of life that is deeply and complexly entwined with the environment. Both sets of narratives are thus circulated in terms of resistance to the encroaching Colombian stereotype, to colonial history, to modernity. Thus knowledge, whether in anthropological terms or dissident media mediated indigenous terms is politically framed in narratives of sacred rootedness to place in order to claim and separate, that is to organize political power through place.

This is supported through a use of public exclusion of the everydayness and other subjectivities, creating thus an image built on the separation, on the power of the occult. The narratives are encompassed in a kind of secret topics that are considered too complex for western understanding but everyday cultural forms for the Kogui. This implies a sense of double secrecy; a secrecy on the normality, on the everydayness subjectivity of the Kogui. Every act of everyday life seems to be in this film represented as guided by the powerful secret of Kogui knowledge. The long history of contact, negotiation, and reinterpretations of Kogui individuals with Colombia(ans) is disregarded thus enlarging the exclusion argument. Yet the mystery that such spiritual power bears upon has to be revealed to Colombia and more so to the world for it to be really acknowledged even if not fully comprehended. Thus, to use Michael Taussig’s (1999) term, Koguiness is

“defaced” and in doing so “secrecy magnifies reality” through the revelation of this sacred secret Kogui form of knowledge in the film.

All this then is again crisscrossed by the image of the tomb robbers I referred to above. By the violation of sacred sites and by the encroaching of their territory. A group of *mamas* is shown in one of the sacred spots of the *Línea Negra* performing *pagamento* ceremonies while overlooked by the smog and the noise of a thermoelectric plant. Ereira himself then travels to the páramo, to those areas deep in the heartland which ecologists call water factories, to the highlands where the effects of global warming are melting the snow, where the consequences of not acknowledging the Kogui message can be materially seen. “The Kogui know it, and thus they are sending us a message”; to respect them, to leave them alone, to respect their knowledge, to understand they must be left alone so they can fully concentrate on their activities from which the balance between the spiritual and the material of this earth depend on.

These claims for a way of life that knows and controls an intimate and sacred relation with nature has, as it flows through circuits of free flow information, engendered national and transnational articulations, acting thus as a mediator of power and authority. Ereira thus claims to have influenced the Colombian nation-state, raising consciousness of the government towards these places:

1994 was also the year in which the Colombian President first took notice of the Sierra and its indigenous people, flying in by helicopter to announce that by decree, he was designating a corridor of land down to the sea which was to be restored to them. Here the film can claim some credit. Although it was never shown in Colombia, the President's wife had been sent a copy by a friend of hers in London. The enthusiasm of these two ladies did play some part in bringing about the presidential visit (Ereira 2001: 4).

Something which also reinforces the idea of marginality, of abandoned and threatened places that need the state, whether as intervention, or simply its recognition, or any other

multiple forms of contemporary forms of authority in these so-called multicultural and biodiversity blessed nations.

The regulation of political authority by this media production is hence expressed in the environmental imagery that the film ultimately evokes. As a consequence the constantly reinforced claim by Ereira that the film was made by the Kogui, where he and his crew only served as the means of expression and communication yields to the more powerful and accepted environmental imagery. Thus the film's use of aesthetic representations of nature and beauty incorporated with notions of territory and wisdom ultimately is embedding the viewer in the politics of pleasure (Kondo 1997); this implies the hybridization between contestation, re-production of essentialism, and implicit anthropological representations.

The power of the state is then incorporated to the place making and cultural bonding through the circulation of knowledge/information. The arena of the film, the coming and going of Kogui images and references through the internet³³, the traveling of Kogui leaders to other countries (see Bocarejo 2001) are all ways of expression of this power circulation. They are also ways of legitimizing tourist investment, the multiculturalism of the nation, and the environmental capacity and importance of the Sierra Nevada –considering again it is a UNESCO Biosphere reserve-. The production of the image portrayed by the film has then served as a means to trigger forms of para-production of Koguiness that, for example, intertwine the state's authority in a site where the image of the state is also contested. Colombia as a nation re-presented in narratives and images of violence, poverty, and other Third Worldness is contested and reaffirmed in, and by the film.

