

Reweaving the Uaman Luar:

Cultural Reproduction and Contested Autonomy among the Kamëntšá

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the elders of the Kamëntšá Biyá, the Mamitas and Taitas who, by keeping the wisdom of their ancestors alive, are providing future generations of the Kamëntšá the knowledge and tools with which they might always *vivir bien y pensar bonito*.

Acknowledgements

An ethnographer's debts are many. I cannot hope to adequately acknowledge here all the many people who made my research possible, but a few of the most important names follow.

A la familia Jacanamijoy—Natalia, Juancho, Omayra, Saúl, David, Cristina, y todos los que no alcanzo a nombrar: *aslëpay ainanokán*, muchísimas gracias desde el corazón. Yo no hubiera podido caminar este *botamán benach* sin su generoso apoyo y amistad. Como dice la canción del Clestrin̄ye: Si tenemos vida, el próximo año volveremos a encontrarnos. Y si no, hasta aquí nomás.

A toda la familia Kamëntšá: que sigan en el camino de resistencia, que los saberes de los Taitas y Mamitas sigan vivos en las generaciones venideras, y que el pueblo Kamëntšá nunca deje de vivir bien y pensar bonito. Ojalá este humilde trabajo mío les sirva de alguna manera en su lucha.

A mi directora la Dra. Maria Fernanda Escallón: mil gracias por todo tu apoyo, tus consejos, y tu comprensión durante el largo caminar de este proyecto. Este trabajo no hubiera resultado posible sin tu generosa atención. Eres la mejor mentora que un etnógrafo novato podría tener.

To Dr. John H. McDowell: I can only hope that this work serves to build, in some modest way, on the foundation that you laid down during your own ethnographic adventures in Tabanok with the previous generations of the Jacanamijoy family. Without your thoughtful advice and logistical support, my first foray into fieldwork would have been a far more challenging and less enriching experience. You helped make it an incredible one.

To Dr. Reuben Zahler: The long and winding research journey that ended with this thesis began with a term paper written for your class during my very first term at the University of Oregon. Many thanks for your early guidance and support, which helped develop the research skills that led to my first publication and eventually resulted in this thesis project.

I owe a debt of gratitude for the financial and logistical support generously provided by the funding sources and personnel at the University of Oregon which made my research possible: the Humanities Undergraduate Research Fellowship, the McNair Scholars Program, the Center for Latino/a and Latin American Studies, the Center for Undergraduate Research and Engagement, the University of Oregon Libraries, and the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program. Special thanks go to Dr. Christabelle Dragoo of the McNair Scholars Program for her unwavering encouragement throughout my journey as a first-generation college student facing stacked odds.

Thanks to Dr. Joshua Homan for putting up with my many questions and offering much free advice over the past few years.

Many thanks to the friends and loved ones at home in Oregon who made life lively during my occasional hours of free time in Eugene and who supported me from afar when in the field. The same to the many friends I have made in Tabanok, visitors and passers-through like myself. Que nuestros caminos se vuelvan a cruzar.

Finally, my thanks to the anonymous baristas at the many cafés around Eugene who supplied me with the copious amounts of coffee that made the writing of this thesis possible.

Aslëpay ainanokán a todos.

Note on Style

In this thesis, I italicize only the first instance of each non-English word, of which many appear throughout the text, mainly of Kamëntšá, Spanish, and Inga or Quechua origin. I have striven to define each non-English term upon its first appearance; subsequently, the reader is expected to know its meaning. These words retain italics only when they are specifically referenced in their quality as non-English terms.

For clarity and additional context, the reader may refer to Appendix A: Glossary, where non-English terms are listed and defined alphabetically.

Preface: Genealogy of an Ethnography

An ethnographer owes many debts to the people and places who make provide both the conditions for and the content of one's research. In this preface, I trace the genealogy of the present ethnography, which I present as my BA honors thesis for the McNair Scholars Program and the Anthropology Honors Program at the University of Oregon. The research journey traced below serves to contextualize why and how I came to write about a people and a territory far removed from my own background and homeland. While the reader interested only in the ethnographic data is advised to jump to the main text, to my mind it would be negligent not to begin this narrative with an account of the personal and intellectual trajectory that led to and shaped my research.

I first visited the Sibundoy Valley, a lush and verdant basin nestled between the Andean highlands and the Amazonian lowlands of southwest Colombia, in April 2019 in search of yagé, an entheogenic brew more commonly known outside of Colombia as ayahuasca. As a young backpacker on my first lengthy sojourn abroad, I knew nothing of the place I had come to or the people who have lived there since time immemorial. It was a dim and drizzly evening when, together with a couple of fellow travelers, I jumped down from the canopied bed of the *camioneta* on the roadside in Sibundoy, following a journey of several hours up the treacherous road locally known as the Devil's Trampoline from the regional capital of Mocoa in the jungle below. Sibundoy, the largest town in the valley that bears its name, is a small municipality of about 15,000, but at the time I didn't know that either. All I knew was that a friend of a friend would be picking us up and taking us to visit one Taita Miguel Ángel Muchavisoy, a Kamëntšá shaman of some renown. Who the Kamëntšá were I didn't yet know, but I was excited to talk with a real *yagecero*, a shaman skilled in the use of yagé—and one who, being well known and respected within the community, would not rip us off or put us in danger, as many charlatans catering to foreigners and tourists are apt to do.

That afternoon, when a friend of a friend pulled up in a battered sedan, we went to visit Taita Miguel in his office. Located just a few blocks down from Sibundoy's central plaza, Taita Miguel's office was everything a wide-eyed backpacker with little knowledge and a lot of ideas could have hoped for. Psychedelic paintings of jungles and jaguars in vivid colors filled the walls, with the shaman himself taking center stage. A crown of brilliant feathers with a band around the rim bearing cryptic designs, which only years later I would begin to learn how to read, sat atop a desk amid an assortment of other shamanic paraphernalia: bead ornaments invoking the colors and imagery of yagé visions; a bundle of dried leaves shaken in ceremony to cleanse patients' bodies of malevolent spirits; heavy coiled necklaces of dried seeds and shells that produce a gentle rattle when their wearer moves about, forming a base layer in the soundscape of the yagé experience. We did not spend long in Taita Miguel's waiting room before he stepped out, dressed in plain clothes but with the same look of authority that he wore in his larger-than-life portrait on the wall.

Our conversation was brief and fascinating. Taita Miguel explained that, for his people, the Kamëntšá, yagé is a powerful and sacred medicine with magical and curative properties. It is not a drug, as its criminalization in the U.S. and other countries would suggest. It is a remedy that must be taken with as much caution and respect as any, if not with a good deal more than most. In his words, the Kamëntšá take yagé to know who they are, where they are, and where they are going. He explained that it was his job to prepare and dispense the remedy and to take care of his patients when they took it in ceremony, providing the ceremonial and therapeutic conditions necessary for the medicine to do its work—no

more, no less. When Taita Miguel offered to demonstrate the *limpieza*, the cleansing ceremony that follows the yagé ceremony, I was happy to volunteer.

Taita Miguel walked me to a back room where he did private consultations, this one even more bedecked with shamanic furnishings than the front office. A spotted jaguar pelt was pinned to the wall over a desk busy with jars and bottles containing mystery liquids of various hues and tones. With the curtains drawn across the door, Taita Miguel sat me on a stool in the center of the room and asked me to remove my shirt. Then he picked up a dried leaf bundle of the type I had seen in the other room and began shaking it rhythmically while taking up a garbled chant. With his other hand, he picked up one of the bottles on the desk, unscrewed the cap, and took a swig of the dark liquid inside. As he circled me shaking the leaves and humming now rather than chanting, he suddenly spat the liquid held in his mouth over my back, shoulders, and neck in a cloud of fine mist. An herbal fragrance came with it, as did flecks of masticated herbs, showering my bare torso with little specks of green. Taita Miguel stepped around front and did the same over my face and chest, continuing his chant in what I would later recognize as a mumbled mixture of Spanish and Kamëntšá in between swigs of the herbal fluid. Then, with my eyes closed and not knowing what to expect next, Taita Miguel stepped in close and put his hands to my forehead. Once again to my sudden surprise, the shaman started issuing exaggerated sucking sounds with his mouth as he drew his hands across my forehead as if to push or concentrate something beneath the surface into a point beneath the skin, which he then made to draw out and spit away. He kept up his chant as he did so, and I began to recognize a few keywords metrically repeated in Spanish—*bendición*, *sanación*, *curación*—all alluding to cleansing and healing, physical and spiritual. After sucking out what he later described as ill spirits from my forehead, Taita Miguel did the same across my back, my chest, even my legs. Finally, spitting away the last of the malevolent energy accumulated in my body, the shaman invited me to stand, put on my shirt, and pay him whatever I thought reasonable for the service.

The whole ritual lasted just a few minutes, after which we returned to the front room, herbal flecks of mystery liquid still dotting my skin. While our group conversation continued for a few minutes, we concluded the interview when Taita Miguel's ancient mother stepped out of another room and said something to him in Kamëntšá—a language I didn't recognize at the time and whose sound I could not have known then would become deeply familiar to me. As we stood and shook hands, Taita Miguel invited us to attend a yagé ceremony he would preside over that very night. We thanked him for the chance to converse and for the offer as we left.

When my travel companions later decided, for their own reasons, not to partake in the ceremony, I too abandoned the idea, being unwilling at the time to go through with it alone. After another three days' stay in Sibundoy, my friends and I were unsuccessful in deciding upon another shaman to do a ceremony with and we soon went our separate ways without having imbibed. Still, what little I learned while there—not to mention the beautiful landscape, vibrant street art, and kind people—stayed with me, as did the memory of the strange and intriguing *limpieza* that stood as my first encounter with the ritual world of the Kamëntšá. Despite the brevity of my stay and the superficiality of this initial engagement with a culture I could only get a fleeting glimpse of, I left the Sibundoy Valley deeply impressed by what I had seen and learned while there. But my journey continued and soon I moved on to other climes and new adventures.

These memories might have remained mere pleasant souvenirs of my teenage travels in Colombia if I had not read, in late 2021, now in my first term at the University of Oregon, that Taita Miguel Ángel Muchavisoy had been murdered that August. Taita Miguel was not

only a renowned shaman, but a respected community leader and a former official in the Cabildo Kamëntšá Biyá of Sibundoy, an annually elected government body that represents the Kamëntšá people at the legal level. His assassination struck a blow to the whole community, but unfortunately it barely registered as a blip on the radar in Colombia, which has for years been among the most dangerous in the world in which to be an Indigenous activist or organizer. Far away from Sibundoy, as I began my studies at the University of Oregon and began to consider research topics for my eventual thesis, I learned of the senseless murder of the man who had made my first visit to the Sibundoy Valley so memorable. This troubling news set me thinking. In the intervening few years I had accrued enough knowledge to recognize the murder as part of a terrible pattern, but I also saw in the community's collective response of outraged denunciation a kind of hope.

As tragic as the story of Taita Miguel and the larger pattern it represents are, it seemed clear to me that some of the Indigenous communities most victimized by Colombia's violent past and present remain, against all odds, vibrant and resilient today. In the case of the Kamëntšá, the ancestral inhabitants of the Sibundoy Valley, nearly five hundred years of colonial dispossession have not succeeded in stripping them of their unique culture, language, and thought. This historical legacy of cultural resilience was clear to me not only from what I witnessed when I visited Sibundoy and met Taita Miguel in 2019, but also increasingly from my readings into the Sibundoy Valley and its peoples, which I had spent little time formally investigating during my first visit. The murder of Taita Miguel served as the catalyst that began my efforts to better understand the historical and sociocultural dynamics of a place and a people that I had only glimpsed in passing several years before.

At the same time as I began to read up on Kamëntšá history and ethnography and to reflect on the contemporary situation of the community, new theoretical interests animated my study of anthropology at the University of Oregon. Longstanding general interests in themes of globalization, sociocultural change, subaltern resistance, and the legacies of colonialism began to coalesce around a specific interest in the consequences of first contact and intercultural encounter in the contact zones of colonial and contemporary Latin America. This burgeoning interest in the ethnohistory of Indigenous cultural resistance and adaptation under colonial pressures in Latin America led directly to my first formal research project when I gained admission to the Humanities Undergraduate Research Fellowship (HURF) in December 2021. Naturally, given my developing thinking in relation to the Sibundoy Valley, I opted to focus on processes of Indigenous transculturation—a theoretical concept I discovered soon after research began that perfectly encapsulated my interests—in Sibundoy Valley ethnohistory. The HURF project was conducted under the mentorship of Dr. Reuben Zahler of the Department of History and eventually resulted in my first academic publication, a research paper in the Summer 2022 issue of the *Oregon Undergraduate Research Journal* that won several undergraduate research awards. The experience of researching and writing this paper served as a vehicle to establish the historical context and general background knowledge, ethnographic and theoretical, necessary to pursue my next project, one that I hoped would take me to the Sibundoy Valley in person to conduct my first ethnographic fieldwork.

As it happened, in December 2021 I was also admitted to the McNair Scholars Program, which offers resources and guidance for the development of undergraduate research to promising young scholars of underrepresented and financially underprivileged backgrounds. Crucially, the McNair Scholars Program offers \$5,000 in discretionary summer research funding which can be used to cover independent project expenses. With much of the HURF research already under my belt, I opted to pursue contemporary ethnographic

fieldwork for the McNair summer research, which I decided would aptly double as a senior thesis for the Anthropology Honors Program. I soon secured a mentor for the proposed summer fieldwork in Dr. Maria Fernanda Escallón of the Department of Anthropology, whose graduate writing course, ANTH 685 Professional Writing, I took in Spring 2023 with the intention of writing the HURF paper in a structured setting with regular feedback. Dr. Escallón agreed to mentor my McNair research in the Sibundoy Valley through an independent study course, ANTH 408 Fieldwork, which would provide a structured means of sending regular reports from the field and receiving feedback to the questions and conundrums that inevitably accompany an ethnographer's first fieldwork. After receiving IRB approval for the proposed study with the help of Dr. Escallón and Dr. Christabelle Dragoo, director of the McNair Scholars Program, all formal barriers to fieldwork were lifted. Now it was only a matter of making the necessary arrangements and preparations as best I could.

In the meantime, while still in Eugene, I fretted much and often about how on earth I would “break in,” so to speak, and conduct my first ethnographic fieldwork as an undergraduate without formal methodological training, established contacts, or local knowledge in the proposed fieldsite and target community. So, with the intuitive understanding that good connections go a long way and that successful ethnography depends on asking many questions of many people, I set about contacting the authors listed in my HURF project bibliography, as well as any relevant community members and organizations in the Sibundoy Valley that I found on the internet and on social media. Many of these attempts led nowhere. However, it was my very good fortune, as things would turn out, to receive an early response from Dr. John H. McDowell of the Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology at Indiana University Bloomington. Dr. McDowell was one of the first Anglophone scholars to conduct ethnographic research in the Sibundoy Valley, beginning in the 1970s, and to this day remains one of the most experienced and fruitful in terms of his scholarly production on the valley and its peoples. His two books and many articles on the Sibundoy Valley were invaluable resources in the writing of my HURF paper, as the long email correspondence we struck up has been in conducting the present thesis research. I have Dr. McDowell to thank for connecting me with the Jacanamijoy family, his own research collaborators of decades past, with whom I stayed for three months of fieldwork in the Sibundoy Valley. Without their constant and generous companionship throughout my first foray into fieldwork, the experience would have gone much differently and would have undoubtedly been the poorer for it.

I arrived in Bogotá on June 12, 2022. I spent a few nights in the apartment of Natalia Jacanamejoy, the daughter of an old friend of Dr. McDowell, before flying to Pasto, the nearest big city to the Sibundoy Valley, which is about an hour and a half away by car over the misty Andean páramo and past the scenic La Cocha Lagoon, Colombia's second largest inland body of water by surface area. After a day in Pasto, Natalia flew down to join me in visiting her family and together we took a bus to Sibundoy, arriving as the sun disappeared behind the hills rimming the valley to the west. The Jacanamijoy family welcomed me with warm smiles, a warm dinner, and a warm bed; the atmosphere was instantly intimate and familial. Thus began eight weeks of fieldwork among the Kamëntšá of the Sibundoy Valley, a veritable rite of passage that would prove to be as personally transformative for me as it was ethnographically productive.

My objective upon arrival, building on the theoretical concerns animating my HURF research, was to collect oral histories concerning the Indigenous land rights struggle in the valley between the end of the Capuchin Mission in 1970 and the successful mobilizations for

the expansion of Indigenous reservations from 2010 onward. However, as often happens when conveniently neat plans developed from afar encounter real conditions in the field, my objectives and interests changed soon after arrival in the Sibundoy Valley. While I retained my focus on Indigenous territorial struggles, the novel perspectives discovered in the field brought new interests to light. Even as I interviewed elders who had participated in the land rights movements of the last century and compared these to the testimonies of the next generation of young land defenders, I met and befriended people of diverse backgrounds, commitments, knowledge, and expertise—artisans, shamans, musicians, artists, poets, lawyers, teachers, government workers, and even other anthropologists. The insights that arose out of my interactions with diverse collaborators suggested new directions and novel questions for my research. Gradually, I came to conceive of two main social processes animating my ethnographic interests: 1) *cultural reproduction*, or the ways in which Kamëntšá culture is being recuperated, resignified, or remade, particularly through intergenerational and intercultural mechanisms; and 2) *territoriality*, namely the culturally and philosophically grounded concepts of space and place being advanced to assert claims to autonomy over the ancestral territory of the Kamëntšá. Finally, I came to understand my overarching purpose in terms of defining and describing the intertwined relationship between these two social processes, or the ways in which the reproduction and rearticulation of Kamëntšá culture feeds into emic conceptions of territoriality and the contemporary struggle for territorial autonomy within the community, and vice versa.

At the same time, I continued to engage in theoretical reading that articulated well with my developing ethnographic interests. My timely and fascinating incursions into general anthropological theory surrounding such topics as Indigenous territoriality and autonomy, political ecology, political ontology, and cultural reproduction appeared increasingly applicable to the contemporary situation of the Kamëntšá and the social processes presently at work in their community. Gradually, in dialogue with my research collaborators by day and the theoretical texts I immersed myself in by night, I came to understand that one cannot conceive of Kamëntšá social processes each in isolation, but that they must rather be conceived collectively as pieces of a puzzle, or threads in a loom, integral to and inextricable from the whole. This realization developed especially through my deepening ethnographic involvement with the Kamëntšá artisans, particularly weavers, who produce the arts and *artesanías* that constitute and reflect the aesthetic, ceremonial, and functional universe of the Kamëntšá.

A culturally appropriate metaphor will serve to elucidate my point. Midway through my fieldwork in the summer of 2022, it struck me that the interrelationship between the cultural domains involved in the interwoven social processes I was investigating can be aptly compared to the pictographic symbology of the *tsömbiach*. The *tsömbiach* is a type of long woven belt inscribed with a sequence of unique symbols of generally agreed-upon values that the weavers say can be “read” like a book. But if the symbolic codes embedded in *tsömbiach* belts constitute texts, they do not function in the same way as alphabetic texts; no two *tsömbiach* are either “written” or “read” the same, and different observers can read the same one in different ways. Despite the ambiguities in meaning and interpretation of the specific symbolic sequence contained in any given *tsömbiach*, the stories they tell by combining and recombining a limited number of symbols tend to follow general typologies recognizable to the average Kamëntšá observer. In the *tsömbiach* one finds, linearly arranged, symbols representing the most important and salient aspects of the Kamëntšá lifeworld: people, animals, cultural objects, and the territorial features of the landscape of the Sibundoy Valley. The patterns in which these symbols are arranged and the ways in which these patterns are interpreted differ, but in all cases, they demonstrate the fundamental interrelatedness between

each discrete element of Kamëntšá culture, thought, territory, and lifeways. I came to conceive of the Kamëntšá lifeworld in its totality as a vast and complex tsömbiach, a woven fabric where each term cannot be regarded in isolation but only in relation to the rest. Hence the title of this thesis; the ancestral territory of the Kamëntšá, the Uaman Luar, is a fabric composed from the interrelated weft and weave of all the cultural elements—philosophical concepts, arts and artesanías, music, language, kinship structures, and more—that constitute the vibrant and vital lifeworld of the Kamëntšá. And this cultural-territorial fabric, like the tsömbiach designs produced and reproduced by Kamëntšá weavers since time immemorial, is *rewoven*—reclaimed, resignified, reinvested with meaning—through ongoing and broad-based social processes of cultural reproduction and territorial autonomy. As Kamëntšá culture is recouped and reproduced, Kamëntšá territoriality in both its abstract philosophical and concrete sociopolitical manifestations is strengthened, slowly but surely bringing the Kamëntšá towards a more sustainable, equitable, and autonomous future for their people.

This thesis is, in its own way, also a tsömbiach. I hope this rather ambitious text serves to communicate, by example of form as well as function, something of the interrelationality at the core of both Kamëntšá culture-territory and my academic endeavors.