³³ A simple Google Web search of the words Kogui and Tairona reveals over 200 links.

This confronts an image of the Kogui to the power of the state, or better to the west and its flaws, and more so, it enables subversion towards forms of land domination. But in doing so it also denies the ongoing transformations, reaffirmation, and re-appropriations of identities and other forms of negotiation of marginality with, and within the historical and political process that are going on in Colombia.

This process of cultural production is an entangled field of contradictions and complexities of the lived realities of abstract concepts such as self/other, resistant/compliant, art/politics, and global/local (Mahon 2000). Hence the film involves aesthetic politics and the politics of pleasure (Kondo 1997) at the same time as being a means of reproduction and a tool of expression by the west and by Kogui individuals themselves. It is therefore a site of knowledge production as well as a means of information flow where forms of authority are intertwined; authority by the Kogui, the authority of the producer, the authority that contesting the Colombian nation as a violent threat represents, and also the authority that the conservation apparatus exerts indirectly through the Kogui representation.

This process of reproduction is also guided by the hyperrealism that Ramos (1998) mentions as an outcome of conservationist and indigenist NGO milieus. Specifically the process of the creation of a bureaucratizable Indian, the *Hyperreal Indian*: “[a] perfect Indian whose virtues, sufferings, and untiring stoicism have won him the right to be defended by the professionals of indigenous rights. That Indian is more real than the real Indian. He is the Hyperreal Indian” (1998: 276).

With the production of a “hyperreal-bureaucratizable Indian” as an essential part of the idea that helps establish the conservationist discourse, the Kogui representation is

incorporated as a powerful authority in conservation milieus. It's establishment and connection with conservationist NGOs thus allows the recognition by state authorities of Kogui knowledge on environmental matters. When the above image is linked to the historical relationship that Koguiness has with environmental politics one can see then how there is a production of a hyperreal Kogui that must be confronted by Kogui individuals in everyday life. It is a form of power that is also shared with other ethnic groups of the Sierra Nevada when they come together as a form of authority. For instance, during Andres Pastrana's presidential campaign a few visits were made by him to the Sierra Nevada, mostly to Kogui settlements. He was taken there by Juan Mayer, the founder of the conservationist NGO Pro Sierra. President Pastrana was ceremonially protected by the *mamas* and a spiritual compromise was made so he could do well on the peace process, a major banner of his campaign. After winning the elections, this image of a multicultural form of governance was reinforced when Pastrana appointed office; Juan Mayer was appointed Minister of the Environment and he selected an Arhuaco Indian as his advisor³⁴. Information on the hyperreal Indian was incorporated as a form of political power in the government thus legitimizing this form of environmental subject.

Through the representation of Koguiness, the control or at least a sense of partial control over the state and other powerful actors is incorporated by the Kogui individuals that portray themselves in front of the camera, the biologist, the anthropologist, the president, or the nation. The mentioned film is then not a message adorned with the help of filming techniques, it is actually a place of reproduction of reproductions, where the camera and its aesthetical productions are a form of political authority for the producer,

³⁴ In this case the Arhuaco person elected is very close to the Kogui; this is also suggestive of Uribe's argument about the external fusion and internal fission that the indigenous communities of the Sierra apply.

for the Kogui, and why not, for the Colombian state. In doing so individuals are left out as they act in, and the only means these individuals have to obtain control and power is by putting on the images and representations; in that form knowledge as information is mimetically political, or politically useful.

These instances are hence a way in which ideas of threat over people and place are legitimized as information. Contrary to GIS and other tools that imply the reading of expert knowledge, film is a more public form of information that also legitimizes these ideas of threat. In doing so it acts over forms of knowledge production that themselves then legitimize the application of expert forms of knowledge on these places. Here then, the regulation of authority over ideas of threat is especially prominent in the way instances of the so-called Third World—here represented by Colombian society- are portrayed as a threat to the Kogui and the Sierra Nevada, and hence the emphasis on the separation of the territory. But at the same time, the claims by the producer of having raised awareness on these marginal areas reinforces the legitimization of intervention as protection –state and private, national and international- to these people and places.

Flowing through the entangled threads of environmentalism

This legitimization of ideas of threat creates points of tension between the Colombian state's authority over its people and territories and the so-called Kogui cause against encroachment. As this representation is circulated as information through various “free” circuits the image is situated in different locations.

Maybe the most explicit of these is the creation of the Tairona Heritage Trust, a British NGO that was born from the film, located now at the University of Wales's department of Anthropology. The THT was created as

[an] extension of the Mamas' need for representation and as a product of Alan Ereira's, and the general public's, fascination with the Kogi... [to] publicise the Kogi message, to raise money to allow the Kogi to regain their ancient territories, [and] to allow all the surviving peoples of the Tairona civilization the opportunity to benefit directly from world-wide interest in them"(Tairona Heritage Trust 2001).

Through the Trust the Colombian state is contested over the control and authority of the recuperation of indigenous territories, in a land where peasants, para-militaries, guerrillas, researchers, private and state institutions fight and coexist over the authority of this place. As such, issues pertaining the subtleties of environmental activism and authority must be taken into consideration for it, again, creates a double tension; it supports the Kogui claims but in doing so it also makes them confront the state as well as other forms of authority over the land (peasants, para-militaries, etc.).

Instances like the above must be questioned taking into consideration the fact that environmental campaigns suffer fluctuation in the power of their message. They initially gain a momentum that must be nourished in time with new images as the initial ones loose their force (Brosius 1999a). This changes the way the images are staged and more so, the way the public receives them, supports them, and might loose sight of them. This is clear now a decade after the film was first presented and new forms of attraction (i.e. support) are pursued. Ereira has recently proposed a series of projects to the OGT that seek the translation into English of the booklets of Words of Mamas (see part 2.)(Ereira 2001); the idea is to translate them and publish them in an picture book format that will maintain public awareness (P. Rawitscher p.c. 2001). This would be then another

instance of knowledge/information production and hence another form for regulating authority through the politics of pleasure.

Other elements and forms of re-production have also spread through the circulation of information. For instance one can find performative productions of Koguinness that are sensuously engendered in bodily movements of golden figurines. Such is the performance piece *Gold*, staged by the State Theta Collaborative Arts Performance Co. (State Theta 2001) in Edinburgh, Scotland. Here theatrical performances situate and transmit “the message” as they are portrayed in Scottish theaters, as they are sensuously re-produced in the embodiment of Tairona gold, the materiality of Kogui fertility. This form of animating fertility and with it place, creates a site of circulation of new kinds of political identity. Thus as Kondo (1997) argues, theater and performance act as sites for political intervention and the articulation of new kinds of political identities. Knowledge/information is thus circulated, grounded, and re-produced in a re-affirmation of political claims through aesthetics.



The image also gains popularity through its incorporation in organic coffee labels, new age web pages, and an increasing popularity of ecotourism companies that advertise trips filled with...

³⁵ Scene from the performance piece *Gold* (State Theta 2001).

[a]dventure to the heart of the Colombian mountains, [where] we will trek to the Lost City where Mama Luca will teach us some of the ways the Kogi link with the earth and nature in one of the world's most secluded ancient sites. Visiting the mountain villages of the Kogi Indians along the way, this magical journey will take us to wild rainforest, spectacular rivers and waterfalls, experiencing the richness and diversity of wildlife and scenery. We will also have time to relax on idyllic tropical beaches at the end of the trip (Ecolatina 2001).