These notions of interwoven relationality, even of the metaphor of both culture and territory as types of fabric constantly and collaboratively woven and rewoven, find resonance in many Indigenous conceptions of territoriality across the Americas. Indeed, many of the cultural features and philosophical concepts developed by the Kamëntšá that led me to this metaphor are only local representatives of a general and widely dispersed typology. For instance, when my Kamëntšá collaborators speak of the body as territory, or when they bury the placenta of newborns within the family hearth to establish a ritual link to the territory that cannot be broken, they are echoing or reenacting similar beliefs and practices that form part of the weft and weave of Indigenous territoriality elsewhere in Abya Yala and beyond. In discussing these features and practices in relation to Kamëntšá territoriality, I hope to both identify differences where they exist and to demonstrate the applicability of the processes at work among the Kamëntšá to other Indigenous communities regionally and internationally.

On August 15, 2022, I left the Sibundoy Valley after eight weeks in the territory. The next month, I was back in Eugene to resume Fall 2022 classes—a return that old-school anthropologists might term integration, the period of readjustment that follows the transformational experience of transition and liminality characteristic of the rites of passage. The beginning of a new school year and a return to old commitments put my fieldwork data on the backburner for a few months. In the meantime, the Knight Library Tiny Galleries Award allowed me to curate an ethnographic exhibit in the University of Oregon’s flagship library building putting on display the arts and artesanías of my Kamëntšá artisan collaborators. The installation of this exhibit constituted, I hope, an act of reciprocity in making both the artistic achievements and social processes of the Kamëntšá visible to my own communities in Oregon.

My ethnographic engagements were revived when I received an invitation from the Jacanamijoy to return to the territory in February 2023 to participate in Bëtskнатé, the so-called Kamëntšá “Carnival of Pardon.” Although the dates fell inconveniently in the middle of Winter 2023, I was happy to make the arrangements, especially to attend the most significant annual Indigenous festival in the Sibundoy Valley. With the blessing of my winter term instructors and the official letter of invitation from the Sibundoy Cabildo in hand, I headed back to Colombia for a breakneck two weeks of final thesis fieldwork. The return visit also gave me the opportunity to follow up with collaborators with whom I had worked the previous summer to ask new questions and share preliminary results and interpretations. I

kept myself very busy for those two weeks, mostly in preparation for the “Great Day” itself: Monday, February 20, 2023. Numerous interviews conducted prior to the celebration shed much light on its significance, especially in relation to the theoretical scaffolding provided by the fieldwork that preceded this return visit.

Having invested in a professional digital camera and additional videography equipment prior to arrival, I also came well prepared to build on a longtime interest in visual and multimodal ethnography. With my camera in hand the whole while, I was able to record dozens of hours of video, which I plan to cut and condense into my first ethnographic documentary. I also shot hundreds of photos, many of which feature in the text that follows. I hope these documents serve to provide visual insight into the vivid world of the Kamëntšá. All photos included in the text, unless otherwise noted, were taken by me.

There is much in this thesis that is provisional or preliminary. It goes without saying that a year spent reading and three months visiting have not managed to turn this curious gringo into an “expert” on the Sibundoy Valley and its people. The ethnographic descriptions and interpretations that I offer in this text necessarily reflect only a partial, subjective, and profoundly limited view into a rich and complex culture and society that no one researcher, least not this one, could hope to represent in its entirety. Additionally, there are limitations on the types of data made available to me during my time in the community. While in general my collaborators were extremely cooperative and helpful, some were justifiably reserved or suspicious given the problematic history of anthropologists working in Indigenous communities. Given these caveats, in the text that follows, it is not my intention to speak for the Kamëntšá, but to speak with them, guided by a research ethic and personal commitment based on principles of collaboration, reciprocity, and responsibility. Though I have done my best to tell my story and those of my Kamëntšá friends accurately, responsibly, and respectfully, any mistakes or distortions present in this manuscript (of which there are no doubt several) are solely my own.

One of the promises of ethnography is to put local knowledge in dialogue with themes of “universal” importance and to draw lessons from people and places grounded in space and time but whose import transcends local circumstances. For all the particularities in the lives of the Kamëntšá of the Sibundoy Valley that my research concerns, my work aims to contribute to theoretical discussions around autonomy, cultural reproduction, and territoriality as they occur in other contexts globally and cross-culturally. Applying stories and lessons learned from the Kamëntšá to other contexts furthers an anthropology of autonomy in situations of subaltern cultural resistance and environmental peril, one vital not only to an understanding of the great transformations underway across the world, but also to theorizing and putting into practice models of transition towards futures in which difference is finally allowed to flourish.

Part I.

Background: Context, Theoretical Framework, and Methodology

1. Introduction

This thesis is the product of more than a year of research at the University of Oregon and of three months of ethnographic fieldwork among the Kamëntšá people of the Sibundoy Valley in southwest Colombia. The impetus for this project developed from ethnohistorical observations demonstrating that the Sibundoy Valley has long been a nexus of intercultural encounter and exchange, and that the Kamëntšá have consequently developed strategies for preserving, recuperating, and rearticulating their culture under transcultural pressures. Building on my observations of the centrality of transculturation within Sibundoy Valley ethnohistory, I initially sought to observe and document similar strategies for cultural preservation and reproduction at work within the community today. Given the general historical success of Kamëntšá strategies to negotiate the transculturating pressures introduced by colonialism, evangelization, territorial dispossession, and socioeconomic and political marginalization and exclusion, I wanted to examine how such strategies are being put into practice within the community today, not only as part of a historical legacy responding to past intercultural incursions, but also in response to new, distinctly twenty-first-century challenges.

At first, I did not anticipate what a monumental task this would be. The search for the answers to questions as ambitious as the ones I sought to ask necessitated as total an immersion in the Kamëntšá community as was feasible given the limitations of time, funding, and training available to an undergraduate anthropologist. Naturally, three months spread out over several visits is little time for an outsider with no preexisting ties to the community to attempt to understand the complex links between local history and the various social

processes at work in the community today. Given the natural constraints imposed on this project, therefore, I must stress the provisional nature of my findings. Nevertheless, my three months among the Kamëntšá were not wasted. Intensive participant observation, continuous background reading, and a series of semi-structured interviews and focus group sessions recorded with members of the community representing various identities, professions, perspectives, and life experiences all brought to light crucial data on the social processes I was interested in. This thesis is my attempt to forward an understanding, based on a synthesis of the existing literature and my primary ethnographic data, of those processes, specifically in terms of what I came to recognize as a throughline underscoring the various cultural and social domains that I observed and passed through: cultural reproduction. This concept and its implications for Kamëntšá autonomy constitute the theoretical throughline of this thesis.

This thesis is organized in two parts and bookended by a narrative preface and three appendices. Part I establishes the general geographic, demographic, and historical background necessary to contextualize the ethnographic data and interpretations that I develop later. Part I also presents the theoretical framework through which I interpret my ethnographic data and, finally, describes the methodologies I employed in gathering and processing my data. Part II of this thesis introduces the ethnographic data derived from my three months of fieldwork in the Sibundoy Valley. Through my discussion of these data in dialogue with other ethnographic and theoretical texts, I forward an interpretation of cultural reproduction and territorial autonomy among the Kamëntšá based on engagement with various domains of contemporary Kamëntšá culture and society. Part II concludes with a discussion of the broader significance and implications of my research—for the Kamëntšá, for other Indigenous and subaltern populations engaged in cultural resistance and reexistence worldwide, and for the discipline of anthropology as a whole.

2. Background: Geographic and Historical Context

2.1 The Sibundoy Valley: Geography and Demography

The Sibundoy Valley is an intermontane basin of the Andes-Amazon interface of southwest Colombia. At an average elevation of 2,200 meters above sea level, the Sibundoy Valley is an ecological transition zone between the Andean highlands to the west and the Amazonian lowlands to the east, containing flora and fauna native to both regions, although Andean ecology predominates (Bristol 1965). It is also, significantly, the narrowest point in South America between the lowlands of the Pacific coast and the Amazonian rainforest of the continental interior (Davis 1997, 137). The valley has an area of approximately 470 square kilometers and an average temperature of 15 °C within a range of 6 °C to 24 °C. The valley contains three ecological zones depending on elevation: páramo, or alpine moorland, between 3,500 and 2,800 meters; intermediate, between 2,800 and 2,200 meters, corresponding to the slopes surrounding the valley; and the base of the valley, ranging from slightly concave to flat, at 2,000 meters (Grupo de Memoria Kamëntšá 2022). The base of the valley was formerly a shallow lake, but a series of drainage canalization and river diversion projects implemented by the Colombian Institute for Agrarian Reform (INCORA) between 1966 and 1986 made these lands available for settlement and cultivation, though these lands remain swampy and subject to seasonal flooding (Bello Torres 1987).

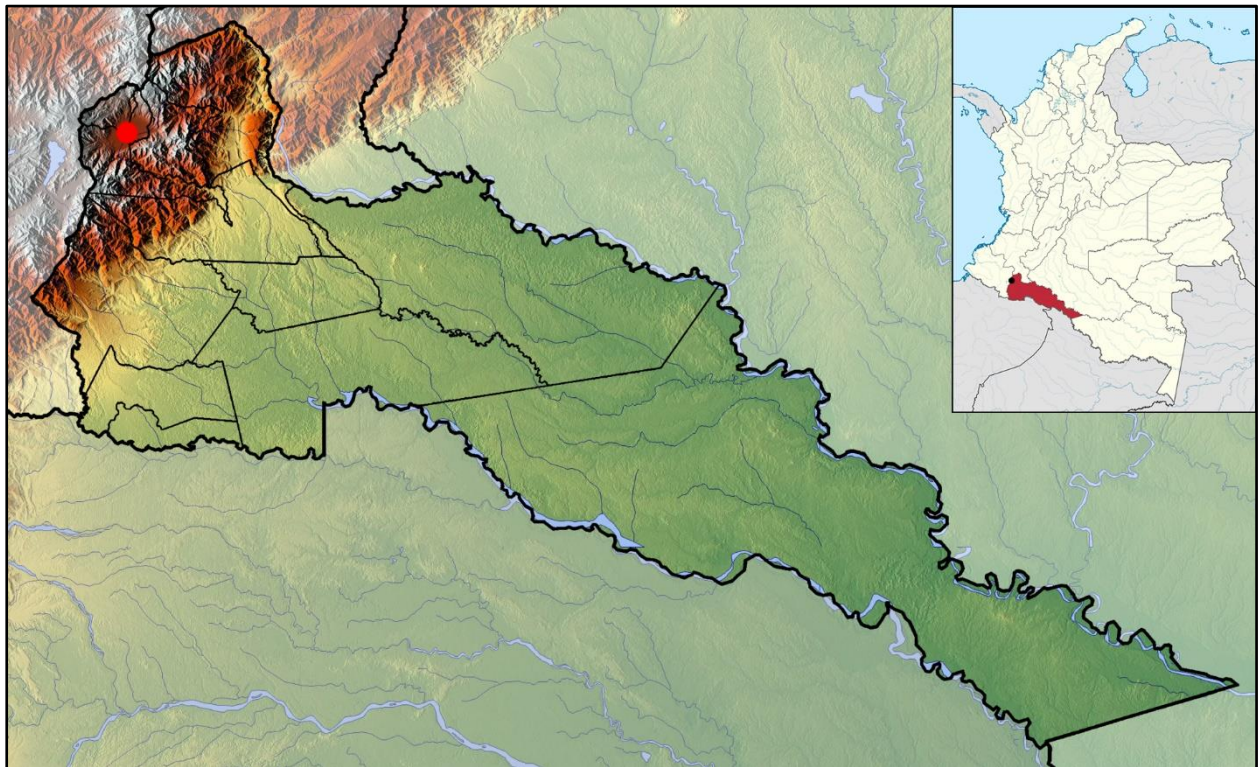
The Sibundoy Valley is coextensive with the upper region of the Colombian department of Putumayo, which in its entirety ranges from the Andean highlands of the Sibundoy Valley down to the sparsely populated Amazonian lowlands that comprise most of the department's area. The three regional subdivisions of Putumayo department are, in order of elevation from highest to lowest, and from west to east, the Alto or Upper Putumayo (i.e., the Sibundoy Valley), the Medio or Middle Putumayo, and the Bajo or Lower Putumayo.

Despite the ecological and climatic differences between the temperate Sibundoy Valley and the hot jungle interior, the three subregions of Putumayo have long maintained historical, cultural, and commercial ties, and transit between these regions is frequent. Owing to its strategic position between the Andean department of Nariño and the Amazonian lowlands, the Sibundoy Valley also serves as one of the most transited crossroads between these two regions of southwest Colombia. Map 1 illustrates the location of the Sibundoy Valley within Putumayo department and Colombia.

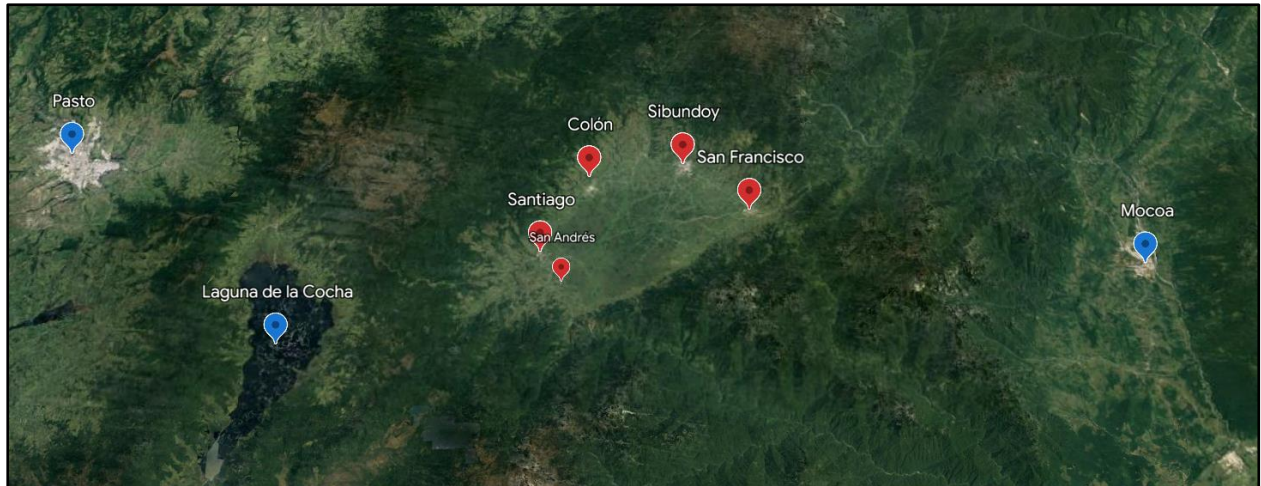
Administratively, the Valley of Sibundoy is comprised of four municipalities and several *corregimientos*, or municipal subdivisions. From east to west along the highway that runs along the northern periphery of the valley, the four municipalities are San Francisco, Sibundoy, Colón, and Santiago. The San Pedro River, which bisects the valley from north to south, is traditionally seen as the boundary marker between the two Indigenous populations of the valley, demarcating the Inga to the west from the Kamëntšá to the east (Chindoy, 2021, p. xv). Sibundoy and San Francisco correspond to the traditional territory of the Kamëntšá, while Colón and Santiago correspond to Inga territory. Map 2 highlights the location of each municipality within the Sibundoy Valley in relation to regional geography.

Demographically speaking, the Sibundoy Valley is primarily rural, with a total population approaching 32,000, according to the 2018 census (DANE 2018). The same census registered 7,521 Kamëntšá people, with the majority living in the municipalities of Sibundoy and San Francisco in the eastern half of the valley. The majority of the Kamëntšá population lives in rural districts called *veredas* that surround the urban zones of each municipality. Today, the urban zones are predominantly peopled by *colonos*, or non-Indigenous settlers, though the Kamëntšá retain a presence in Sibundoy and San Francisco proper, while some *colonos* have moved into the *veredas*.

In addition to the four municipal subdivisions of the Sibundoy Valley, there exist six *resguardos*, or Indigenous reservations with a degree of autonomous jurisdiction over their titled land. Each *resguardo* is under the authority of its respective *cabildo*, or Indigenous government council, composed of a cabinet of seven *cabildantes* (cabildo members) elected on an annual basis. Four of the *resguardos* of the Sibundoy Valley are in the name of the Inga people (those of Santiago, Colón, San Pedro, and San Andrés), one is Kamëntšá (Sibundoy), and one is Kamëntšá-Inga (San Francisco). Most of the veredas and the majority of the Indigenous population of the Sibundoy Valley are contained within these six *resguardos*.



Map 1. Location of Sibundoy Valley, marked with a red dot, within the department of Putumayo and Colombia. Note the geographically strategic position of the Sibundoy Valley between the Andean highlands to the west and the Amazonian lowlands to the east, distinguishing the valley as a cultural and ecological contact zone since time immemorial.



Map 2. Towns of the Sibundoy Valley (red pins) in relation to regional geography and neighboring departmental capitals (blue pins). To the west lies the Laguna de la Cocha, Colombia’s second largest inland body of water, and the city of San Juan de Pasto, capital of the Andean department of Nariño. To the east, down the treacherous piedmont road locally known as the Trampoline of Death, lies the city of Mocoa, capital of the Amazonian department of Putumayo, of which the Sibundoy Valley constitutes the upper, temperate region.

2.2 The Kamëntšá: Identity, History, and Contemporary Situation

The complete endonym of the people conventionally known as the Kamëntšá is “Kamëntšá Biyá,” literally meaning “speakers of the Kamëntšá language,” but sometimes translated more poetically as “people of this place with our own thought and language.”¹ The Kamëntšá have resided in the Sibundoy Valley since time immemorial and probably represent the direct descendants of its earliest population. The Kamëntšá speak a language isolate with no proven relation to any other language, although some linguists have proposed links to various language families in South America (Fabre 2001), and even as distant as Polynesia (Juajibioy Chindoy 2008, 17). The most credible assertions, to my mind, associate Kamëntšá with the extinct languages of the prehispanic Quillasinga federation of the Nariño

¹ These translations were provided by Natalia Jacanamijoy (personal communication, March 8, 2023); the second definition is also given on the “Kamëntšá” page of the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC). The Kamëntšá have historically been known by a range of other names. Complicating matters is that the Kamëntšá language does not have a standardized orthography, giving way to alternate spellings such as Kamsá, Camsá, Kamentza, Kamëntšá, Camëntšá, etc., all of which are prevalent in the literature. I employ “Kamëntšá” because it is the spelling preferred in several recent publications from the community itself. To my mind, it also best captures the pronunciation of the word itself, which can be rendered phonetically in IPA as: /kaməŋʃa/ (Adrián Múnera, personal communication, March 12, 2023).

highlands to the west, of which the Kamëntšá may represent a remnant or migrant population (McDowell 1992, 96; 1994, 10; Ramírez and Castaño 1992, 292). However, firm evidence for any direct linguistic relationship is lacking.

Culturally, the Kamëntšá are also unique, evincing a transcultural Andean-Amazonian base with considerable original elements and, today, a colonially imposed Catholic overlay. While the Kamëntšá share some philosophical and religious principles with widespread Andean cosmologies,² such as an ancestral solar god and a lunar goddess, or sacred landscape features similar to Andean *huacas*, they also share in the shamanic complex widespread across Western Amazonia through their use of the Amazonian entheogen *yagé*³ and other lowland plant medicines. The traditional horticultural garden full of edible, medicinal, and magical plants kept by Kamëntšá households, the *jajañ*, also bears similarities to the *chagra* system widespread in the Amazonian lowlands below. Kamëntšá artistic traditions, on the other hand, are unique, as is their ethnobotanical use of the pharmacopeia of the páramo region surrounding their valley (Bristol 1964; 1965; 1966; 1969; Schultes 1988; Schultes and Hoffman 1992; Schultes and Raffauf 1992; Seijas 1969).

In Western historiographical terms, it is unknown where the Kamëntšá came from or for how long they have inhabited the Sibundoy Valley, which in their language is called *Bëngbë Uaman Luar Tabanok*, “our sacred place of origin.”⁴ The Kamëntšá themselves,

² The folklorist John H. McDowell, who worked extensively in the Sibundoy Valley from the 1970s to the 90s, has written extensively on Kamëntšá mythology and its parallels to Andean cosmologies. See also the Kamëntšá folklorist and ethnolinguist Alberto Juajibioy.

³ *Yagé* is a generic term in Colombia for an entheogenic brew produced by mixing the vines of the liana *Banisteriopsis caapi* with any number of secondary potentiating plants. The same brew is more widely known elsewhere as ayahuasca. The ceremonial use of *yagé* is one of the most salient features of Sibundoy Valley ethnomedicine and shamanism.