The power of the representation also flows in the guise of environmentally oriented educational knowledge as proposed by an educational package developed at the School of Education, University of Wales, Bangor, in the U.K. Hence one has public and free web access to quotes like the following from Welsh school children: "The Kogi invited the man because they wanted to send a message to the rest of the world. The Kogi have taught me that we should look after the world and not pollute it, also that we should keep patient and live naturally in peace"(University of Wales, Bangor 2001)

This educational package is illustrated by the image with which I opened this part of the thesis, that of a godly like Kogui man overlooking the city, overlooking modernity. That mystical power that protects the West is translated into school children's activities that seek creative writing, singing, drama and role play, model building, painting of murals, and crafts such as weaving, spinning and pottery. The location of this image in this kind of educational setting is thus revealing to the double- way processes of knowledge and information, where knowledge becomes information and yet is further reproduced as new forms of knowledge in other sites and locations; in this case environmental education or aesthetic expressions of environmentalism.

These are thus transnational instances of ways in which information on/of place acts a regulatory mechanism of authority. In some instances doing it in an openly and direct way, and in others it is secretly enmeshed in environmentalist rhetoric. It creates tension between the Colombian nation's own environmental politics and/or policies, and

confronts it with the international information of the environmental movement. Notwithstanding, the flow of information on Koguiess that is apparently so tightly bound to a place in northern Colombia is acting as a way of environmental authority in many locations. Thus not only are we confronted with a way in which locality is both embodied and narrated and is, as a consequence, highly mobile (Raffles 1999). We are also confronted with forms of how knowledge of a place is circulated as information in various narratives, whether artistic or environmental, or both, that can be in this case grounded to a process of media re-production that ultimately acts as a channel for the regulation of political authority.

Thus the notions of a created place that bear from the conservation apparatus are entangled in a setting of re-presentations that make essentialism a double edge sword, a means of subversive and complicit authority. Knowledge grounded in people or agencies is transformed to information as a means of “reaching out” to broader publics, in a language now common and understandable to all, the language of conservation. Though the agendas of these claims might not be conservation *per se*, they are entwined in this context and language of place and culture, seeking different expressions, negotiations, and forms of control. It points to processes of legitimization of a constructed image of and by the Indians, as well as the need for conservation and protection strategies in the Sierra Nevada. Thus state as well as private forms of political power are entangled, sometimes opposed and sometimes connected in a field that rests upon notions of place as a fixed and static entity.

CONCLUSIONS. AN IN-THE-WAY PLACE

Contemporary environmental politics are as present and diffuse in society as the power they represent. With a reflection on the role played by anthropological representations in the construction of place I have wanted to raise certain reflexivity oriented issues. They are all engendered in the role of anthropology oriented critiques of environmentalism or environmentalism oriented representations. Our engagement as writers of political and institutional actions (see Brosius 1999b), in this case of “place as a site of theory and politics” (Escobar 1999b) is hence a site of cultural critique to our own constructions as anthropologists, as much as it is a delicate process of exposure of subaltern means of contestation. Thus considering our endeavor a messy engagement is a way of recognizing our own practices in the entanglements of power, where the traditional account of power as an opposition of dichotomies is questioned and replaced by less subtle divisions of power, acknowledging domination and resistance as “[a] hybrid phenomena, the one always containing the seeds of the other, the one always bearing at least a trace of the other that contaminates or at least subverts it” (Sharp et al 2000: 20).

The above consideration thus makes possible the fact that this thesis was engendered from a process that involves a diversity of institutions, people, and forms of conceiving the politics of conservation in the Sierra Nevada, its relationship with forms of authority, and so on. It also allowed me to consider the Sierra Nevada under the already fixing idea of marginality. As much as marginality is also a territorializational

category, approaching it as a mobile entity contests that same image by making visible forms that people inhabiting these zones have in order to negotiate, contest, and re-appropriate this marginality, and thus as Tsing states, it raises the “[i]mportance of analyzing heterogeneity and transcultural dialogue in even the most out-of-the-way places” (1993:10). This process locates the constructed idea of marginality, reinforced and legitimized by the conservationist discourse, in a varied set of contexts where associations of marginality and essentialism take up new roles in contemporary politics.