⁴ This is the most elaborate of several related terms for the Sibundoy Valley in the Kamëntšá language, all of which are rather ambiguously translated, with different sources frequently giving different definitions of each: the others that I have seen and heard are *Tabanok*, *Uaman Luar*, *Bëngbë Uaman Tabanok*, more or less meaning, respectively, “place of return” or “place of origin,” “sacred space” or “intimate space,” and “our sacred place of origin.” I asked Juan Carlos Jacanamijoy, who has long been involved in language recuperation efforts among the Kamëntšá to clarify these terms; the English glosses above are approximations based on our discussion, but a perfect definition of each eludes me. Juan Carlos added that *Uaman Luar*, now commonly

however, do not conceive of their relationship with their territory primarily in chronological or historical terms, instead relying on an extensive body of mythic narrative and oral history that places their origins in a distant, mythic past. Kamëntšá origin myths locate their ethnogenesis in a “raw time” (*kaka tempoka*), in which the first people consumed all their food raw, for fire had not been invented yet. With the invention of fire came the domestication of corn, a major dietary staple, followed by an ancestral period of vague temporality in which a majority of Kamëntšá myths are set. Myths referring to the ancestral period begin in an early phase in which celestial bodies interact with the first people, animal-people walk the earth, substrate populations emerge, and a pervasive spiritual power runs rampant in the world. In a subsequent formative phase, substrate peoples are vanquished, proper social mores established, animals and people are separated, and spiritual power retreats to the periphery of the world. Finally, following the ancestral period comes the modern period, now firmly rooted in historical time, in which Spanish missionaries impose Catholicism, Kamëntšá lands are lost to settlers, and an elusive spirit realm persists, which poses dangers to ordinarily mortals but can be controlled by shamans through use of yagé (Juajibioy Chindoy 1987; 1989; McDowell 1989; 1992; 1994).

As for Western historiographical approaches to the possible origins of the Kamëntšá, preliminary archaeological evidence suggests that people were living in the Sibundoy Valley by at least 600 CE. Professional archaeology conducted in the Sibundoy Valley remains very limited, hampered by a lack of funds, little state and local interest, and a tenuous land rights situation. The only modern archaeological survey in the Sibundoy Valley was conducted in 1995 by a team led by Diógenes Patiño. This rescue survey was conducted along the route of

employed to refer to the Kamëntšá parts of the Sibundoy Valley, is a recent invention on the part of contemporary land defenders, but Tabanok and Bëngbe Uaman Tabanok are ancestral terms. Of these terms, “Tabanok” is probably the most common in daily parlance and can be seen in street art and graffiti around the town of Sibundoy in a stylized and vowelless variant: “TBNK.”

a planned electrical line running across the southern rim of the Sibundoy Valley. Patiño's study was limited to surface survey, spaced test pits, and several rapid excavations upon the discovery of archaeological features. Despite the limited scope of the survey, Patiño was able to make several discoveries that shed light on the ancient inhabitants of the Sibundoy Valley. Among the most notable discoveries were 1) agricultural terraces and platforms following an equatorial Andean typology, similar to those typical of Peru and Bolivia, though of non-lithic construction, which were apparently in disuse at time of Spanish incursion; 2) pollen cores showing evidence of plant cultivation which returned radiocarbon dates as early as 600 CE; 3) petroglyphs following a regional pattern; 4) the tomb of a high-status individual associated with artifacts related to a regional shamanic complex elements of which remain conspicuous among the Kamëntšá today; 5) and ceramic and lithic typologies unique to the Sibundoy Valley. Patiño concludes by stating that the limited evidence collected by his survey suggests that the southern foothills of the Sibundoy Valley were already densely populated as early as 600 CE by a people whose material culture evinces both local innovations and links of trade and intercultural borrowing with other peoples of the neighboring Andean highlands and Amazonian lowlands. He finally asserts that further excavation would likely produce evidence of earlier occupation (Patiño 1995).

Where archaeological scholarship on the Sibundoy Valley remains profoundly limited, ethnohistorical work abounds, although the contradictory nature of the various accounts of the ancient peopling of the valley complicates the picture. The Sibundoy Valley has long been a site of intercultural encounter and movement between various peoples of the Andes-Amazon piedmont, in part informing the development of a profoundly syncretic cultural atmosphere among the contemporary Inga and the Kamëntšá of the valley (Glass 2022). Emic accounts, predominantly mythic in nature, on the other hand, provide an insider's view into Kamëntšá notions of ethnogenesis in relation to their inhabitation of

Tabanok, “our sacred place of origin,” i.e., the Sibundoy Valley (Juajibioy Chindoy 1987; McDowell 1994). The most salient feature of Kamëntšá mythic narrative in terms of ethnogenesis is the fundamental belief that the Kamëntšá have always inhabited their territory, to which they are attached by sacred bond, which is ritually affirmed in various ways throughout the lives of members of the community. In short, the notion of the permanence of Kamëntšá habitation in the Sibundoy Valley is rooted in the oldest recorded oral histories of the community and reinforced by ritual.⁵

From the archaeological and ethnohistorical evidence summarized above, I draw two conclusions. First, the apparent similarities between some of Patiño’s archaeological finds and aspects of contemporary Kamëntšá culture, as well as the claims made by Kamëntšá oral history concerning the antiquity of their territorial presence, lead me to suspect that the people inhabiting the Sibundoy Valley at least as early as 600 CE represent the direct ancestors of the Kamëntšá. Second, assuming that mythic events such as the domestication of maize recorded in Kamëntšá oral history refer to historically or archaeologically traceable peopling processes—a correspondence that other Indigenous oral history traditions have demonstrated to be reliable—then it is reasonable to suppose that the presence of the Kamëntšá or their ancestors in the Sibundoy Valley may be very ancient, perhaps long predating the earliest archaeologically verified dates of 600 CE produced by Patiño.⁶

⁵ Inga accounts differ owing to the recognition, both etic and emic, of their external origins in Quechua-speaking groups migrating through the neighboring Amazonian lowlands. For this reason, Inga ethnohistory is less relevant than Kamëntšá mythic narrative in terms of the ancient peopling of the Sibundoy Valley.

⁶ Reliable radiocarbon dates have shown that humans were in northern South America by at least ~12,000 BP (Aceituno et al. 2013), with some sites elsewhere in South America, such as Monte Verde, Chile, evincing considerably earlier occupation. While the very limited archaeological work hitherto conducted in the Sibundoy Valley provided occupation dates only back to 600 CE, I believe that the geographically strategic location of the valley, its ecological fecundity, and the oral histories of the Kamëntšá all strongly suggest an initial peopling of considerably greater antiquity, perhaps millennia earlier than is currently firmly demonstrable. The bottom line is that more archaeological work must be done to confirm this supposition. The Sibundoy Valley’s perennial status as a crossroads between the Andes and the Amazon, and the shortest link on the continent between the Pacific coast and the Amazonian interior, suggest its possible archaeological importance in the story of the peopling of South America.

In any case, chronological certainty only comes with first contact between the Kamëntšá and a party of Spanish conquistadors under two lieutenants of Sebastián de Belalcázar in 1535, which was brief and violent. The valley was next visited by the conquistador Hernán Pérez de Quesada in 1542 during his ill-fated search for El Dorado (Bonilla 1968; Taussig 1987). In the following decades, a series of short-lived missions were established in the Sibundoy Valley by a succession of religious orders, but the isolation of the valley and the apparent reticence of its inhabitants forced these evangelists to periodically abandon their work (Bonilla 1968). The relative geographic isolation of the Sibundoy Valley allowed it to remain peripheral to the colonial system throughout Spanish rule and nearly empty of foreign presence until well into the nineteenth century, when an expanding Colombian state began to establish a firmer foothold on the Amazonian frontier. Despite its relative isolation, partial Christianization and sporadic contact throughout the colonial period saw the development of a syncretic Catholicism and other transcultural processes in the valley, as evinced by oral tradition and surviving colonial-era documents (Glass 2022). The relative isolation of the Sibundoy Valley—and therefore the relative autonomy of the Kamëntšá—ended with the advent of the Capuchin Order at the turn of the twentieth century.

The seventy-year rule of the Capuchins, beginning officially in 1904 and unofficially about a decade prior, initiated a process of colonization that saw the rapid dispossession of Kamëntšá lands by the mission, an influx of colonos from other regions of Colombia, and systematic efforts to strip the Kamëntšá of their culture while encouraging assimilation to the forcibly imposed and mutually reinforcing institutions of orthodox Catholicism and Colombian national identity. The first step taken by the Capuchins in establishing their new mission was to build a network of schools and churches. In the mission schools, Kamëntšá children would learn to speak Spanish, while speaking Kamëntšá was strictly forbidden and harshly punished. They were taught to sing the national anthem, to dress and behave like their

White and mestizo classmates, and to identify as Colombian before Kamëntšá. The avowed goal of the Capuchins was to “civilize the savages.” This was supposedly accomplished via conversion to Christianity, violent discouragement of the practice of Kamëntšá customs, and schooling according to a Western model. It was during the Capuchin period, which only ended in 1969, that the Kamëntšá not only witnessed the near-total loss of their lands and the attempted destruction of their culture and lifeways, but also the settlement of their territory by colonists and its subsequent ecological transformation and degradation at the hands of outsiders (Bonilla 1968; Restrepo 2006).

By the time of the mission’s decline, most Kamëntšá families had been displaced from the most productive lands of the valley’s slopes to the less fertile wetlands of the valley’s base, parts of which remained permanently inundated throughout most of the twentieth century. This left their former holdings in the hands of the colonos who now outnumbered the Kamëntšá in their own territory. In the decades since, the Kamëntšá have made significant gains in securing legal protections and the reclamation of stolen land, although much remains to be done. INCORA, a Colombian agrarian land reform agency founded in 1961, nationalized much of the former land holdings of the mission after its dissolution and began a lengthy and only partially successful process of redistribution to the Kamëntšá community. Nonetheless, the majority of the Kamëntšá land titles remained in the infertile and swampy base of the valley which was only partially improved by INCORA’s twenty-year land reclamation project (Bello Torres 1987). Additionally, the Colombian Constitution of 1991 guaranteed, at least on paper, Indigenous peoples’ right to a degree of political and territorial autonomy through the cabildo and resguardo systems. However, both were plagued by problems of corruption, ineffectively short electoral terms of one year per cabildo cabinet, and political gridlock between competing actors—not only between local

governments at the municipal or departmental level, but also within the Kamëntšá community itself (Bonilla 1968; Comunidad Camëntšá 1989).

The problems mentioned above notwithstanding, the effective capacity of the Kamëntšá for political and territorial self-government has gradually increased in recent years, especially since 2010, when a nascent social movement for territorial autonomy began in the community. Over the following decade, this movement, taking up the slogan “por la tierra, por la vida, por nuestra existencia,” succeeded in considerably expanding the Kamëntšá *resguardos*, formally restoring to the community the land claimed for his descendants by the legendary *cacique*, or tribal chieftan, Carlos Tamabioy in his last will and testament penned in 1700. This document remains significant to Kamëntšá ethical and legal claims to legitimate sovereignty over their ancestral territory, to which the recent social movement has applied his name in an act of homage: “Territorio Ancestral Carlos Tamabioy” (McDowell 2022; Ministerio del Interior and Cabildo Indígena Camëntšá de Sibundoy 2012; “Pueblos Kamëntšá e Inga” 2016; “Termina una disputa” 2016).

An important dimension of the recent and current territorial movement in the Sibundoy Valley responds not only to past and present conditions of territorial dispossession and occupation at the hands of colonos, but increasingly also to neoliberal and extractive development projects. Such projects include mining and oil drilling concessions made to multinational mining concerns such as AngloGold Ashanti, Antofagasta, B2Gold, and Libero Copper, all of which have held or currently hold shares in local subsidiaries such as Mocoa Ventures Ltd (Harris 2022; Libero Copper 2022; 2023; Rowland, Sim, and Davis 2021).⁷ Also important is a planned highway development, the San Francisco-Mocoa Bypass (*La*

⁷ Taussig (2004) has written compellingly on the parallels between Spanish conquistadors’ search for El Dorado through 300 years of colonial rule in South America, the Colombian origins of the El Dorado myth, and modern multinational mining concerns’ continued extraction of Colombian gold—modern legacies of a colonial myth. It is worth noting that one of the earliest expeditions in search of El Dorado, that of Hernán Pérez de Quesada, passed through the Sibundoy Valley in 1542 from out of the Putumayo lowlands.

Variante San Francisco-Mocoa), which would connect the eastern terminus of the Sibundoy Valley with the departmental capital. While the Colombian state claims that the highway would save lives and modernize the departmental infrastructure of Putumayo by replacing the sole existing road between San Francisco and Mocoa—the deadly and decrepit “Trampoline of Death”—the planned trajectory of the bypass runs through an ecological reserve and a section of Indigenous territory. Kamëntšá protesters have blocked the completion of the partially built highway on both counts, but the issue remains unsettled, with developers seeking means to resume work on the road. Many among the Kamëntšá also doubt the official line regarding the purpose of the highway, instead suspecting that its primary intended purpose is to facilitate the commercial exploitation of the natural resources of the ecological reserve that it would run through (Lizcano 2020a; 2020b; Sigindioy Chindoy 2013; Uribe 2011; 2019; 2020; 2021; “Variante San Francisco – Mocoa” 2020).⁸

In view of these projects, which have often depended on bad-faith legal arguments that deny the presence of the Kamëntšá on their ancestral territory, it is clear that the Kamëntšá territorial defense movement not only affirms the legal right to sovereignty over the community’s ancestral territory, but also embodies ecological concerns regarding the detrimental environmental effects of development projects such as mining and road construction. In other words, neoliberal and extractive development projects not only threaten Kamëntšá territorial autonomy in a legal and ethical sense by denying their historical and cultural ties to the territory, but threaten the ecological integrity of the territory itself, which the Kamëntšá conceive as *tsbatsána mama*, Mother Earth. The Kamëntšá, then, approach the

⁸ The San Francisco-Mocoa Bypass was formerly part of a series of international megaprojects under the Initiative for the Integration of the Regional Infrastructure of South America (IIRSA). IIRSA, now defunct, was a development plan established at the first South American Summit (*Cumbre Sudamericana*) in August 2000 with the support of several regional development banks, and later taken over by the Union of South American Nations (USAN), itself now nearly defunct. IIRSA initiatives have been roundly criticized for their potential to cause serious environmental damage where developed, especially in the Amazon rainforest (Escalante-Moreno 2022; Killeen 2007).

issue of territorial autonomy in terms of what McDowell (2022) has termed “ecospirituality,” evincing deeply rooted territorial concepts of place and belonging.

This is the situation in which the Kamëntšá find themselves today. Based on the history traced above, it is now possible to speak of the Sibundoy Valley as an arena for the development of settler colonial strategies of territorial and cultural dispossession in the Indigenous Colombian context. To complete this section on the historical context and contemporary situation of the Kamëntšá, I now attempt to situate their local story in relation to broader processes of settler colonialism, neoliberalism, and extractivism at work elsewhere in Indigenous Latin America.

2.3 Settler Colonialism, Extractivism, and Neoliberal Multicriminalism in the Sibundoy Valley

The colonial and postcolonial history of the Sibundoy Valley is the history of repeated invasions and territorial dispossessions. Since at least the second half of the nineteenth century, the Kamëntšá have witnessed the invasion of their land by waves of foreign colonists. First came Colombian merchants seeking quinine and rubber, agents of the state looking to consolidate and secure the national frontier, and missionaries, themselves acting on behalf of the Colombian state, bent on evangelizing and civilizing the lands of the “savages.” More recently, but as part of the same historical process, there have appeared the multinationals and other actors responsible for the infrastructural and extractive development projects outlined above (Bonilla 1968; Escandón 1913; Gómez López 2011). Given the historical constancy and current operation of settler colonialism in the Sibundoy Valley, I will briefly trace the intellectual lineage of this concept before investigating it in more depth in relation to the local and regional context of the Sibundoy Valley. This discussion will serve as context for my later discussion of Kamëntšá territoriality and autonomy.

Settler colonialism, a term that emerged from Indigenous and academic discourses in Australia and Anglo-America,⁹ is a type of colonization and colonialism—the first understood as an event, the latter as a continual process—that aptly applies to the situation of territorial and cultural dispossession and genocide in which Indigenous communities in Australia, the United States, and Canada have historically found themselves and which they continue to confront in the present. Only recently, however, have scholars interested in Indigenous issues in Latin American contexts comprehensively engaged with settler colonial theory developed in Anglophone contexts. Fruitful discussions have occurred in recent years between Indigenous scholars and scholars of Indigeneity from across Anglo-America and Latin-America, suggesting the suitability of the concept of settler colonialism to the experience of Indigenous peoples in colonial contexts in both regions.

Settler colonialism describes a type of colonialism characterized by the permanent¹⁰ dispossession of Indigenous peoples of their ancestral territories and the occupation of these territories by non-Indigenous colonizers. In these situations, the settling of Indigenous territories coincides with colonial efforts to eradicate, both physically and culturally, the Indigenous inhabitants of those territories. Following an initial land grab, Indigenous peoples are rendered outsiders in what was once their own territory and are subjected to various forms of official and unofficial violence, exclusion, dispossession, and othering that render them subordinates in a relationship, now perpetual, of colonial domination stemming from the

⁹ I use this term principally to refer to the US and Canada together, excluding the English-speaking countries of the Caribbean, which in many respects have histories and cultures that more closely resemble those of Latin America and other Caribbean countries than those of Anglophone continental North America.

¹⁰ *Ideally* permanent, that is, in the mind of the settler and according to the ideology enforced by settler colonial systems themselves. The question of alternatives to the settler colonial status quo is very much under discussion in Indigenous communities and among scholars and activists invested in these issues. The Land Back movement in the US and Canada is one example of an Indigenous response to the hegemonic notion of the permanence or inevitability of the settler colonial status quo in these countries. Similar movements exist throughout Latin America. The best-known case is probably that of the Zapatistas of Chiapas, Mexico, whose successful establishment of de facto autonomous zones under Indigenous sovereignty has inspired other movements for Indigenous territorial autonomy throughout the region (Harvey 2016).

cultural, political, economic, and territorial hegemony enjoyed by settlers living on stolen land (Castellano 2017; Speed 2019).

In my analysis of the collusion of the Colombian state and multinational development and extractive projects in the Sibundoy Valley, I draw on the concept of neoliberal multicriminalism introduced by Chickasaw anthropologist Shannon Speed (2016; 2019). In her analysis of Indigenous women migrants from Latin America to the United States, Speed defines neoliberal multicriminalism as a kind of “intersectionality of violence” (2019, 46), a system of collusion between corrupt state authorities, neoliberal corporate entities (both legal and illegal), and armed actors such as paramilitaries. The dark underside of neoliberal *multiculturalism*, which falsely promises the inclusion of minoritized and marginalized populations, neoliberal multicriminalism is characterized by a situation “in which violent, corrupt, and lawless states are driven by profit motives in massive scale illegal economies that lack any reasonable regulation or protection of basic human rights” (2016, 280). For Speed, this is the reigning status quo in Indigenous territories across Latin America, where corrupt statecraft, neoliberal economics, criminal enterprise, and racialized and gendered violence all coincide and reinforce each other. These forces converge to render Indigenous peoples “multiply vulnerable” (2019, 118).

Neoliberal multicriminalism as defined above aptly describes the profusion of state-sanctioned, corporate, and illegal infrastructure development and natural resource extraction projects currently being enacted on Kamëntšá soil in the Sibundoy Valley and the surrounding region. Indeed, it is important to situate the Sibundoy Valley within a broader context of historical and contemporary settler colonialism and extractivism, both of which have a long history in the region. Anthropologist Michael Taussig (1987), who spent time in both the Sibundoy Valley and the Lower Putumayo in the 1970s and 80s, has written extensively on the history of violence and terror deployed against the Indigenous populations

of both areas, especially during the Amazonian Rubber Boom at the turn of the twentieth century. Even as the Capuchin fathers established a “state within a state” (Bonilla 1968) in the Sibundoy Valley, the infamous Peruvian Amazon Company, also known as the *Casa Arana*, literally worked to death entire Indigenous populations in the Lower Putumayo. Although the Kamëntšá were spared the overtly genocidal violence inflicted against Indigenous peoples in the lowlands below their valley, the Sibundoy Valley experienced its own reign of terror and violence at the hands of the Capuchins, who were famous for their liberal use of the whip and other forms of corporal punishment and torture (Montañez, Gómez-Cáceres, and Reyes Albarracín 2020). Indeed, many of my older collaborators have spoken of the punishments inflicted on them for speaking their native language in the Capuchin schools of the mission days. While the situation has undeniably improved since then, the legacies and traumas of the Sibundoy Valley’s history of officially sanctioned violence live on in the collective memory of the community.

Also important to account for is the history of unofficial and criminal violence in the Sibundoy Valley. The cocaine economy, as is well known, is one of the primary pillars of organized crime and violence in Colombia, and it has not left the Sibundoy Valley untouched. Despite its reputation as a “safe haven” (*remanso de paz*) free from the narco-trafficking and attendant conflict between guerrillas, paramilitaries, and state security that plague the Lower Putumayo, the violence of the drug trade has long infiltrated the Sibundoy Valley and disproportionately affected its Indigenous populations in the process (Grupo de Memoria Kamëntšá 2022). In Colombia, young people, predominantly poor and rural, are frequently attracted to the coca trade as a form of social advancement and to escape from difficult conditions in their home communities. Known as *raspachines*,¹¹ these youths, who often

¹¹ Etymologically, this term refers to the “scraping” that constitutes the principal activity of coca leaf harvesting. Raspachines nationwide are generally young men from rural peasant backgrounds lured to coca cultivation zones by the promise of wealth and social mobility (Grupo de Memoria Kamëntšá 2022, 22).

work in the coca fields picking and processing leaf, are some of the most frequent victims of the cocaine trade. Although coca leaf is not cultivated in the Sibundoy Valley, the Middle and Lower Putumayo are some of the most productive coca-growing regions in the country, attracting many Kamëntšá youths due to poor economic prospects in the Sibundoy Valley. This situation is the product of the continual economic exclusion of the Kamëntšá community in its own territory at the hands of settler society and extractive economics. The violence of the drug trade in Colombia has only been compounded by the drug war waged against its participants by the Colombian state, with support from the US.¹² This situation exemplifies the collusion at work between official and unofficial forms of settler colonial violence and exclusion inflicted on the Indigenous communities of the Sibundoy Valley and elsewhere.

Finally, it is appropriate to relate this situation to the concept of epistemicide, a form of cultural genocide which, after the corporal violence of colonization itself, constitutes one of the most pervasive and serious consequences of settler colonialism. Epistemicide is the destruction of a people's knowledge system and way of thought, of the very foundations of epistemically and ontologically unique lifeworlds (de Sousa Santos 2014). For Indigenous peoples with ancestral relationships to the territories they inhabit, the ecological consequences of settler colonial occupation, transformation, and degradation of colonized territories have been disastrous for Indigenous ways of seeing and knowing. Indigenous resistance to settler colonial territorial occupation and environmental exploitation, therefore, is also cultural and even ontological resistance, serving to recuperate ancestral ways of

¹² This support came mostly in the form of ten billion dollars in funding and military aid through the Plan Colombia program between 2000 and 2015. Plan Colombia has since been rebranded as "Peace Colombia" (*Paz Colombia*) following the Colombian peace negotiations in Havana in 2016, but the program actually increased the amount of funding provided in 2017 compared to previous aid years (Rampton 2016). In Colombia, former president Álvaro Uribe (2002–2010) was one of the pivotal figures determining the use of Plan Colombia funds; he is also known for opposing the peace talks that followed his departure from office, for corruption, and for his links to military scandals such as the infamous "false positives" scandal, to the paramilitary organizations responsible for a majority of the deaths in the Colombian Conflict, and to business interests also complicit in corruption and paramilitary violence.

knowing and ways of being that enabled millennia of sustainable coexistence with the earth prior to colonial dispossession. The ecological devastation and cultural unraveling that have resulted from invasion and land theft in the past, and which now follow the neoliberal development and extractive projects currently underway in Kamëntšá territory, are the natural consequence of the epistemicide inflicted by settler colonialism. Ecology and culture are deeply intertwined; ecological and cultural wellbeing both can only be restored should the Kamëntšá succeed in their battle for territorial autonomy against the unjust and unsustainable settler colonial realities of both the past and present (Surrallés and García Hierro 2005).

The preceding pages have served to establish the geographic, historical, and contemporary context of the Sibundoy Valley and its Kamëntšá inhabitants. I now turn to the theoretical framework through which I interpret my ethnographic data.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Transculturation: Loss, Gain, and Synthesis

The first theoretical tool underpinning my treatment of the ethnographic data, *transculturation*, is one that I have applied before in interpreting historical processes of cultural change, adaptation, and rearticulation in Sibundoy Valley ethnohistory (Glass 2022). This term was first introduced in 1940 by Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz Fernández to describe the synthesis that defines Cuban culture as a medley of Indigenous, African, European, and Asian elements. For Ortiz, transculturation is defined first and foremost as a triadic movement of cultural change occurring in stages: 1) *deculturation*, or an initial loss of elements of the subordinated culture via the impositions of the dominating culture; 2) *acculturation*, or the partial gain and adoption of dominant cultural elements by the subordinated culture; and, finally, 3) *neoculturation*, or the synthetic emergence of new cultural elements out of the merger of multiple cultures in situations of encounter and negotiation (Allatson 2007; Millington 2007; Ortiz 1940). Ortiz had his native Cuba in mind when coining the term, as the unidirectionality of cultural change implied by the older anthropological model of acculturation could not account for the heterogeneity of Cuban identity. The applicability of Ortiz's theory to other situations of colonial contact and cultural transformation, however, would later cause it to circulate among scholars interested in describing similar processes in other contexts, especially where Indigenous cultures elsewhere in the Americas evinced cultural survival, adaptation, and resilience under the deculturating pressures of nationally and globally dominant cultures. As Spitta (1995) writes, “[t]ransculturation can thus be understood as the complex process of adjustment and re-creation—cultural, literary, linguistic, and personal—that allows for new, vital, and viable configurations to arise out of the clash of cultures and the violence of colonial and neocolonial appropriations” (1–2). It is in this sense that I have applied the concept of

transculturation to Sibundoy Valley ethnohistory, and in which I here apply it to contemporary processes of Kamëntšá cultural survival through the strategic accommodation of colonially imposed cultural elements alongside, or within, recuperated, resignified, and reproduced Kamëntšá cultural concepts and categories. This feeds directly into my concept of cultural reproduction, as formulated below.

3.2 Cultural Reproduction: Preservation, Recuperation, Rearticulation, and Invention

While cultural reproduction is an established term in sociological theory, having first been developed by French theorist Pierre Bourdieu, my definition of the term differs from its established use. Bourdieu's use of the term relates mainly to the ways that the "culture" or ideology of social elites is reproduced through education (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990; Jenks 1993). This basically describes a type of enculturation through which hegemonic and normative values are transmitted from one generation to another by standardized institutional means, such as school curricula. While Bourdieu can be credited with introducing cultural reproduction as an important concept within recent social theory, I consider the scope of his definition reductive and limiting. To focus only on the reproduction of the culture and ideology of elite classes in institutional settings cannot account for the more general processes by which culture writ large is produced and reproduced, especially in contexts other than the Western educational institutions with which Bourdieu was concerned. Bourdieu's definition also seems to reduce culture to ideology and leaves little room for the negotiation of meaning during the reproductive process within the institutions he examines, thereby minimizing the agency of the subjects upon whom elite ideology is imprinted. In short, while Bourdieu's theory may be applicable to Marxian readings of the reproduction of ideology in Western educational and institutional contexts, it is not useful for an interpretation of the ways in which subaltern cultures, such as many Indigenous communities,

agentially reproduce themselves in situations of colonial subordination. My redefinition of cultural reproduction attempts to rectify this problem of broader applicability.

What I term cultural reproduction encompasses a range of social processes involving the recuperation and resignification of traditional cultural elements *and* the creation of novel cultural forms based on traditional models that may, in the future, become tradition themselves.¹³ Differently put, I define cultural reproduction as a continuous and iterative intergenerational process by which elements of a culture are *preserved*, *recuperated*, *rearticulated*, or newly *invented* as part of a continuous cultural transformation through time. At any given point in this process, the culture in question is no longer quite as it was at any earlier juncture, but there is nevertheless a clear line of descent and inheritance from its earlier, ancestral forms to its later, modern iterations.¹⁴ For clarity, I will unpack the four italicized terms above, which I consider to constitute the four principal mechanisms by which cultural reproduction writ large occurs.

1. *Preservation* describes the relatively stable conservation and maintenance of ancestral and traditional cultural elements transmitted intergenerationally, with minimal modifications resulting in the process. Examples include the preservation of ancestral narratives or myths, which studies of oral tradition have demonstrated

¹³ My theory of cultural reproduction emerges from my fieldwork and the terminology employed by my Kamëntšá collaborators, who themselves often used terms such as *recuperación* and *innovación* to describe what they understood as processes of rescuing ancestral cultural elements while, at the same time, reinterpreting and reinventing others. This theory is, then, the fruit of the grounded theory approach described below in section 4. Methodology.

¹⁴ “Modernity” is a tenuous notion with a range of possible values and interpretations. It is often assumed that tradition and modernity are at odds, or that “traditional cultures” cannot exist in a modern context without a considerable loss of local culture and tradition. In other words, “modern” connotes “Western” and “advanced,” while “traditional” connotes “Other” and “primitive” (as the old anthropological and popular terminology has it). This perspective, of course, situates contemporary Indigenous peoples and other subaltern or subordinated (i.e., “traditional”) cultures outside of modernity, the privileged purview of Western, capitalist, and globally hegemonic societies. Part of the impetus behind this thesis project is to critically examine what Indigenous modernity looks like—that is, how peoples like the Kamëntšá claim and create their own modernities outside of Western and colonial imaginaries.

can remain remarkably consistent in form and content over centuries or millennia of transmission.

2. *Recuperation* describes the retroactive rescue and reclamation of traditions imminently threatened by devaluation or loss of cultural knowledge. Examples include language revitalization, which entails the rescue of cultural knowledge systems threatened by language loss. Just as revitalized languages may be only partially recovered or subjected to modification during the process of revival, cultural recuperation is often only partial and may entail the modification of recovered traditions.
3. *Rearticulation* describes the resignification of traditional elements, or the ways in which traditions are reinterpreted and modified during the process of intergenerational transmission. Examples include celebrations or rituals that carry over intergenerationally, but which are assigned new values or interpretations over time, sometimes to the point that the original significance of the event is forgotten.
4. *Invention* describes the synthesis of novel cultural elements or traditions which emerge from, draw on, or recombine features already extant in the culture. As genetic mutation is to evolution, invention is arguably one of the basic mechanisms of cultural variation, and like mutation, the conditions for the invention of novel cultural forms are immanent within the preexisting cultural repository that they emerge from.¹⁵ Inventions derive from preexisting traditions, but it bears remembering that all traditions were themselves once invented from

¹⁵ It is not my intention here to model an evolutionary theory of culture—an antiquated and largely retired endeavor in anthropology, and for good reason—but if we wish to take this comparison a little further, we could say that whereas cultural invention is akin to mutation in that it arises internally based on preexisting and locally available elements (cultural or genetic), neoculturation in Ortiz's schema (i.e., the syncretic and synthetic emergence of novel cultural phenomena from out of transcultural encounters) is comparable to gene flow or genetic recombination; both are mechanisms for the generation of genetic diversity from external sources. *Nota bene*: I am not a biologist.

the cultural resources that preexisted them. Examples of cultural invention abound; a basic one might be the gradual development of novel musical genres from established ones, which in fact has occurred in the Kamëntšá musical scene, as will be discussed later.

The combined operation of the four mechanisms outlined above constitutes the broader social process of cultural reproduction as I have theorized it in application to the Kamëntšá case, but it seems to me that this theory is descriptive of cultural change and continuity through time more generally. This may be especially true in situations of transculturation, interculturality, and institutional power imbalance—the general situation in which Indigenous peoples in Latin America presently exist. As an important addendum to the schema sketched above, I do not recognize as valid the distinction between “genuine” and “artificial” traditions established by Eric Hobsbawm in his influential work on invented traditions (1983). Whereas for Hobsbawm traditions appear to be either established and legitimate or invented and artificial, I posit the cycle of preservation, recuperation, rearticulation, and invention of traditions as part of one continual and iterative process of cultural reproduction.

Having established my model of cultural reproduction as one of the theoretical backbones of this thesis, which I will employ to describe contemporary processes of cultural reproduction among the Kamëntšá, I turn now to a description of the ways in which Indigenous autonomy—political, cultural, and territorial—has been theorized in the Latin American context. This discussion allows me to situate processes of autonomy among the Kamëntšá within a broader regional and theoretical context.

3.3 Indigenous Autonomies in Latin America: Political, Cultural, and Territorial

In recent decades, an academic conceptualization of autonomy has emerged through the work of scholars writing at the intersection of social movements and political ontology (Escobar 2008, 2020; Dinerstein 2014; Gonzales and González 2015; González 2015; López Flores and García Guerriero 2018; Rosset and Pinheiro Barbosa 2021; Sieder and Barrera Vivero 2017; Schavelzon and Pitman 2019). For these scholars, autonomy is understood in terms of “the integration of people and nature, traditional management practices, the role of traditional authorities, and the resulting conservation of the environment” (Escobar 2008, 58). Related to this conceptualization of autonomy are similarly relational notions of “territory, culture, and identity linked to particular places” (282). In short, autonomy is theorized academically as interwoven with cultural reproduction, territorial recuperation, and identity; movements for autonomy in the Latin American context are therefore movements not only for autonomous self-government and justice, but also for the recuperation and remaking (“reexistence”) of culture, territory, and identity.

While elements of the above theorization are generally applicable to various movements for Indigenous autonomy in Latin America, a key problem for some Indigenous scholars is that such ideas are products of the intellectual “palaces” of coloniality and empire: the universities of the Global North (Cusicanqui 2019, 101). Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, an Indigenous Bolivian scholar, argues that academic conceptions of autonomy cannot enact a decolonial praxis due to their origins within such “palaces,” instead serving to implicitly legitimize the institutions and epistemologies of a colonial “geopolitics of knowledge” based in the Global North (102). Cusicanqui believes that “it is our collective responsibility not to contribute to the reproduction of this domination” (101) and that “there can be no discourse of decolonization, no theory of decolonization, without a decolonizing practice” (100). From this perspective, academic discourse around decoloniality and autonomy is toothless—worse,

it privileges performance and fashionable jargon above active engagement with Indigenous movements. There is also a kind of colonial extraction implicit in the academic cooption of Indigenous theory developed in the Global South, wherein “just as in the global market for material goods, ideas leave the country converted into raw material, which become regurgitated and jumbled in the final product” (104). Indigenous autonomous praxis is thereby converted into a bastardized and defanged “decolonial” theory made palatable to Northern intellectuals.

More important than the academic interpretations of autonomy offered in response to grassroots movements *for* autonomy within subaltern Latin American contexts are, of course, those movements themselves, which articulate and mobilize locally grounded visions of autonomous futures in specific acts of political, cultural, and territorial resistance and reexistence across the region. In the last twenty years or so, ethnographic case studies of these movements have proliferated, modeling local variants on what is an international reaction to centuries of oppression and, more particularly, to the rampant abuses and incursions of neoliberal multicriminalism in their lives, cultures, and territories (Altmann 2017; Amigo 2022; Baracco 2017; Cott 2001; Gaitán-Barrera and Aseez 2015a; 2015b; Hale 2001; Harvey 2016; Hope 2021; Laing 2020; Lang 2022; Larson et al. 2016; Postero and Tockman 2020; Ramos Cortez and MacNeill 2021; Stephen 2005; “The Indigenous Guard” 2020; Velasco 2011).

These case studies profile movements for autonomy along multiple lines and in vastly different cultural and regional contexts, from Patagonia to the Sonoran Desert, but all contribute to a developing discourse, at both the grassroots and academic levels, around the theory and praxis of autonomous alternatives to the status quo. These movements have generally coalesced around three distinct but mutually intertwined modes of autonomy: *political autonomy*, or self-government in the administrative and judicial spheres; *cultural*

autonomy, or the right to cultural difference and coexistence outside of or alongside settler colonial and globally mainstream cultures; and *territorial autonomy*, or the right to what McDowell (2022) has termed “ecosovereignty” over ancestral lands, which not only provide the ecological resources necessary for sustenance and the reproduction of life, but which also, on an ontological and epistemic level, form an integral part of Indigenous cultures’ sense of place and identity. For clarity, I will expand on each of these points below, though it bears reiterating that these are mutually dependent and inextricable modes or expressions of autonomy writ large.

Political autonomy has perhaps been best represented and enacted by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), an Indigenous insurgent movement based in Chiapas, Mexico. The Zapatistas emerged from the Indigenous interior of Chiapas on January 1, 1994, in protest of the enactment of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which jeopardized the livelihoods of small farmers in Mexico by enabling the neoliberal privatization of Indigenous communal landholdings. The San Andrés Accords signed with the Mexican state in 1996 granted autonomy to a network of Indigenous enclaves called *caracoles* established and defended by the Zapatistas. Since then, the Zapatistas have elaborated a theory and praxis of Indigenous autonomy according to which “the people command and the government obeys,” a foundational principle which has become a slogan of the Zapatista movement. Autonomy is here no longer a matter only of reproducing Indigenous traditions or reiterating the relationship between people and land, as the academics posit, although these are important aspects of the Zapatistas’ praxis. What differentiates the Zapatistas’ understanding of autonomy from that of intellectuals working in the “palaces” of the “geopolitics of knowledge” (Cusicanqui 2019) is the distinctly political nature of the former. The “good government” of the Zapatistas, therefore, is a distinguishing element of the experiment in Chiapas, signaling that a praxis of Indigenous political

autonomy must entail a rejection of neoliberalism and the state as colonial institutions, proposing instead principles of self-determination and political sovereignty as integral to the autonomous project.¹⁶

Despite their successes, the Zapatistas are unique in terms of the extent to which they were able to establish a near totally autonomous political regime in the areas liberated from state presence. For most Indigenous groups seeking political autonomy, their objectives have necessarily been more modest, consisting instead in local regimes of partial self-government nested within an overarching administrative state apparatus. This is the case in Colombia, for example, where since the promulgation of the Constitution of 1991, Indigenous groups have had the legal right to self-organize under cabildos, some with a designated *resguardo* over which they have legal jurisdiction. In such cases, political autonomy has seen a more limited implementation than in the rare cases of total *de facto* sovereignty like that of the Zapatistas, but a degree of autonomy in the realms of governance and justice is still available, with certain limitations depending on regional context. A common problem in these cases occurs when a given Indigenous group's political autonomy depends on the recognition or endorsement of a non-Indigenous (e.g., state or national) legal entity, which may (and often do) fail to recognize the legitimacy of Indigenous claims or aspirations. In some cases, the size of *resguardos* and the political efficacy of cabildos is also subject to variation and change according to national legislation, presenting a constant background threat to political autonomy for groups that have achieved it through state institutional means (González 2015; Surrallés and Hierro 2005).

¹⁶ Also central to the Zapatista conception of autonomy is the role of women within the revolutionary project. Of four Zapatista volumes outlining their project, one was devoted entirely to the elaboration of the Zapatistas' Women's Revolutionary Law (Marcos 2014). The ten points of the Women's Revolutionary Law convey the understanding that women are fundamental to the success of the autonomous project. According to Mexican scholar Sylvia Marcos, "this process is presently the most successful proposal for constructing another world that is more just for women and, indeed, for everyone. And it is one that is created concretely by them through [the Zapatistas'] daily practices" (2). Such daily practices exemplify the spirit of praxis that animates the Zapatista autonomous project, which is often absent from academic discussions of autonomy.

Cultural autonomy describes what might be called the right to cultural difference—a term which I take in an expansive sense to also signify ontological and epistemic difference, as will be discussed in more depth below—in situations of interculturality and colonial power imbalance. More concretely, cultural autonomy describes Indigenous peoples’ right to valorize, maintain, and reproduce their own cultures free of outside interference or suppression at the hands of nationally and globally dominant cultures. The recognition of cultural autonomy as an integral part of an overall state of autonomy derives from the understanding that Indigenous cultures have long been attacked, suppressed, or devalued by colonial ones, and that such cultural dispossession continues to occur where Indigenous peoples’ right to difference is not guaranteed or respected. Cultural autonomy can apply to many spheres of social life, including language, Indigenous intellectual property, and forms of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, among many others. An example of a significant domain in which cultural autonomy is often expressed, and which is particularly pronounced in this respect among the Kamëntšá, is that of artisanry and handicrafts. Kamëntšá artisans practice a type of cultural autonomy by transmitting aspects of Kamëntšá culture—including symbology, language, and philosophical principles—through the reproduction of traditional artisanal artforms which serve both aesthetic and practical functions within the cultural universe of the community. This praxis of autonomy is maintained despite the availability of commercially available alternative products which are industrially mass-produced rather than handcrafted, serving to valorize and fortify the cultural values embodied in artisanal products (Barrera Jurado 2015; 2016; Barrera Jurado, Quiñones Aguilar, and Jacanamijoy Juajibioy 2018).