Essentialism is a delicate concept that empowers as much as it disempowers (see Brosius 1999a, Carlassare 1994, Conklin 1997, Conklin and Graham 1995, Lattas 1993, Jackson 1995, among others). Environmentalism is a site that has made visible the multiplicity of directions that the use of essentialized images can take (Slater 2000). As such, this thesis has grounded itself on the essentialized construction of a particular association of place and people and followed some of the instances through which it flows. But as issues like these become more obvious day by day I have also wanted to do this, by a sometimes direct and others silent gaze to a particular form of power in the realm of contemporary environmental politics. The conservationist discourse that serves as a silent axis to this thesis represents then the capillary form of power that flows through the essentialized constructions and utilizations of place in contemporary environmentalism. A form of power that, in the entanglements of power, creates new possibilities for identities, nationhood, and other forms of dealing with everyday conflicts.

Considering then the variability of essentialism and its relationship with marginality, marginal essentialized places can become useful representations for the

fields of subaltern struggles. Thus as Tsing (1993) proposed reading marginality in out-of-the-way places, the constant shifting of marginal places such as the Sierra Nevada in such a varied range of contexts –donors, maps, indigenous texts and narratives, academics, films, theater, educational packages, etc.- allows for a way of considering the Sierra Nevada an “in-the-way” place; one that wavers through power from the margins to the centers and back, constantly being re-situated in discursive practices and other political instances that rely on the politics of place. Thus essentialized marginality is as much a means of subversion as it is a means of complicitness to downwarding schemas and other forms of legitimizing interventions. It is found at the center of conservationist discussions and projects as much as at the center of state policies for the war against drugs. It is territory, home, sacred knowledge, “The Heart of the World”, as much as it is another visited landmark on the tourist routes of Euro-American backpackers “doing South America”. Essentialized marginal places as this can be situated at the centers or the margins of discourse and cultural practices, and as such are multiple and mobile sites of power.

Places discursively created on this association of essentialism and marginality are therefore situated at the crossroads of contemporary politics: identity politics, environmental politics, and, media politics are some of those present throughout this text. Their situatedness plays important roles in the constitution and/or negotiation of “emergent forms of life” (Fischer 1999) such as the new imaginaries of environmental and cultural threat schematized in technoscientific ways that not only administer life (Rutherford 1994) but also reorganize space, place, and social life.

As I mentioned earlier in this text, recently anthropologists concerned with critical theory approaches to conservation, its politics and policies, have argued for concern to broad spatial approaches to conservation (Brosius and Russell 2001). The implications of GIS and other forms of reproductive technologies and their consequence in making natural and cultural communities legible, results in the production of topologies that privilege intervention at a distance, that privilege constructions of risk and the roles of actors that know how to deal with these new forms of (environmental) threat. Today, concern with the Tropical Third World dilemma—the fact that biodiversity rich areas are located in conflicted nation/states- is making broad spatial conservation oriented initiatives and policies more popular everyday –at least for South America (Dinerstein et al 1995, Soulé and Terborgh 1999). Conservation oriented areas, ecoregions, biosphere reserves, biodiversity hot spots, and other forms of categories for place that are encompassed under the conservationist discourse come to a close association by means of power; they are sites that situate power/knowledge in the form of place and visualize it through contemporary technoscientific forms. At the same time these technoscientific representations can be means of subverting state power and management (Orlove 1990, Peluso 1995).

These instances integrate different forms of power in these new spaces. They establish ideas through policies that sometimes are not even considered by the people they affect. Many of these forms of created categories and subjects end up blurring claims and supporting interventions, as well as erasing forms of appropriation, creating messy expressions in, and of place. For instance, what would be the social and cultural consequences of considering the Sierra Nevada ecoregion, an encompassed ecological

zone that doesn't consider political lest social boundaries? How does this affect the power of the claims for territoriality, considering internal heterogeneity and hybridity, the reconfiguration of identity, and the fluctuation of environmental imagery? These are concerns for future attention.