Finally, territorial autonomy refers to Indigenous peoples’ right to exist and reproduce their culture in coexistence with the territories to which they are ancestrally bound. Primary to this concept is the acknowledgement that Indigeneity always implies territoriality, meaning

a constellation of unique historical and cultural ties between a given Indigenous people and its ancestral territory. Territoriality is not a recent creation by Indigenous peoples, even if it has only recently been theoretically enunciated; concepts of territory, territoriality, and conceptions of nature are built into the ontologies and epistemologies of Indigenous peoples and are integral to their sense of place and identity. The recuperation and reproduction of territory and territoriality has therefore become an integral part of the autonomous project for Indigenous peoples in movement throughout Latin America, meaning first and foremost Indigenous peoples' right to self-determination and collective access to the territories that they occupied prior to colonization (Chindoy 2022; Escobar 2008; González 2015; Schavelzon and Pitman 2019; Surrallés and Hierro 2005).

As a corollary to this discussion of territory and territoriality, it is important to distinguish between Indigenous and Western visions of territory, which can be expressed as the distinction between, in the former case, a relational fabric in which nature and culture are interdependent and intertwined and, in the latter case, a nature-culture dualism that construes people and nature as essentially different and unconnected. It is this ontological distinction which is at the heart of the effective differences between Indigenous and colonial land use patterns. The former tends towards ecological sustainability and equilibrium and the latter towards ecologically unsustainable and extractive procedures that tear asunder the relational fabric between people and their territory. Surrallés and Hierro (2005) articulate this distinction more completely in the following terms:

[The Western] emphasis placed on natural resources distorts the [Indigenous] territorial vision. The natural resources—water, hills, waterfalls, animals, including people, spirits of the forest and every single small insect—are primarily integral beings within a relational space that simultaneously identifies them in myth and situates them in history, the environment, the economy as well as in society. This “relational” space is not a space divided into zones of utility. From this perspective, far from constituting a geometrical area framed by physical landmarks that separate and demarcate it, an indigenous territory is simply the consolidation of a very specific and singular fabric of social ties between the different beings that make up that environment. (10–11)

In situations of territorial dispossession and ecological destruction, territorial autonomy offers Indigenous communities the possibility of undoing the harms, both sociocultural and ecological, of the colonial misuse of their ancestral territories. For this reason, territorial autonomy is sometimes framed in terms of the recuperation and reproduction of territory (e.g., Laing 2022; Larson et al. 2016), acknowledging that territories are integral and dynamic fabrics of cultural-natural interrelationships and not merely reducible to land and ecology.

To close this discussion of Indigenous autonomies in Latin America, it is necessary to briefly review a final concept, one which has enjoyed considerable currency in both grassroots and academic discourses surrounding autonomy in recent years: *buen vivir*, a Spanish approximation of the Quechua *sumak kawsay* (“the plentiful life” or “good living”). Buen vivir emerged in Andean communities in the 1990s as an alternative to conventional—that is, global, capitalist, and neoliberal—models of development, stressing harmonious, reciprocal, and relational coexistence between culture and nature rather than capital accumulation and “progress,” as the capitalist model posits. Buen vivir articulates with models of Indigenous autonomy by proposing just and sustainable self-government independent from colonial and global mainstreams which continue to render Indigenous communities multiply vulnerable. Several decades after the term was first introduced, Indigenous movements outside of the Andean contexts in which buen vivir was initially formulated have adopted the term and its principles in forwarding their own visions of autonomy. Buen vivir can thus be seen as a particularly mobile and influential concept within a larger discursive field in which Indigenous visions of autonomy are adopted and adapted according to local circumstances within a transnational and pan-Indigenous movement seeking alternatives to the monocultural mainstream (Altmann 2017; Lang 2022; Pardo Quintero 2015; Schavelzon and Pitman 2019; Sieder 2017). This leads us, finally, to the concluding discussion of this section, which contrasts Indigenous pluriversal politics against

the monocultural, homogenizing, global vision imposed and represented by what the Zapatistas term the “capitalist hydra” (Sixth Commission of the EZLN 2016).

3.4 Pluriversality: Radical Interdependence against the One-World World

In the Fourth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle (1996), the Zapatistas proclaimed:

Many words walk in the world. ... There are words and worlds which are lies and injustices. There are words and worlds which are truths and truthful. ... In the world of the powerful there is no space for anyone but themselves and their servants. In the world we want everyone fits. In the world we want many worlds to fit. (10)

This sentiment, so eloquently expressed by one of the first and by all measures one of the most successful movements for Indigenous autonomy, has, in the intervening decades, become one of the guiding throughlines of Indigenous autonomous and decolonial thought in Latin America. Scholars such as Arturo Escobar, Mario Blaser, and Marisol de la Cadena, among others not based in the “palaces of the geopolitics of knowledge,” have adopted the term “pluriversality” to describe this vision of multiple worlds in coexistence. For thinkers and activists engaging with pluriversality, the term and the praxis of “worlding” that it implies present worlds of possibility for ontologically and politically just and ecologically sustainable futures outside of the globally hegemonic, capitalist status quo. It is no coincidence that this concept first emerged through sustained anthropological engagement with Indigenous cosmological and philosophical systems in the Americas. These systems are, as a rule, integrally relational and emphasize the interdependence of culture and ecology for the wellbeing of both (Chindoy 2022; Escobar 2018; 2020; de la Cadena and Blaser 2014; Hope 2021).

Pluriversality contrasts with what Escobar (2018; 2020) has termed the “one-world world”: a monocultural, homogenizing, and universalizing vision of reality as an ontological singularity, one reality under which all people and cultures are subsumed. This one reality happens to resemble very closely the dualist ontology of globally dominant forms of

Enlightenment liberalism, which posits an existential difference between culture and nature and subordinates the latter to the service of the former, thus making way for the situation of ecological degradation and impending climate collapse that threatens ecosystems and societies alike on both local and global scales. The one-world world is therefore based on an “ontology of separation” (Escobar 2018, 220) as well as one of exclusion—not only separation of culture and nature, but exclusion of any type of ontology which posits a more relational and interdependent world in which the former depends on the latter. The one-world world ontology tends to destroy what it cannot coexist in relationship with, namely other worlds. It thereby seeks to reduce a diverse and dynamic pluriverse to a monolithic universe.

This is not to suggest that there exists any fundamental incommensurability between Western and Indigenous ontologies per se. According to the Kamëntšá philosopher Juan Alejandro Chindoy (2022), this idea of basic incompatibility is a product of a belief in total alterity inherited from colonial epistemologies. For Chindoy, there can and should be an intercultural philosophical engagement between Western and Indigenous ontologies, though perhaps necessarily through the epistemic procedures postulated by the latter. He critiques the idea that there are no “points of dialogue” between both traditions; one point of contact is precisely the idea of a relational ontology, which finds parallels in the Western tradition prior to the introduction of a one-world world ontology in the post-Enlightenment era. Indeed, the pluriverse as a “world of many worlds” exists across time and space, even where this ontology is dominant today; worlding, or the enactment of alternative ontologies, is an act of subterranean resistance to the homogenizing imposition of the one-world world. As Escobar (2018) puts it:

It is often said that the notions of relationality and the communal apply only to rural or indigenous peoples, or to those cases where people maintain an attachment to a territory; in other words, they do not apply to urban moderns always on the move. This is a partial truth at best, for we all exist within the pluriverse. For those of us who live in the delocalized and intensely liberal worlds of middle-class urban modernity,

the historical imperative is clearly that of recommunalizing and reterritorializing.
(200)

For thinkers and enactors of pluriversal politics, the imperative is to keep alive the promise of difference. For Indigenous peoples who exist in resistance, this has always been the imperative since the colonial encounter first imposed the cultural and territorial dispossession that sought to sever the links of communality and interdependence on which life depends. The defense of the territory and of the rights of nature is therefore an act of ontological resistance as well.

In the preceding pages, I have established the theoretical framework that guides the ethnographic description and analysis that follows. The core theoretical concepts enunciated above have been: 1) transculturation, a classical model of intercultural change and synthesis, leading to a more nuanced model of 2) cultural reproduction, a grounded theory model of intracultural change through time defined by concurrent and iterative processes of preservation, recuperation, rearticulation, and invention; 3) Indigenous autonomies in Latin America, defined by interdependent political, cultural, and territorial dimensions; and 4) pluriversality, or radical interdependence, a model of coexisting worlds drawn from Indigenous thought and in opposition to the globally dominant one-world world ontology. I turn now to the final section of Part I of this thesis, describing my methodology and methods.

4. Methodology

4.1 Data Collection: Conventional Ethnographic Methods

In collecting data for this research, I primarily followed conventional ethnographic fieldwork techniques, employing the following methods: participant observation, written fieldnotes, unstructured non-recorded interviews, semi-structured audio-recorded interviews, semi-structured audio-recorded focus groups, and semi-structured video-recorded interviews. Ethnographic activities took place in a variety of settings, usually personal homes, institutional and government buildings, and cafes and restaurants, and included events such as community gatherings, birthday parties, yagé ceremonies, cultural festivities, concerts, *mingas* (collective work projects), workshops, and focus groups.

Participant recruitment proceeded primarily using the snowball method, beginning with the Jacanamijoy family, my hosts in vereda Tamabioy outside of the town of Sibundoy. The Jacanamijoys, especially my friends Natalia and Juan Carlos, proved essential as “bridges” (*puentes*), as they put it, between myself and the community, helping me immensely during my first few weeks of fieldwork by introducing and recommending me to traditional authorities, artisans, shamans, artists, land defenders, and many other people who became key participants in my ethnography. Each new person I met was able to put me in contact with a network of other potential participants to the point that, after several weeks in the field, I was able to arrange interviews, meetings, and other ethnographic events with ease. Staying in contact with many of the collaborators I met early on throughout the course of my research also helped build rapport and establish effective and trusting working relationships. I owe a special debt to Omayra Jacanamijoy, who personally recommended me to the current *taita gobernador*, or head cabildante, of the Kamëntšá Cabildo of Sibundoy when I needed to solicit permission to use visual methods in documenting the Bëtsknaté celebration in

February 2023. Speaking solemnly to the gobernador in the ritual register of Kamëntšá, reserved for ceremony and highly formal speech occasions, she helped me legitimize my research in the eyes of the highest political authority of the Kamëntšá.

In total, during my first fieldwork period of eight weeks in the summer of 2022, I recorded eight individual interviews and two focus groups. All interviews were semi-structured. I came to interviews with a list of five to ten prepared questions, which I modified depending on the background of my interlocutor. During each conversation, I would pose new questions as relevant and opportune and discard prepared questions as necessary. Before each interview, I would also go over my list of questions with the interviewee and ask them to make any preferred modifications or interpolations they may wish. This approach allows me to conceive of my interviews as collaborative and creative endeavors in which the content and direction of each interview were coproduced by both interviewer and interviewee, an approach suggested by Heyl (2001).

My approach to ethnographic interviewing is also informed by the work of Charles L. Briggs (1986), whose *Learning How to Ask* is a classic in the literature around this foundational technique. Briggs' emphasis on the importance of paying attention to culturally specific modes of communication helped me ascertain the best approach to initiating and conducting interview encounters—and attuned me to cultural cues that indicated when this approach was unwelcome or inappropriate. For instance, there was a moment during one conversation with a widely respected Kamëntšá shaman and land defender that crystalized for me the reflexive understanding that I had not yet “learned how to ask” according to the communicative norms of Kamëntšá culture. As John McDowell has abundantly shown in his studies of Kamëntšá speech performance (1983; 1990; 1995; 2000), formal and ritual speech occasions in the Kamëntšá community are structured according to age and social status, the expectation being that young people listen quietly and respectfully while elders hold forth

and confer the wisdom of the ancestors. Once the elders have said their piece and reiterated the ancestral truths, the younger people present might later be invited to participate in a more egalitarian conversation. In the encounter in question, the taita I sat down with refused to conduct a structured interview with my field recorder pointed at him, instead gently advising me to turn off my recorder and to shut up and listen. After this encounter, I began to rethink how Kamëntšá communicative norms determined the type and nature of information that I had access to, and in later interviews I moved away from the structured format towards what this taita termed “conversaciones abiertas.”

During the course of my fieldwork, I had many opportunities for participant observation in group activities and community events, which often yielded much in the way of ethnographically useful and interesting data. While most of these encounters only involved participating and observing as data-gathering methods, on two occasions I was able to convene focus groups for semi-structured and audio-recorded group conversations, which in both cases yielded about an hour and a half of audio content to be later transcribed. These focus groups—two in a series of four meetings with the same individuals—were organized with a collective of artisan women, principally weavers, as a forum for the exploration of the reproduction of Kamëntšá culture and cosmovision through these women’s art and artisanal production. Each meeting was organized around a central theme, in the first case “territory” and in the second “the future,” around which the conversation would focus, but both conversations were wide-ranging and gave me insight into a number of other themes and concerns, particularly as the participants responded to one another’s points and comments, often with minimal input from myself. Additionally, just as I refined my understanding of Kamëntšá communicative norms through trial and error during my interview procedures, employing a focus group format also helped bring out the particularities of Kamëntšá discursive procedures, especially apparent given the variation in age and experience among

participants—an important methodological point also noted by Romm (2014) in the Indigenous South African context.

In addition to the audio interviews and focus groups I recorded during the summer of 2022, I also recorded several video interviews during two weeks of fieldwork in February 2023. Like the audio interviews, the video interviews were also semi-structured; I came to each with a list of prepared questions but encouraged interviewees to take the conversation wherever they wished and to modify my questions or introduce new ones as they saw fit. Only one collaborator, a male artisan I met early on during my first fieldwork period, participated in both interview formats; the others participated in only one recorded interview of either type, although in most cases we shared repeated unrecorded encounters which often rendered important data recorded in fieldnotes. Audio interviews and focus groups were recorded using a handheld Zoom H1n field recorder in WAV file format. Video interviews were recorded using a Sony Alpha 6400 mirrorless digital camera with 16-50mm kit lens mounted to a SIRUI AM-225 tripod and using a Deity V-Mic D3 Pro shotgun mic for external audio. The Sony Alpha 6400 camera was also used for taking most of the photographs that appear as figures throughout the text; the remainder were taken with an iPhone SE 1.

Other than my interviews and focus groups, writing fieldnotes also constituted a mainstay of my ethnographic methodology. In developing a writing routine, I benefitted greatly from the personal recommendations and suggested texts offered by my mentor, Dr. Escallón, who advised me to conduct a nightly writeup while in the field, lest important ethnographic details slip away overnight; following this advice, I spent many weary nights writing up the events of long and ethnographically productive days. An introductory ethnographic writing text she recommended also helped approach the fieldnote writing process as a novice ethnographer (Konopinski 2013). Otherwise, I relied on the techniques

suggested by two classics in the methodological literature surrounding fieldnotes (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011; Sanjek 1990), including advice pertinent to the development of a daily writing regimen in the field and to early and effective writeup habits once returned. In the field, I never went anywhere without a weatherproof notebook and pen in my coat pocket, with which I captured many an ethnographic detail to be expanded upon later at my computer keyboard.

4.2 Data Collection: Participatory, Experiential, and Indigenous Methods

In addition to the conventional ethnographic methods outlined above, I also employed several collaborative, experiential, and Indigenous methods. Conventional methods may be the bread and butter of ethnography, but I believe in the utility of a modular approach to methodology in which less oft-cited methods are adopted according to the situation and needs of the research. In the case of my fieldwork with the Kamëntšá, it quickly became apparent to me that I would have to accept the validity of Kamëntšá ways of doing, learning, and knowing alongside the traditional ethnographic tools to proceed with my work and avoid partaking in a colonial legacy of research methods propagated by Western anthropologists working in Indigenous contexts (Smith 2021). Social scientific approaches which approximate emic Kamëntšá “methods,” if you will, include phenomenology, which I employ to analyze my subjective experiences in the four yagé ceremonies I partook in; embodied ethnography, which I draw on to discuss Kamëntšá “memory-walking” and bodily relationships to the territory; and apprenticeship, a traditional method of knowledge transmission in the Kamëntšá community, particularly in intergenerational and artisanal contexts. Before discussing these methods, however, it is necessary to contextualize my use of them with a discussion of participatory action research as a guiding paradigm in my community engagements, for it was through close collaboration that I came to recognize the inadequacy of the sole application of traditional ethnographic methods.

Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda (1986) was one of the first to articulate participatory action research as a collaborative and activist method in the latter half of the twentieth century. Participatory action research, in Fals Borda's elaboration, aims to actively involve research participants in the design and conduct of the research project itself, often with an activist and critical outlook that attempts to empower researchers and their collaborators to produce positive social change. Given the ethical dimensions of my research questions, an "objective" or detached scientific approach would have done me no favors in terms of attracting interest and participation from my collaborators. Moreover, I wanted my research to respond to the needs and concerns of my collaborators and not merely to serve the interests of academics in the palaces of the geopolitics of knowledge.

My solution to the problem of responsible and reciprocal research conduct was to invite collaborators to suggest and direct the course of the research activities we conducted together. In some cases, this led to interview topics veering from the path I initially set out for them, but yielding important new data which was often more relevant to the concerns of my collaborators. In other cases, this gave rise to projects in reciprocity, such as a series of language exchange and weaving apprenticeship workshops that I designed with a collective of young mother artisans, teaching English in exchange for lessons in Kamëntšá and basic weaving. Not only did this endeavor respond to my collaborators' desire to learn the basics of English, but it also opened a new field of ethnographic possibility—namely the chance to learn some Kamëntšá and to converse with weavers and young mothers while personally engaging in their work. It also introduced a new research method: apprenticeship, an experiential learning approach with important applications within multimodal and experimental ethnography (Lave 2011; Pink 2009).

An important corollary of my activist commitment to do right by my research collaborators is the recognition that people construct their own theories according to which

they live their lives, irrespective of the formal theories that insular academia often generates for application to others' lives. As a politically entangled researcher, I have a duty to represent or translate such emic perspectives accurately and responsibly. This is not only a matter of rendering an accurate picture of the lives and stories I am writing about, but of recognizing the legitimacy and, in some cases, the priority of Indigenous perspectives and theories of social life over Western ones which may command currency in academic discourses. I have therefore tried to cite Kamëntšá scholars and everyday local knowledge to put emic perspectives in dialogue with etic anthropological ones, without the intention of expressly valorizing one over the other. I hope, in so doing, to do justice to theory that emerges from within the Kamëntšá community.

There are two related experiential methods mentioned above that I draw upon where traditional methods seemed to fall short: phenomenology and embodied ethnography. I employ the first to analyze my experiences during four yagé ceremonies, which occurred with two Kamëntšá shamans and one Inga shaman, all over the course of the summer of 2022. The entheogen yagé, better known outside of Colombia as ayahuasca, is a notoriously difficult thing to talk about, above all in sober academic terms, which prefer to dispense with subjective experience in favor of “objective” and “scientific” language. Unfortunately for those who prefer the scholarly rigor of the latter approach, the yagé experience can hardly be characterized but subjectively. Therefore, I follow the approach employed by the most serious and comprehensive study of the subject, cognitive psychologist Benny Shannon's phenomenological treatise on the ayahuasca experience (2003). In applying a phenomenological description and analysis to my subjective experiences in several yagé ceremonies, I imitate the local narrative tradition involving personal accounts of yagé experiences. In doing so, I try to put my own experience in dialogue with what others in the community have told me about their own experiences and about the cultural significance of

yagé in general, particularly as a spirit medicine which affirms individuals' links to their culture and territory. While seldom counted among the most common or conventional of ethnographic methods—conceivably because it emphasizes the experiences of the ethnographer over those of the people who are nominally the subject of her research—phenomenology has a long history in anthropology, particularly in application to profoundly experiential contexts, such as the ceremonial ingestion of mind-altering substances for spiritual and medicinal purposes (Desjarlais and Throop 2011; Maso 2001).

The second experiential method I apply is embodied ethnography, which describes the use of the body and of bodily experiences as a research tool (Csordas 1990; Lock 1993; Turner 2000). I draw on embodiment theory and practice to analyze what Kamëntšá scholar Willian Jairo Mavisoy Muchavisoy (2009; 2018) has termed “memoriandar,” or “memory-walking.” Memory-walking, to my understanding, is a form of embodied interaction with the territory characterized by collective walking excursions along ancestral routes for the purpose of reiterating and strengthening ties of territorial belonging and identity. I am aided in this analysis by the existence of a minor literature, nested within that of embodied ethnography, of methods pertaining specifically to walking, which I propose is a significant practice within Kamëntšá territorial habitus (Ingold 2007; Ingold and Vergunst 2008; Springgay and Truman 2018). Walking methods and metaphors are also extant in a number of Indigenous traditions and terminologies in the region, such as in locally prominent expressions like “walking the word” (*caminar la palabra*) or in the practice, among groups such as the Nasa of Colombia and the Yanésa of Peru, of walking as a mnemonic tool by which one remembers and shares in the history inscribed in the landscape (Surrallés and Hierro 2005). By walking the territory with Kamëntšá friends, shamans, artisans, and land defenders, my experiential engagement with the landscape on my own two feet brought me closer to an emic understanding of Kamëntšá concepts of territoriality and embodiment.