The mobility of these places situates them at the center of contemporary mobility and heterogeneity (and/or hybridity), at the crossroads of contemporary politics as means of expression to and from entangled relations of power. Thus words like essentialism, marginality, visualization, and, control (among many others) take new forms and expressions for contemporary individualities and commonalities. A very rich scale of grays thus defines the current voicing of forms of domination/resistance in these contexts of environmental politics.

Anthropological cultural critique is also located in a similar scale of grays, pondered through our own perceptions and writings (Clifford and Marcus 1986, Marcus and Fischer [1986]1999). The creation of these sites and places through our own writing is also a means of circulation and location, another site for the situation of place. As such it traverses the boundaries of writing, fieldwork, and activism, and establishes itself through subjectivity as another location of place. A gray location of power that speaks to and from those of whom we write about; whether subaltern, empowered, grassroots, international, state or private, individual, or communal voices, our role in the constitution of place relocates it [place] in the multi-sited grounds on which it stands. Hence more compelling reasons for reflexivity.

Finally then, one could talk of places of environmentalism, places of biodiversity, as those places in the contours of contemporary environmental politics where state,

private, individual, ethnic, even corporate (Fortun 1999) interests in/of the natural environment are negotiated, contested, and utilized as they are heterogeneously situated in diverse, yet articulated locations. The implications for how we think of these “threatened places” is therefore questioned from the grounds one stands from. And as much as there are concerns for global problematics –as the so-called biodiversity degradation- the location of these threats must be appreciated in its own multiple terms. Thus place as an apparent homogenous entity is placed in-the-way of discursive practices, politics, and, policies regarding knowledge and management of these places.

This is not the same as merely calling for a claim to recognize so-called local voices, and though this is implied, it means that we must recognize the voices of the places of environmentalism in the multiple locations that being an outcome of a global discourse –environmentalism- entails. The Sierra Nevada thus become a political – environmental- act for the Kogui families of the Buritaca as much as for audiences in Edinburgh theaters, film critics and organic coffee buyers in the UK, Colombian environmental state agencies and NGOs, and so on.

This means that looking at place is a bifocal act (Peters 1997) which can be engaged through ethnography. This poses many directions and questions on, of, and, about these environmental places or places of environmentalism. As an outcome of this intersection of place, discourse, and power maybe the most ethnographically intriguing for me is the role of all these expressions of environmental politics in Colombian environmental institutions. Place as a conceived “target” of policies, politics, research, and, funding (state and private) is articulated with the everydayness of the nation’s reality. Violence on the one hand creates a particular stage for approaching

environmental places from complex and, for the most, unresolved possibilities. This is something that must be related with the way institutional policies and programs that seek the assessment, protection, and sustainable use of biodiversity incorporate representations as knowledge into the creation of (environmental) policies; as such it must integrate the political economic grounds on which these institutions stand with the public articulations and interpretations of this reality. Considering that “public” is not the same as “local”, the juxtaposition of environmental policies with other expressions of contemporary environmentalism (and politics) situates place in a myriad of transnational representations that foreground the inner complexities of state and private institutional power.

When one approaches place as an entity that tends to slip outside the representational grids of power/knowledge, when one aims the ethnographic gaze towards itself, to its history, to the personal interpretations and contextualizations as well as to the ways people negotiate, contest, and appropriate these representations, place can be read as a political (transnational) act of power. In the case center of this discussion, the place called the Sierra Nevada is seen as the result of an articulation of the entanglements of power of contemporary environmental politics in a set of multiple locations. As a result it is an in-the-way place for a multiple set of actors and their actions, thus being a way of re-membering the land of oblivion through everyday, political, cultural acts.

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