4.3 Data Processing and Analysis

Following my return from my first and most extensive fieldwork period in the summer of 2022, I first set to work transcribing the audio recordings of my interviews and focus groups. I employed a clean verbatim transcription approach, transcribing nearly word-for-word but removing filler words and false starts to produce a more easily readable transcription. In cases of doubt, or where unable to transcribe a word or phrase in the Kamëntšá language, I asked my collaborators in Colombia to help clarify. The transcription process took several weeks, by the end of which I had transcribed eight individual interviews and two focus group sessions, collectively representing about ten hours of speech content.

With my transcribed recordings in hand, I moved into the data analysis stage. I opted to employ qualitative coding methods guided by a grounded theory approach. This entailed rereading my transcripts—including not only my audio transcriptions, but also my personal fieldnotes, field reports prepared for my advisor, and reading notes taken on relevant texts—while, in the process, developing a series of codes based on the most salient themes to emerge from the data. As recommended by Johnny Saldana (2016), whose *Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* guided my approach to coding and interpreting my data, I applied a minimum of two rounds of coding to each transcript, and more where the data was dense enough to merit further analysis. In accordance with Saldana's caution not to take qualitative coding as a "precise science" but rather as an "interpretive act" (5), I do not regard the codes I developed from my close readings of my transcripts as objective, authoritative, or definitive. They represent a synthesis of the themes and patterns that most stood out to me given my interests, objectives, and background, but a different researcher with different questions would produce a different set of codes, even using the same dataset. In tandem with the coding process, which extended over several months, I also periodically wrote analytic memos as a preliminary form of engaging with the themes and patterns emerging from my

data. Saldana argues that this is an essential writing process to cultivate *during* the coding process as a way of synthesizing the patterns one is beginning to recognize, facilitating the additional writing and analysis that later goes into producing the final writeup (54).

While qualitative researchers used to code by hand in a painstaking and tedious process, numerous software suites now exist to facilitate the coding process. Weighing the many different available options of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), I opted for a relative newcomer to this arena which is intended to simplify the coding process for novice analysts: a simple, intuitive, and affordable program called Delve. Delve allows the user to upload any number of “transcripts,” which in my case included interview and focus group transcriptions, fieldnote entries, and field reports to my adviser—all the textual materials comprising my ethnographic dataset. Once a transcript is uploaded, the user can read through it, highlight any part of the transcript, and apply codes to the highlighted text. Codes are named and assigned as the user sees fit and listed for easy reference on the pane to the right of the transcript text. The user can cross-reference all transcripts for specific terms and codes, correlating their incidence across transcripts. These features allowed me to quickly develop a series of logical codes based on the emergence of similar ideas, themes, and terms across all seventy transcripts of my project, ranging from expressions of autonomy to particular pictograms or concepts in Kamëntšá symbology. Over several coding cycles, I eventually reduced my codebook to a list of about twenty high-frequency codes consistent across transcripts. These formed the basis of the theoretical framework I began to construct from the data.

My approach to developing codes based on my data and then transforming these codes into a viable theoretical framework was guided by a grounded theory approach. According to Saldana, “grounded theory, developed in the 1960s, is generally regarded as one of the first methodologically systematic approaches to qualitative inquiry. The process

usually involves meticulous analytic attention by applying specific types of codes to data through a series of cumulative coding cycles that ultimately lead to the development of a theory—a theory ‘grounded’ or rooted in the original data themselves” (55). Charmaz and Mitchell (2001) describe all variants of grounded theory as including the following strategies: 1) simultaneous data collection and analysis; 2) pursuit of emergent themes through early data analysis; 3) discovery of basic social processes within the data; 4) inductive construction of abstract categories that explain and synthesize these processes; and 5) integration of categories into a theoretical framework that specifies causes, conditions, and consequences of the processes described (160). The product of the application of these strategies to my data is the model of cultural reproduction formulated in the theoretical framework section above, a theoretical model grounded in and emergent from the ethnographic data.

4.4 Methodological Limitations

Several methodological limitations became apparent over the course of my fieldwork. First is the problem of contradictory data offered by different collaborators. This is a common problem in ethnography and one that my collaborators sometimes recognized themselves, as when they would warn me to take things certain others said with a grain of salt. Naturally, this presents a quandary—who and what can be trusted, and how do I know? But as one collaborator succinctly explained, it is not my job to determine absolute truth; I am only supposed to document what people say, to compare it to what others have said, and eventually come to my own reasoned conclusions by way of what is most logical and consistent. This is, in fact, the task of the ethnographer writ large—not to collect and retell *the* story of a place and its people, but only to represent, as accurately and responsibly as possible, *a* story, one drawn from the specifics of the places and people that the ethnographer encountered in her individual research journey.

The inclusion of visual methods, namely photography and videography, brought to light problems of (mis)representation in the history of anthropology's use of these methods, particularly where Indigenous people have been made their subject. In adopting these methods, which at their best can contribute much to an ethnography that text cannot, I have followed ethical procedures to the best of my ability. In accordance with IRB requirements, research participants signaled their informed consent to the use of these methods by oral consent during Phase I fieldwork (June–August 2022) and signed written consent forms during Phase II fieldwork (February 11–24, 2023). I also acquired formal permission to employ photography and videography from the incumbent governors of the Sibundoy cabildo during both visits. However, given general suspicion surrounding the use of photography within the community, at times I was asked to put away my camera, which I readily did when requested.

Another significant limiting factor is my inability to speak Kamëntšá. Being a poorly described language isolate (Fabre 2001), there exist very few didactic resources on this language. While I made some attempts to learn the language, such as through the language exchange workshops that formed part of my work with artisans, and successfully memorized a number of set phrases and terms which I tried to employ in relevant situations, I came to realize that to reach conversational competence in Kamëntšá would require a significantly longer period of residence in the Sibundoy Valley than was available to me for this project. Yet the potential ethnographic importance of learning the language—and therefore the limitations on the data available to me by failing to—should not be understated. Kamëntšá ritual speech precedes many important events in the community, and although speakers tend to repeat themselves in Spanish—as much for the benefit of Kamëntšá youths, who may not understand the language, as for my own—I cannot be sure of the fidelity of the translation to the original. There are also philosophical concepts and other terms whose depth of meaning

in the original Kamëntšá may be only partially apparent when translated to Spanish. Finally, some terms are frequently translated in multiple ways, whereas my ignorance of Kamëntšá precludes my ability to detect or distinguish between the valences of meaning in the original terms. For all these reasons, I consider that further work with the Kamëntšá will necessitate learning their language. In this thesis, I have made efforts to retain in their original language phrases and words in Kamëntšá whose meanings I have been able to reasonably confirm with the help of collaborators.

A final limiting factor is one of access. In general, I found many incredibly open, welcoming, and cooperative collaborators among the Kamëntšá. However, as an outsider to an Indigenous community which has historically suffered at the hands of unscrupulous researchers, I did sometimes encounter suspicion regarding my intentions and ethics. While in most cases I was able to explain myself or receive endorsement from Kamëntšá friends and proceed with my work, in a few contexts I was prevented access to certain situations, events, or knowledge due to my outsider status. When this occurred, I did not press the issue or inquire further, but the obvious result is that this thesis refers only to the knowledge and experiences that I had access to. I state this only for the sake of transparency and by way of reflexive acknowledgement of my positionality. For truly emic perspectives that do not suffer from this problem, the reader is advised to refer to the growing body of scholarship produced from within the community by Kamëntšá anthropologists.

This concludes Part I, which has detailed the context, theoretical framework, and methodology of this thesis. In Part II, we move into an ethnographic description and analysis of the major domains of contemporary sociocultural life among the Kamëntšá in which the processes of cultural reproduction and autonomy under discussion are currently at work.

Part II.

Ethnography: Reweaving the *Uaman Luar*

5. Introduction: Three Ethnographic Vignettes

As the sun sank below the western hills and the fireflies began to blink sporadically to life in the garden visible through the window, a woman spoke up, directing her words to the dozen or so women who, in addition to myself, sat in a circle around Batá¹⁷ Magdalena's living room. It was the first of several focus group sessions hosted by Batá Magdalena, a Kamëntšá artisan of national and even international repute, who helped me facilitate discussions with a collective of artisan women, young and old, engaged in the culturally essential work of reproducing the Kamëntšá artisanal tradition. Among the Kamëntšá, artisans are not only important economic actors, but also keepers of lore and cultural knowledge which they preserve and transmit through their craft. After only a few minutes into our first focus group session, I was already picking up on the depth of wisdom invested in the women gathered in Magdalena's house on that July afternoon (Figure 1).

It was Susana, Magdalena's younger sister and a university-educated social worker, who spoke. "Hay tres pilares de la vida Kamëntšá: *juabna*, nuestro pensamiento; *biyán*, nuestra lengua materna; y *nemoria*, nuestra identidad, historia, y origen. Y es como si fuéramos una casa," she said. "Si se van perdiendo los pilares de nuestra cultura, la casa se va cayendo."

¹⁷ "Batá" is a feminine honorific title literally meaning "aunt," but used to refer to any respected woman of the community of middle or advanced age. Its masculine counterpart is "bacó," meaning uncle, but again used as a general honorific. Both terms are the Kamëntšá-language counterparts to the Quechua-derived "taita" and "mama," which have the same meanings and whose use is also widespread in the community. "Taita," however, in addition to being an honorific, is also a political and shamanic title, which "bacó" is not.



Figure 1. A focus group discussion with a taita and several artisan women in Batá Magdalena's house. Here we discuss the Sibundoy Valley as it was in this man's youth, some fifty or sixty years past.

As a house collapses upon losing its structural support, the structural integrity of the community depends on the maintenance of its central pillars, without which it will crumble. The maintenance of the philosophical principles of the Kamëntšá is essential for the structural integrity of the community. But how are those pillars being maintained? How is Kamëntšá culture being fortified, recuperated, and refashioned to meet the challenges of the present and to safeguard Kamëntšá life and territory for future generations? This thesis constitutes a multifaceted attempt to answer that question.

As if to in response to that very question, Susana took hold of one of the long, multicolored, and elaborately woven *tsömbiach* belts on the table before her and held it up for me to see. The *tsömbiach* is a type of textile unique to the Kamëntšá, a woven belt inscribed with the unique pictographs of Kamëntšá symbology, representing a diversity of cultural, territorial, and cosmological forms (Figure 2). It is probably the single most representative product of the Kamëntšá artisanal tradition, and it is said that the symbols each *tsömbiach* bears, arranged in linear sequences along the length of the belt, which can sometimes exceed five meters, allow it to be read like a book. For this reason, the weavers say that when they

weave a tsömbiach, they are weaving thought, and the symbols that they weave into the fabric of the tsömbiach are a record of the thoughts of the weaver as she weaves. The influence of tsömbiach symbology is, today, evident across all domains of Kamëntšá culture, being found woven into other textiles, replicated in beadwork designs, painted on walls, and printed in books.



Figure 2. A pile of tsömbiach belts in a variety of colors and designs. Unraveled, these belts may stretch more than five meters long, containing potentially dozens of different designs along their length. Each design represents, in abstract and stylized form, some aspect or element of the Kamëntšá cultural and territorial universe. Scanned sequentially, it is said that each tsömbiach tells a story that can be read like a book.

Susana unraveled the tsömbiach and laid a segment several feet long flat across the table. Solemnly she said: “el territorio está en el tsömbiach. Para nosotros, el tsömbiach es sagrado, porque cuida nuestro cuerpo, lo que es nuestro primer territorio.” As she spoke, she pointed to the intricate series of symbols arrayed across the face of the tsömbiach. I recognized there the symbols that represent the sun, mountains, rivers, paths, animals, the family hearth, the *jajañ*—in short, all the symbols of Kamëntšá life and territory. “Aquí en el tsömbiach están nuestro pensamiento, nuestra lengua, y nuestra identidad y nuestro origen. Mientras sigamos tejiendo, todo esto no se va a perder.”

About a week after this first of several focus group meetings, I found myself sitting with an Inga shaman by the fireplace in his house, only half-aware of my surroundings as colorful and disconcerting yagé visions warped my field of vision and distorted the dim sounds of others in the room wailing and vomiting under the powerful influence of *remedio* (some part of me vaguely recognized, at that moment, that yagé isn't all fun and games). My eyes turned to the paintings of *chumbes*, Inga variants of the tsömbiach belt,¹⁸ that unfurled across the walls of the shaman's house. They appeared to twist and writhe in the wavering firelight. I had been staring at them absentmindedly all night, in between fighting off waves of nausea and sporadically giving in to the *pinta*, the yagé visions that sometimes render one unable to do anything but lie down and let the medicine do its work. Something about those *chumbes* painted on the wall, which became a fixed reference point for me throughout the night, spoke to me, but the strong *pinta* prevented me from thinking too hard about it.

Only hours later, as my head began to clear and a sense of contented ease settled over me and dissolved the anxieties that yagé can often bring, did I piece together the fragmented thoughts I had been thinking throughout the night as I looked up at the twisting forms of those *chumbes* on the wall. The conclusion I came to was this: Kamëntšá culture is, like those *chumbes* of many forms and colors, a relational fabric in which each symbol (that is, each domain of culture and of social life) is mutually inextricable from the rest and given its unique significance only by its position in the sequence, an integral weft and weave of

¹⁸ *Chumbe*, a Quechua loanword meaning “sash,” is also used by the Kamëntšá to describe textiles in the style of the tsömbiach but thinner, shorter, and generally less complex in terms of design and symbology. The Spanish word “faja” is also used to refer to these smaller variants of the ancestral tsömbiach. Natalia Jacanamijoy postulates that the Kamëntšá taught the Inga how to weave, basing this hypothesis on the fact that Inga *chumbes* and associated symbology are very similar to the Kamëntšá tsömbiach and related designs, whereas Inga groups living outside of the Sibundoy Valley—for example, in the highlands of Nariño or in the Amazonian lowlands of Putumayo and Caquetá—do not weave in the same style. In short, the Sibundoy Valley weaving tradition is unique and appears to be Kamëntšá in origin and Inga by way of adoption.

culture, territory, and thought. This was what Susana had been trying to tell me, but yagé—
itself an important part of that very fabric—gave me the vision to see what she meant.

Though fatigued and shaky after a long night of curing—it is bad form to sleep
through a ceremony—I slipped out onto the veranda to meet the first light of dawn over the
Uaman Luar, the sacred place of origin of the Kamëntšá. As I watched the golden light of the
sun which the residents of this valley once worshipped cascade over the eastern hills, draping
in a golden mantle the north face of the Patascoy Volcano towering over the valley from the
south, I breathed in air heavy with the humidity of an overnight rain and the morning dew.
The shaman's garden was already humming with insect life and my eyes were drawn to two
plants whose vines were growing together, intertwined, one wrapped in a corkscrew spiral
around the other. The image of these two plants growing together in mutual harmony, a
passion vine already bearing fruits and a *Datura* whose deadly but beautiful flowers were just
coming into bloom, suggested again the motif of weaving (Figure 3). Is the chagra, too, a
kind of chumbe? I was, then, struck by what must seem obvious to my collaborators: the
territory too, the whole Uaman Luar in its splendid beauty, is a tsömbiach like the one Susana
had showed me, like the chumbes which stretched like climbing vines across Taita Javier's
walls.



Figure 3. *Passiflora*, the passion vine. Locally called maracuyá after its fruit, this vine grows in association with the other edible, medicinal, and magical plants cultivated in the *jajañ*, the traditional ethnobotanical garden of the Kamëntšá. Here, Batá Magdalena shows me the flower during a tour of her *jajañ*.

Six months later, during my final two-week return visit to the Sibundoy Valley in February 2023, I found myself sitting with a fellow researcher friend in Sibundoy’s central Interculturality Park taking a brief break from the nonstop dancing that characterizes Bëtsknaté, the Great Day of the Kamëntšá erroneously known to outsiders as the “Carnival of Pardon.” As we watched the community procession, led by the enigmatic masked figure of

the Matachín,¹⁹ stream out of the Capuchin-built cathedral at the heart of Sibundoy, my friend said to me simply “aquí veo mucha resistencia.”

The procession, thousands strong, was filing past us now, and everywhere I looked in the throng was like a cross-section of the Kamëntšá community, with all its diversity and unity on spectacular display. Old women in the traditional purple shawls and old men in the customary *capisayos*, the batás and bacós of the community, lead little children by the hand as others dance, play music, and cry out festive cheers in an overwhelming medley of sound and color (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Thousands of Kamëntšá people walk in procession along the main road into Sibundoy during the Bëtsknaté celebration of February 20, 2023. The procession will continue until reaching the cathedral that overlooks Interculturality Park in central Sibundoy.

¹⁹ The Matachín is the leader of the Bëtsknaté procession. An enigmatic figure who is apparently a representation of the sun god that was once the supreme being of Kamëntšá cosmology, the Matachín wears a bright red mask which is carved anew each year by a master woodcarver specially selected for the occasion. The duty to take up the mantle as Matachín is passed down the male line of a particular family chosen for this honor. The Matachín, dressed in full ceremonial regalia and ringing a bell, assembles the community at the church in vereda Sagrado Corazón to the south of Sibundoy in the morning. He then leads the procession down the main road into town until reaching Interculturality Park, where part of the procession enters the cathedral for Catholic mass. The procession ends at the Kamëntšá cabildo building on the other side of the park, where the festivities continue long through the night and into the next morning.

I saw what my friend meant. Here, as the Kamëntšá people celebrated the annual recreation of society and reiterated the essential bonds between individuals and between the community and its territory—asking pardon from each other, from nature, and from their God—I saw a people in resistance. Despite centuries of oppression and colonial dispossession which continues to the present day, the whole Kamëntšá community turned out to celebrate their existence and the reexistence of the cosmos for another year. If nothing else, the vitality and vibrancy of Bětsknaté illustrates that the Kamëntšá are a people who have successfully reproduced their culture and will continue to do so, always with an eye to their right to exist in perpetual coexistence as a community forever bound to their ancestral territory—as they have since the dawn of time and will until its end.

Part II of this thesis constitutes an ethnographic treatment of processes of cultural reproduction and autonomy within the major cultural domains explored during my fieldwork. I begin, in Section 6, with a discussion of some of the philosophical principles of the Kamëntšá. I discuss these concepts integral to Kamëntšá cosmology and philosophy²⁰ in order to establish the principles of Kamëntšá life and thought which are embedded and reproduced in the several cultural domains that I explore in the following sections: (Section 7) artisanry and handicrafts, (8) shamanism and the yagé ceremony, (9) and Bětsknaté, the festival that celebrates the annual renewal of the Kamëntšá cosmos and cultural universe. In my discussion of each of these realms of cultural expression, I trace the processes of cultural reproduction that I have observed at work there by documenting instances of preservation, recuperation, rearticulation, and invention developed and employed in each domain. I also refer to the conceptualizations of autonomy offered in Part I where relevant in order to

²⁰ In this text, I use these terms more or less interchangeably. “Philosophy” has often been regarded as the privileged purview of the Western tradition traceable to ancient Greece, but this conception of the term is needlessly antiquated and Eurocentric. Moreover, many philosophical schools of antiquity were themselves essentially cosmological. In short, I understand the distinction between these terms as constituting, in most cases, a false dichotomy.

establish the relationship between cultural reproduction and the enactment of autonomy among the Kamëntšá. In Section 10, I conclude by exploring the implications of cultural reproduction and autonomy among the Kamëntšá for Indigenous and subaltern contexts elsewhere in Colombia, in Latin America, and globally.

Owing to the methodological limitations acknowledged in Part I, the ethnographic description and analysis that follows should ultimately be regarded as preliminary and incomplete. Three months, though not insubstantial, is of course relatively little time to gain anything approaching a “complete” picture of an entire culture and society, assuming it is ever possible to gain such a picture, especially as an outsider—an open question in ethnography. I cannot hope to do justice to the considerable depth and complexity of Kamëntšá life and thought. However, my interpretations depart from what I think is, for my part, a reasonable comprehension of the basic values and principles on which Kamëntšá culture writ large is based. I leave it to the reader—principally, my Kamëntšá readers—to decide for themselves where I have succeeded in my endeavor and where I have erred. Any inaccuracies or misrepresentations that follow are solely my own fault.

6. Live Well, Think Beautifully: Philosophical Principles of the Kamëntšá

6.1 Bound from Birth: Kamëntšá Personhood and the Territorialization of the Body

“The body is the first territory.”

— Kamëntšá proverb

Long before missionaries and settlers first entered the territory that has since become known as the Sibundoy Valley in the 1530s, the Kamëntšá knew it by other names: *Tabanok*, “place of return,” *Bëngbe Uaman Tabanok*, “our sacred place of origin,” or *Uaman Luar*, “sacred space.”²¹ These terms, still widely in use today, hint at the ancestral link between the Kamëntšá and their territory—as does this people’s complete endonym, “Kamëntšá Biyá,” which has been translated as “people of this place with our own thought and language.” Even before this sense of place, which we can term *territoriality*, is reified on a collective level, it is established bodily and individually by a ritual process that I will term the *territorialization of the body*. In this section, I begin a brief and necessarily incomplete discussion of the philosophical pillars of the Kamëntšá with an exploration of this community’s concept of personhood, which is intimately tied up with conceptions of territory and collective belonging.

Kamëntšá personhood, like that of Indigenous peoples in general, is territorial and collective, as opposed to the bodily and individual basis of liberal personhood. This distinction is important; it has major ramifications in terms of the ways in which people relate to each other and to their environment. If in Western, liberal, and “modern” ontologies, personhood extends only as far as the body’s limbs can reach, then under what conditions can

²¹ These terms are translated differently across the literature and even by the Kamëntšá people whom I asked to define them. Throughout this text, I prefer the term “*Uaman Luar*,” which is usually translated as “our sacred place of origin,” though the definitions given above (adapted from what a specialist in Kamëntšá language revitalization has told me) suggest that this is a conflation between a longer, ancestral term and a shorter, recently invented term.

one identify with one's ecological and interpersonal surroundings, which are, after all, external to oneself? If, on the other hand, one's person does not and cannot exist but in relation to the community and the ecological environment into which one is born, the ethical obligations to other people and to one's environment are obvious. For the Kamëntšá, these ethical obligations are deeply felt with respect to the Kamëntšá community and the Uaman Luar, two inseparable halves of the lifeworld of the Kamëntšá individual. This union is established at birth and ritually reaffirmed throughout one's lifetime.

According to tradition, a person born into the Kamëntšá community is forever linked to the territory. This link is ritually established by burying the placenta of the newborn in the hearth (*shinjak*) of the family home (Figure 5).



Figure 5. The *shinjak* (lower right) is the traditional family hearth composed of three large stones, one each for the mother, the father, and their children. My collaborators speak of it as a place of gathering and family dialogue where the wisdom of the ancestors is ritually transmitted. This photo shows a shaman's curing booth at the artisanal fair hosted in Interculturality Park during the three days prior to the celebration of Bětsknaté. In addition to the *shinjak*, other elements of the traditional Kamëntšá household are also present, all products of the Kamëntšá artisanal tradition.

One interlocutor, a young artisan and musician, explained this ritual in the following terms and with reference to his personal experience:

Cuando nace, se entierra la placenta, experiencia propia, porque conmigo hizo mi abuelita. Tuve la dicha y el orgullo de decir que mi abuelita me recibió como partera y le hizo todo el tratamiento a mi mamá. Sí, sembró la placenta con hartó fuego, harta leñita. Ahí le hacen todo el ritual con palabras sagradas para que uno cuando tenga ya alcance, el uso de razón o la conciencia, tenga sentido de pertenencia al territorio. Pueda ser músico, artesano. Pueda ser constructor, pueda ser también médico tradicional.

Todos le ofrecen a la tierra para que la tierra los reciba con sus dones, con todo. Así fue, la sembraron ahí con hartó fuego como una ofrenda también. Agradecimiento por la vida del ser que nació y la vida de la madre. Decía la abuelita, “Si la persona por más lejos que se vaya, por más oportunidades que tenga, siempre va a querer volver porque está sembrada ahí la semilla.” Ahí es donde te digo que me sembraron el pensamiento y la mayoría de los familiares de nosotros hicieron eso. (I.7)

This interlocutor characterizes the placenta-interring ritual as establishing a sense of belonging to the territory, describing it as an “orgullo” and taking place with the use of “palabras sagradas.” Others have expanded on this point by telling me that this is because the placenta, as a tangible piece of body of both child and mother, will forever remain in the territory wherever one may go—and always eventually draws one to return, hinting at the definition of *Tabanok* as “place of return.” By the same token, some collaborators see the advent of hospital birth and the subsequent loss of the placenta as a threat to the body-territory link traditionally established by the placenta-interring ritual. One woman, a mother and artisan, explained this thought in more depth during a focus group meeting:

La ley natural viene desde la concepción, cuando nacemos y cuando nuestras mamitas, como decíamos, quizás unas sí tuvimos la gran fortuna de que nuestras mamitas, las placentas, las depositen otra vez, las devuelvan a la madre naturaleza.

Aquí creo que las mamitas que nos encontramos hoy como tejedoras, creo que la mayoría—no sé de acá, las jovencitas, no sé si las mamitas, ya nos comentarán, si ellas depositaron las placentas en la madre naturaleza o quizás lo hicieron como yo lo hice. Me tocó en el hospital y hasta ahí yo creo que vulneré un derecho con mi hijo y que es ese derecho a esa identidad.

No le puedo hablar de una ley de origen desde la concepción, cuando no le permití hacer ese vínculo con la madre naturaleza, porque mi placenta no sé donde está, ahí sí. Como decía, hablamos aquí de cómo vulneramos el derecho y el origen.

Pienso que la primera vulneración del derecho a la identidad con nuestros hijos es esa, las mamás de esta época hicimos eso. Digo que esas placentas están en otro lugar. Hoy las placentas se las utiliza para hacer cremas, para hacer cirugías. Así se utilizan las placentas en los hospitales. Tienen otro destino y ahí se nos va tergiversando el pensamiento que nosotros creamos cuando nacemos, con nuestros hijos.

Por eso digo que la gran fortuna es que cuando nuestras mamás sí tuvieron, desde la naturalidad de ellas, parir o dar a luz y depositar esas placentas, con el fin de que nosotros, desde ahí, ya desde la concepción, esté pensamiento, la palabra y el origen. (FG.1)

This woman explains the loss of the placenta-interring ritual as a “vulneración del derecho a la identidad,” implying that failure to bury the placenta is an act of violence or deprivation against the newborn—strong terms which characterize the intensity and importance of the body-territory bond established at birth. On the other hand, the speaker valorizes the ancestral ritual by characterizing it as a “gran fortuna” which affirms the central pillars of Kamëntšá life: thought, language, and identity. Another collaborator, an Inga shaman accompanied by his wife in an interview conducted during a curing ceremony, put it in similar terms:

Mira que a nosotros, el sistema ha venido desconectándonos de la Madre Tierra en lo siguiente, nuestras parteras hacían su ritual para conectar nuestros niños con la tierra. Eso lo han venido también cortando, cuando nosotros empezamos, nuestras mujeres empezaron a tener sus partos en los hospitales. Nuestras parteras cuando nacía el niño, su placenta se le enterraba en la tierra al lado de la tupa y eso, ¿qué significaba? Que nosotros sí tenemos un compromiso con la tierra.

Sí, eso, ahí, con dos propósitos, conexión con la tierra y para que nosotros estemos abrigados, porque la tupa, el fuego de la tupa nos da calorcito, nos mantiene vivos. Ese era el propósito de las parteras. Mucha de la comida occidental, no se sabe qué pasa con las placentas, dónde irán a parar, cuál será el proceso que usan. Es por eso también, nosotros hemos empezado a analizar que dentro de las ciudades no hay conciencia ambiental, porque sus placentas adónde irían a dar. Nuestras placentas deben volver a la Madre Tierra, para que nosotros estemos conectados con la Madre Tierra y podamos sentirla. (I.6)²²

What the quotations cited above demonstrate is that personhood is intertwined with the circumstances of one’s birth—namely, whether one is successfully territorialized and thereby able to actualize one’s “right to identity.” The territorialization of the body at birth establishes

²² Although this interview was conducted with an Inga couple, who use Inga-language terms instead of Kamëntšá ones (e.g., *tupa* vs. *shinjak*, both terms for the family hearth where the placenta is interred), they are talking about the same ritual and much of what they told me is applicable to the Kamëntšá case as well.

a sense of personhood which is collectively expressed and reified in Kamëntšá territoriality writ large. Conversely, the recent diminution of the actual practice of the ancestral placenta-interring ritual implies, in terms of Victor Turner's model of ritual process (1969), a breakdown in the symbolic order essential to the establishment and reification of Kamëntšá personal identity and collective territoriality.

This concept that I have termed the territorialization of the body has generally been explained to me axiomatically in the following proverb, which many collaborators have independently repeated with little variation: “el cuerpo es el primer territorio.” This body-territory equation, so to speak, rests at the heart of Kamëntšá concepts of personhood. It also implicitly puts the notion of individual bodily territoriality in dialogue with another oft-repeated idea: that of the territory as a collective mother or conceptual womb. In the section that follows, I explore the gendered dimension of Kamëntšá personhood and territoriality with reference to the symbolic association between women and territory.

6.2 Gendered Territoriality: Territory as Collective Mother

The gendered dimension of the territorialization of the body cannot be overlooked in relation to the placenta-interring ritual described above, as it is from women that the placenta comes. There are two ways to read the dictum that the body is the first territory. The first is that one's own body is one's first territory—a territory in microcosm, as opposed to the macrocosmic territory which is the external world, to paraphrase the words of one collaborator.²³ The second interpretation is that the territorialization of one's own body begins in the womb of one's mother—that is, that the mother's body is one's own first territory. This is a logical interpretation if we consider that the Kamëntšá, like many other

²³ The following quote is drawn from fieldnotes written during an unrecorded conversation with an anonymous informant on February 22, 2023: “Yo soy un microterritorio. Es como el microcosmos y el macrocosmos.” I paraphrase him in the following lines: “The wisdom of the ancestors is the recognition that the body functions as a territory exactly like the exterior territory, that is, the rest of the universe.”

Indigenous cultures, believe that women share a particular and special bond with the territory.

One informant, a land defender, mother, weaver, and wife of a shaman, told me this in the following terms:

Nosotras como mujeres nos conectamos con la tierra y sentimos ese ardor tan fuerte al mirarla tan abierta, nos duele nuestro vientre. Esa es la conexión tan grande que nosotras hemos sentido, por eso peleamos y luchamos tanto, para que haya un poquito de respeto hacia la tierra, hacia el territorio y hacia nosotros mismos. (I.6)

This woman relates the pain connected to the “opening” of the territory—that is, its exploitation at the hands of extractivist projects such as open-pit mines—with bodily pain of the womb. This symbolic connection, felt on a bodily level, between women and territory finds expression as an ethical mandate to struggle for respect for the earth, for territory, and for women. The same concept and the same ethical mandate are expressed in the terms used to refer to the earth as a maternal figure. The emic Kamëntšá term is *Tsbatsána Mamá* or *Tsbatsána Bebmá*, both translating as “Mother Earth,” although one informant has indicated that *Tsbatsána Bebmá* is the most traditional term and bears a slightly different connotation than *Tsbatsána Mamá*, where “mamá” is a Spanish loanword. According to another collaborator:

Tsbatsána Bebmá quiere decir Madre Tierra, pero no solo se refiere a la madre humana, sino se refiere a todo lo que es madre, allí está hablando de que la tierra es madre. *Bebmá* es lo que nos da vida tanto a los humanos como a los animales y a las plantas, las semillas madre también son *Bebmá*. (I.9)

In addition to the semantically expansive Kamëntšá term, the apparently less nuanced Spanish “Madre Tierra” and the Quechua “Pachamama” are both also commonly heard within the community, all referring to the territory or the earth itself as a mother figure. Cross-culturally, the reproductive biology of women is very often symbolically associated with fertility and the earth in world mythologies. What is more interesting and perhaps unique about the Kamëntšá case—though possibly typical of Indigenous cosmovisions more generally—is the ethical vision that derives from the recognition of the territory as a

collective mother; respecting the territory is equated to both caring for oneself and for one's own mother, for the territory is both. This sense of ethical obligation comes across clearly in the following interview quotations:

Cambiamos de color, de estatura, pero estamos hechos igual, no hay diferencia que diga la raza. Sí, de pronto por organización, pero somos iguales, no hay que pelear, hay que trabajar, pero más que todo hay que despertar, hay que tomar conciencia que nuestra Madre Tierra, que no es la madre de los Kamëntšá nomás, es la madre de todo el planeta tierra, de todos los que habitamos.

No comulgo con mis hermanos de raza que dicen que somos nosotros los únicos que concebimos que la tierra es nuestra madre, no. La tierra es madre todo ser humano, de los animales y de todo ser viviente que hay. Tenemos que respetarla como a una madre entre todos. (I.8)

Here the territory is described in universalizing and almost literal terms as “la madre de todos,” not just of the Kamëntšá. One therefore owes respect to Mother Earth just as one does to one's own mother. This sense of kinship and intergenerationality extends, furthermore, to future generations, for whose benefit the territory must also be cared for. Another collaborator, a well-respected shaman involved in the Indigenous Guard, an autonomous territorial defense collective, told me:

El territorio, ¿le estamos defendiendo con qué fin? Para los que vienen, los niños, los jóvenes y los que vienen caminando hacia atrás todavía. Para ellos es los que estamos defendiendo este territorio y que para ellos el día de mañana tengan a dónde decir, “Bueno, gracias a los abuelos, mis padres nos han dejado este territorio.” No queremos más violencia, no queremos más que vengan a saquear las minerías, lo que tienen la Madre Tierra, que es la vida de él, el alma de él, la respiración de él y el aire lo estamos recibiendo nosotros. (I.5)

It is significant that this interlocutor describes the extractive projects underway in the territory in terms of violence and sacking; to rip apart the earth in search of precious minerals, as the Colombian and transnational mining corporations do in the open-pit mines clearly visible on the hills surrounding the valley, is implicitly equated to matricidal violence. The short-sighted nature of such operations is also acknowledged in the understanding that the territory must be defended against such projects if there is to be any territory left for the coming generations. Many other collaborators speak of the harms of mining, deforestation,

oil drilling, construction projects, and large-scale commercial agriculture as forms of violence against both a conceptual mother and against oneself. In the words of another interlocutor, “cuando el territorio está sano, nosotros también estamos sanos” (I.6).

In short, the quotations cited above demonstrate 1) a symbolic association between women’s bodies, particularly in terms of reproductive biology, and the territory as a body; 2) a conception of the territory as the collective mother of the Kamëntšá community and, indeed, of the entire human race; and 3) that people collectively therefore owe an ethical obligation of respect and responsibility to the territory as mother, just as the individual owes such an obligation to one’s own human mother.

Returning to the question of Kamëntšá personhood, we can extrapolate from the above points to conclude that personhood describes the individual as a bodily territory which is *territorialized*, first in relation to the mother’s body and then, through the placenta-interring ritual, to the external territory, itself a collective mother. This territorialization of the body establishes relational links of ethical obligation and reciprocity, based on a kind of territorial kinship, with other people and with the Uaman Luar.

6.3 Universal Kinship: Relationality and the Anthropomorphization of Nature

One of the implications of the above discussion is that Kamëntšá philosophy is organized partly on relational principles of kinship between individuals, society, and the natural world. Throughout my fieldwork I often noticed that various objects or entities that Western ontologies recognize as “inanimate” are anthropomorphized in kinship terms by the Kamëntšá. The most prevalent example, “Mother Earth” and its various synonyms in Kamëntšá, Spanish, and Inga, is explored above, but other natural entities are also humanized in the same way. In this section, I argue that the application of kinship principles to the

natural world informs Kamëntšá principles of relationality and reciprocity with nature and the territory.

The previous section has shown that the symbolic association between the earth and women finds expression in bodily and reproductive metaphors of fertility and maternity and in conceptions of the territory as a collective mother. But what of masculinity and paternity? If earth is a feminine element, then fire is a masculine one. My collaborators often refer to fire in Spanish as “Abuelo Fuego,” a term frequently invoked alongside “Madre Tierra” or its equivalents in ritual contexts within formulaic phrases used at the end of speech. Moreover, there is a semantic and etymological relationship between *shinyak*, which can refer to both the family hearth and the elemental fire that burns within it, and *shinyë*, the Kamëntšá term for the sun, which is also characterized in masculine and paternal terms; the hearth fire is conceived of as the representation of the sun on earth. Before the advent of Catholicism in the Sibundoy Valley, the Kamëntšá worshipped the sun as a supreme being alongside its complementary opposite, the feminine moon—a pairing that recalls the pan-Andean philosophical principle of *yanantin*, or “complementary dualism” (Webb 2012). One informant, a young artisan, musician, and nephew of a well-known shaman, explains this relationship in greater depth:

Shinyë es el sol, que es como el taita [i.e., “father” in Quechua]. De nuestra forma de ver es el taita, que se complementa con la luna que es nuestra madre, Mamita Joashkón. El *shinyak* es la representación del sol en la tierra. El sol nos brinda calor y es fuego. El *shinyak* es también el fuego, el fueguito. Es la manera, lo que hablábamos, la parte terrenal y la parte espiritual que se conecta. El cielo y el sol. La tierra y el fuego. Esa es de la forma en que nosotros entendemos.

Nosotros decimos que el sol nos cobija a todos. El sol nos cobija a todos y el fuego nos da abrigo, ¿a qué? A toda la familia. Dentro de la cultura Kamëntšá decimos que todos somos familia. Por eso los acogemos también en ese sentido de familiaridad, que convivan con nosotros, que nos conozcan. Así como nosotros damos ese valor, la gente que venga también nos dé ese valor. De esa manera existe un respeto, también existe ese valor simbólico que hablamos.

Algo bonito que el *shinyak* se compone de tres piedras. Es el sol, la luna y las estrellas que hace relación, ¿a qué? A la familia. El sol, el padre, la luna, la madre, y las

estrellas los hijos. Esa misma representación universal es la misma representación acá en la tierra. Esa manera es el complemento que se hace. (I.7)

According to this interlocutor, the *shinjak* is the terrestrial representation of the familial ideal represented cosmologically by the trinary union of the sun (father), the moon (mother), and the stars (children), connecting the “parte terrenal y la parte espiritual.” Apart from the parallels this interlocutor establishes between the cosmological family and its representation in the makeup of the Kamëntšá family, he also draws a link to the notion, widespread in the community, that the Kamëntšá community is one large family. The prevalence of extended kinship networks attests to the importance of the concept of generalized “familiaridad” within the community—one close collaborator told me that she counts 700 relatives in her *direct* family alone, all of the Jacanamijoy clan, a very common surname among the Kamëntšá.

In addition to the anthropomorphization of major celestial figures in familial terms—father sun, mother moon, children stars—my collaborators have also made frequent reference to the spirits which inhabit various natural elements and entities, such as rivers, jungles, mountains, water, and air. One informant, a respected weaver, characterized the rivers that annually cause landslides and floods in dialogic terms; according to her, the reason the river floods is because the people have lost the knowledge of how to listen to what it says. This notion of elemental agency and the duty to listen to what nature says finds resonance in what other collaborators have told me about ancestral practices meant to keep the balance of nature, as expressed in the following quote provided by an Inga shaman:

Ha habido muchas prácticas de nuestros ancestros que, para mantener el territorio en armonía, una es esta, con medicina, cantándole al territorio, cantándole al espíritu del agua, espíritu de la selva. Te traduzco. Por ejemplo, espíritus del agua, *iaku waira*. Espíritu de la selva, *shishaja waira*. *Sacha runa* son los guardianes de ese territorio, los que a nosotros nos invitan a que conservemos eso. Eso es lo precioso de entender el territorio. (I.6)

This interlocutor describes techniques meant to keep the territory in balance by forms of interaction, such as “singing,” with the spirits of water, the jungle, and the guardians of the

territory. Although this interlocutor is Inga and uses Quechua terms, here again I believe these data to be generally applicable to the Kamëntšá perspective. To quote the same young artisan cited before:

Gracias a la mejor herramienta y única herramienta de la medicina, desde la parte espiritual se ha logrado lo que se ha logrado hasta ahora. ... Como comunidad tenemos la mejor arma y herramienta que es desde la parte espiritual y encomendar también a la naturaleza para que, ella desde su proceder y naturalidad, también ejerza. Algo gracioso, porque empezaron a hacer la vía ya y no podían, que se aparecían cosas raras, extrañas, sobrenaturales. Es porque la misma naturaleza no está permitiendo. Son señales que la gente de afuera no entiende. Esa manera creo que es la mejor herramienta de reexistencia y pervivencia. (I.7)

Significantly, both collaborators quoted above make mention of “*medicina*,” that is, *yagé*, as a medium or “tool” for the maintenance of natural harmony through connection and communication with the spirits of the territory. As mentioned before, the interview with the Inga shaman took place during a *yagé* ceremony that he was leading with the help of his wife, and much of our conversation revolved around the significance of *yagé* as a medicine meant as much for the reparation of the broken bonds between society and nature as for personal healing. The second collaborator, the young Kamëntšá artisan and musician, is the nephew of a high-profile shaman who has also been involved in the land defense struggle and who has spoken of the importance of *yagé* in the same terms: as a tool for the recuperation and reiteration of a sense of universal kinship with nature and its spirits. In the words of the taita in question, “*lo natural*” and “*lo espiritual*” are two sides of the same coin. *Yagé* grants the drinker the vision to see that nature is full of agentic spirits to which people owe ethical obligations much as they do to the territory in its personification as a collective mother. And it is surely no coincidence that *yagé* is known in Quechua as *ayahuasca*, a term usually translated as “spirit vine” or “vine of the soul.”

It is interesting to consider these visions of relationality and universal kinship within the natural world with reference to the ideas offered by a recent strain of ontological theory

known as perspectivism, which developed out of anthropological engagements with the cosmologies of many peoples of the Amazon rainforest, principally through the work of the Brazilian ethnographer Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2012; 2014; 2015). For Viveiros de Castro, the relative and relational ontologies of Amazonian peoples hinge on a generalized metaphysics which posits that all subjects—humans, but also different species of animals, plants, and even “inanimate” entities such as rivers and stones—share the same basic *ways of seeing* but see fundamentally *different worlds*. One corollary of this theory is that while the vision and knowledge of any one subject is limited by said subject’s ontological standpoint—humans see the world only in the ways that humans can, tapirs as tapirs can—it is possible to gain and exchange knowledge by acquiring the perspective of another subject, an endeavor facilitated by the ingestion of yagé and the perspectival transformation that it brings. Rivera Zambrano (2017) writes about this operation of transformation as it occurs in shamanic contexts among both the Inga and the Kamëntšá in the Sibundoy Valley:

En la toma, los *sinchiwairas*²⁴ narran sus vivencias con el yagé. Llegada la medianoche, cuando los participantes ya han ingerido la primera totuma de yagé, el *sinchi* comienza a observar sus estados, y, mientras se tejen conversaciones entre los invitados, él interviene para afirmar que en sus visiones pudo estar en algún lugar, cruzando el río, cazando dantas, recolectando alguna planta. El sabedor narra que recorre lugares particulares, y en estos, dialoga con personas o animales o plantas; estas charlas le muestran nuevas alternativas al motivo o problema por el que se realiza la toma de yagé. En términos de McKenna, Luna y Towers (1986, 80), los sabedores experimentan con la ayahuasca procesos de realidad doble, con los cuales contactan con espíritus para adquirir conocimientos o poderes... (157)

Los enunciados ‘yo soy jaguar, yo soy colibrí, yo soy yagé’ hablan del carácter relacional de la vida; es decir, dan cuenta de una coexistencia referente a las simbiosis en las que participan seres de diversa naturaleza sin caracteres de filiación hereditaria, a manera de comunicación o contagio entre poblaciones distintas—entre heterogéneos. (158)

²⁴ The author defines this Inga term as synonymous with “sabor,” “chamán,” or “taita.” McDowell (2022), on the other hand, provides *sinchiyachi* as the appropriate term in Inga and *tatxumbwá* in Kamëntšá (23). In my personal experience, I have heard neither, with “taita” currently being, to my knowledge, the most typical term for shamans in both the Inga and Kamëntšá contexts.

I interpret the intersubjective perspectival transformation instigated by shamanic ritual and yagé visions described above as evincing the same type of relational anthropomorphization of nature as exists in Kamëntšá characterizations of the nature spirits which are said to inhabit rivers, water, air, and other such elements and entities. In my view, the cosmological entities described in kinship terms—Mother Earth, Father Sun, Grandfather Fire, and so forth—and the nature spirits associated with topographical elements of the territory arise from the same spiritual and philosophical base layer syncretically drawn from both Andean and Amazonian strata. Consequently, I would argue that the same ethical standards of reciprocity and responsibility felt towards the earth in its conception as a collective mother also apply more generally to other aspects and entities of the natural world. In effect, a principle of universal kinship—what Escobar might call radical interdependence—defines Kamëntšá concepts of nature-culture relationality. The practical consequence of filial responsibility to the territory and its other-than-human inhabitants—without which there could be no territory at all and from which there is always much to learn—is that the Kamëntšá have been able to live an immeasurably more sustainable existence in their territory than the settlers responsible for its ongoing ecological degradation.

The foregoing sections attempt to profile, in brief and necessarily incomplete form, several rather abstract concepts of territoriality and relationality in Kamëntšá symbolic thought, which I take to constitute the philosophical pillars of Kamëntšá thought. Moving on to matters more concrete, in the next section I discuss two related principles that I understand as undergirding processes of knowledge transmission and cultural reproduction in the community.

6.4 Intergenerationality and Ancestrality

Two related concepts characterize processes of knowledge transmission in the Kamëntšá community. I term the first *intergenerationality*, which I take to describe a social practice of traditional knowledge transmission that occurs across generational lines. By “knowledge,” I mean not only abstract philosophical and ethical principles such as those discussed above, but also the skills and embodied practices which find expression in cultural domains like the artisanal industry, shamanism, arts, etc. *Ancestrality*, on the other hand, describes not a process but a mode of thought, namely the valorization and veneration of the ancestors as the essential source of the wisdom and traditional knowledge on which Kamëntšá thought and lifeways depend. In other words, intergenerationality is the social process and practice which enables the reproduction of Kamëntšá thought and knowledge, which in themselves are imbued with value and significance by the principle of ancestrality.

As among many other Indigenous peoples, the transmission of traditional knowledge and cultural values among the Kamëntšá occurs intergenerationally. On the individual and familial level, knowledge is passed directly from parents to their children, while on the sociocultural level, knowledge is passed from respected elders and traditional authorities to younger generations in a perpetual process of epistemic reproduction. This occurs in a number of settings, often in the form of narrative performances enacted for the benefit of younger audience members who are expected to attend to and receive the lessons being imparted by the example of the elders. Notably, there exists a ceremonial register in the Kamëntšá language reserved for formal speech occasions of an exemplary and performative nature, complete with stock phrases that signal to those involved that the conversation has entered a ritual realm of didactic discourse. Such encounters once took place on a regular basis around the *shinyak* in every family home (Figure 6), but increasingly Kamëntšá homes

are no longer built with hearth fires, a fact that many of my collaborators lament as detrimental to the integrity of the intergenerational process.



Figure 6. A model of a shin'ya and several *bancos*, or low wooden stools hewn from a single block of wood, arranged for display at the artisanal fair in Interculturality Park during the weekend preceding Bëtsknaté 2023. Hearths like this one, with the three stones representing father sun, mother moon, and their children the stars, were once installed in every Kamëntšá home, around which people would sit on bancos and talk away the evenings. Now such talks usually only take place on special occasions, such as during yagé ceremonies, where it is still customary to sit on bancos around a fire.

Today, ceremonial speech occasions occur less frequently and usually in contexts of exceptional formality or performative artifice. In my experience, I have witnessed the use of ceremonial speech in such contexts as curing ceremonies, community gatherings with a ritual component, cabildo events, concerts, and festivals like Bëtsknaté.

Outside of traditional performance settings and ceremonial speech occasions, intergenerational knowledge transmission is also expressed in the artisanal tradition, in Kamëntšá language recuperation, in land management and ethnobotanical practices, and in other practice-based domains. One collaborator, an artisan and member of a weaving cooperative, affirms the importance of intergenerationality in the artisanal tradition and the Kamëntšá language in the following terms:

Estas artesanías han trascendido de generación en generación, puesto de que desde tiempos milenarios los mayores han venido enseñando y así hemos venido aprendiendo. ... Eso ha venido de generación en generación. De igual manera la lengua materna también de generación en generación ha venido. (I.1)

The same interlocutors are often conscious of the instrumental role they personally play in this process, feeling a sense of obligation to pass their own knowledge and skills on to the younger generations as their elders did to them. Taita Arturo articulates this duty in terms similar to those employed in an earlier quote by another shaman, which I reproduce below for comparison:

Nos toca hacer memoria de los antepasados, hacer memorias, historias, para que nuestra cultura no se pierda. En el futuro, de pronto no existamos, pero las próximas generaciones podrán decir, “gracias a ellos, que nos han dejado esto.” (FN)

El territorio, ¿le estamos defendiendo con qué fin? Para los que vienen, los niños, los jóvenes y los que vienen caminando hacia atrás todavía. Para ellos es los que estamos defendiendo este territorio y que para ellos el día de mañana tengan a dónde decir, “Bueno, gracias a los abuelos, mis padres nos han dejado este territorio.” No queremos más violencia, no queremos más que vengan a saquear las minerías, lo que tienen la Madre Tierra, que es la vida de él, el alma de él, la respiración de él y el aire lo estamos recibiendo nosotros. (I.5)

In both cases, we witness the same ethic of intergenerational obligation even though the first concerns knowledge transmission and cultural reproduction while the second concerns ecological conservation for the benefit of future generations. Both shamans believe that it is imperative to preserve cultural knowledge and territorial integrity for the benefit of future generations long after both men are gone. To my mind, this points clearly to the continued centrality of the principle of intergenerationality in Kamëntšá thought and practice.

If intergenerationality describes the social process of knowledge transmission and cultural reproduction between generations, then ancestrality is the philosophical principle that undergirds this process and valorizes that knowledge. McDowell (2022) defines ancestrality as “adhering to the example of the ancestors in order to find the good life” (23) and “the charter for proper living laid down by the ancestors” (28). Proper living depends on adherence to a set of prescriptions established by the wisdom of the ancestors. Many of the

problems of the contemporary moment in the community and in the territory are attributed to a failure to properly adhere to the wisdom of the ancestors. Many of my collaborators have therefore commented on the necessity of a “recuperation” (*recuperación*) and “strengthening” (*fortalecimiento*) of ancestral knowledge. For a broad sampling of examples, the following quotes indicate the valorization of ancestrality in various cultural domains:

On ethnomedicine, shamanism, and yagé:

Esta medicina, en primera yo debo agradecerles a los maestros ancestrales que quien caminó, quien luchó, quien descubrió esta divina planta sagrada, que ellos se les merece el respeto y se les merece recibir el ejemplo de los mayores que a mí me han enseñado. (I.5)

On the jajañ, or ethnobotanical garden:

Para mí la chagra tradicional, jajañ, es como nos han enseñado los abuelos de mis abuelos, ancestrales, que yo los conocí. Dentro del jajañ viene toda la medicina, tanto como toda clase de planta de medicina, ahí está dentro de jajañ. Está el maíz, está el frijol, está el barbacoano, está la calabaza, la arracacha, las coles, la achira. Todo lo que es la chagra tradicional, lo que decimos el jajañ. Dentro del jajañ está la medicina, que los mayores, los abuelos nos han enseñado. (I.5)

On territorial conservation and land management:

El territorio, es lo que a nosotros nos dejaron los ancestros para defenderlo. Cuando el territorio está sano, nosotros también estamos sanos. La idea es conservar. Nuestros ancestros a nosotros nos han enseñado, que no hay que sobreexplorarla madre tierra. Eso nos invita a que de pronto—nuestros ancestros durante siglos mantuvieron la tierra y así ha sido con la—había también seguridad alimentaria y eso. (I.6)

On clothing and the conservation of thought and culture:

Se puede cambiar de vestimenta. Puede que la gente del pueblo Kamëntšá no se viste como antes, como los mayores, pero todavía se conserva el pensamiento. Por eso se conserva la cultura y todo lo que es lo propio de los Kamëntšá, ¿no? (I.7)

On the importance of “autoinvestigation” for the recuperation of ancestral knowledge compared to the worthlessness of popular media:

Nosotros mismos tenemos que autoinvestigarnos para poder recuperar esos conocimientos y sabidurías que dejaron nuestros ancestros, que está inerme, escondido, porque lo que se habla ahora por Facebook, por WhatsApp, por los canales

de televisión, eso es mentira. Eso es una falsedad de las nuevas generaciones que buscan protagonismo e impresionar a los victimarios. (I.8)

On musical innovation and the recuperation of ancestral music:

Rápidamente aprendimos a manejar instrumentos de allá y a interpretar melodías de allá. Eso no quiere decir que está mal, eso es bueno, eso fortalece, pero frente de su repertorio es muy importante recuperar lo que manejaron nuestros ancestros, el sentido, los pensamientos. Nuestros ancestros nunca lo hicieron así de improviso ni a las carreras, ellos siempre lo hicieron con un sentido, con un propósito de conexión espiritual sin tener que recurrir a otros ritos ni a brebajes ni a nada, sino a través del sonido, a través de los instrumentos de hueso porque aquí no hubo. (I.8)

The above quotes demonstrate the importance of ancestrality as a form of valorizing ancestral ways of doing and knowing across various cultural domains among the Kamëntšá. It is this valorization of *lo ancestral* which provides the ethical foundations of intergenerational process, itself the motor of traditional knowledge transmission in this community. In the ethnographic analysis that follows in later sections, I attempt to demonstrate that both of these intertwined principles are integral to contemporary processes of cultural reproduction among the Kamëntšá.

6.5 Juinŷnanam Bëngbe Luarents: Principles of the Kamëntšá People

By way of closing this lengthy section on the philosophical principles of the Kamëntšá, I would like to conclude with a final series of dictates enunciated not by myself but quoted and translated directly from a book recently published by the Grupo de Memoria Kamëntšá (2022), a research team headed up by the Kamëntšá anthropologist Judy Jacanamejoy and in association with the National Center for Historical Memory (*Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica*). I had the privilege of attending the launch ceremony for this book, which is titled *Hacer memoria para recuperar el ser kamëntšá*. The ceremony took place at the maloca of Judy's father, a well-respected shaman, land defender, and ex-governor of the San Francisco cabildo, at the family home in vereda La Mente. The book launch turned out to be one of the most ethnographically rich encounters of my fieldwork. Dozens of people

crammed into the wooden roundhouse where, the week before, I had the honor of attending a yagé ceremony with Judy's father and the sitting councilmembers of the San Francisco cabildo. After a complementary meal of a traditional soup called *bishana*,²⁵ there was a musical performance by the family band Luar Kawsay, a favorite of mine and a group I've since seen in concert many times. Then the assorted elders and traditional authorities invited to partake, many of whom assisted in the book's production and whose words grace its pages, spoke in turn. Some cried, at times, when discussing the violence of the drug trade and armed conflict as it has affected many in the community. Others used their chance to speak to reiterate the wisdom of the ancestors and the obligation to "hacer memoria" and to leave for the coming generations the knowledge and cultural resources that their elders have left for them. It was a moving and eye-opening experience, crystallizing for me some of the concepts that I have done my best to explain and explore in the sections above.

In this section, I opt to reproduce and translate, without further commentary, the "principles of the Kamëntšá people" listed on pages 76–78 of Judy's book. I do this so that the elders and traditional authorities interviewed in the production of the book may speak for themselves without any imposed contextual or qualifying language. The previous sections constitute my attempt to define and discuss what I have come to understand as several defining features of Kamëntšá philosophy, but I am only an outside interpreter looking in and I cannot do justice to the depth and richness of the Kamëntšá world on my own. Who better, then, to close this section on the philosophical principles of the Kamëntšá than those with whom they originate and to whom they belong? Below I have copied the original Kamëntšá

²⁵ Bishana is one of the most traditional recipes in the Kamëntšá cookbook, employing a medley of the ingredients most often found in the jajañ, such as squash, kale, beans, and maize. In its most ancestral form, it is made without salt, which was inaccessible prior to colonization and expensive to import from Pasto until the Capuchin period.

phrases and terms from the book, together with the Spanish translations provided there. The English translations that follow the Spanish are my own.

Kem soy, vid tkuetsebomn kmochanjubtsajaboton, as kmochanjuibiashjach jenobobyanam tsakëng inye pamillang ntsam opresid tmojtsebomnëká.

Aprender, escuchar, aplicar y compartir desde la familia y la comunidad.

Learn, listen, apply, and share from the family and the community.

Kachakanak otjenayá tsemnan tsatatbowanjam bëngbe vid y luar.

El sueño previene para poder decidir y resistir en la vida.

Sleep forestalls decisiveness and resistance in life.

Tsakëkynayan nday sanatem, inyeté jenuiyanam kantjanyete tsatinjenan bëngbe jajañ y day soy jabonyniñam.

Saber guardar y no malgastar. Cuidar del *jajañ* o *chagra* tradicional y sembrar lo que más se pueda para así solventar las necesidades.

Know how to save and not to waste. Care for the *jajañ* or traditional garden and plant all that you can to take care of your needs.

Juashentsam:

Sembrar en el pensamiento de los niños el conocimiento de los mayores para que se transmita de generación en generación. Sembrar con cariño y sin egoísmo, porque en ellos se deben dejar las semillas del conocimiento.

Plant in children's minds the knowledge of the ancestors so that it can be transmitted from one generation to another. Plant with love and without selfishness because the seeds of knowledge must grow within them.

Jenajabuacham:

Ayudarse mutuamente unos a otros, aprender a brindar ayuda, todos nos necesitamos de una y otra forma, los mayores siempre queremos que los hijos se ayuden mutuamente.

Mutually assist one another, learn to offer help, for we all need each other one way or another and the elders always desire that their children help each other.

Jashakam:

Si hemos sembrado con cariño se cosecha en abundancia, así como cuando se siembran tres granitos de maíz y se cosechan varios maíces.

If we have planted with love, the harvest will be abundant, just as one plants three grains of maize and returns to a harvest of many ears.

Jaguashetsam:

Sembrar no solo se refiere a sembrar las plantas, los árboles, las flores, sino también a sembrar las buenas acciones dentro de uno mismo, la familia y la comunidad. Ir a sembrar es una tarea constante en el diario vivir.

Planting does not only refer to plants, trees, flowers, but also to the cultivation of good deeds within oneself, the family, and the community. Going to plant is a constant duty in everyday life.

Jenojuaboyan:

Pensar antes de hablar para no equivocarse. *Botamán jenojuaboyan*, pensar bonito eso hay que aplicar para la vida.

Think before speaking so as not to speak wrongly. *Botamán jenojuaboyan*, think beautifully throughout your life.

Juakjayan:

Guardar para otro momento, guardar en el pensamiento, aprender a cultivar buenos pensamientos y tenerlos para compartir en el momento indicado y con las personas que necesitan escuchar.

Hold back for another moment, hold in your thoughts, learn to cultivate good thoughts and keep them to be shared at the right moment and with those who need to hear them.

Juastajuam:

Colocar los alimentos para ofrecer, *juatšūmbonam*, todos nos necesitamos de una u otra forma. *Wakjnaité*, día de los difuntos.

Gather food to offer, *juatšūmbonam*, we all need each other one way or another. *Wakjnaité*, day of the dead.²⁶

Jabenachan:

Hacer caminos para que otras personas aprendan. Es una tarea hacer buenos caminos para que las generaciones que vienen puedan reconocer la sabiduría de los mayores y puedan replicarla con respeto y con cariño.

Open paths so that other people may learn. It is a duty to open good paths so that the coming generations can recognize the wisdom of the elders and can replicate it with respect and love.

Jenantsamian Kukuats:

²⁶ *Wakjnaité* is a syncretic holiday celebrated on November 1 and 2, coinciding with the Catholic All Saints' Day (November 1) and All Souls' Day (November 2) and the Mexican Day of the Dead (November 1–2). Similar holidays celebrated on the same dates, often going by names like "día de los difuntos" or "día de las ánimas," are widespread among other Indigenous communities in Latin America. I am unsure as to whether *Wakjnaité* has pre-Columbian roots, though my collaborators seem to perceive it as an ancient tradition.

Prestarnos la mano para desarrollar algún trabajo, sin egoísmo y siempre pensando en ayudar porque somos pasajeros. Darse la mano es un gesto de solidaridad que nos enseña a ser más humanos.

Lend each other a helping hand to develop some project, without selfishness and always with a mind to help because we are passengers. Lending a hand is a gesture of solidarity that teaches us to be more human.

7. Weaving Resistance: Cultural Reproduction and Autonomy in the Artisanal Tradition

7.1 Overview

Kamëntšá *artesanías*, or artisanal products and handicrafts, in their various forms of expression—principally weaving, woodcarving, beadwork, and instrument-making—constitute a mainstay of the traditional economy and are omnipresent in homes, shops, community spaces, and especially in rituals and ceremonies. These objects are so ubiquitous that they have become the symbols by which the culture is predominantly known outside of the Sibundoy Valley. Kamëntšá masks are especially well represented in the art museums of Colombian cities like Bogotá and Medellín, and are even sometimes exported and exhibited internationally, often available for purchase at a considerable markup compared to what the artisans who make them charge. Less well known outside of the valley are the woven textiles which are, in fact, more prominent within the artisanal industry and symbolic universe of the community itself. The most significant and unique of the woven products of the artisanal tradition is the ubiquitous *tsömbiach*, the long belt embedded with the unique pictograms representing various aspects of the Kamëntšá world. Other important artisanal products include the *capisayo*, the handwoven poncho or ruana of blue, black, red, and white stripes which is the traditional garment of respected taitas and traditional authorities; the *banco*, a type of low wooden stool carved from a single piece of wood; and bead bracelets that have become the most popular product of the contemporary artisanal industry.

In this section, I discuss processes of cultural reproduction at work in the artisanal tradition of the Kamëntšá to show that, though the specific media and techniques used have changed, the cultural significance of the industry and its products has not diminished. Under the subheadings that follow, I argue that cultural reproduction in the artisanal industry is

expressed in 1) the recent invention and subsequent widespread adoption of the beadwork tradition; 2) the rearticulation and negotiation of the meanings of certain traditional symbols; 3) the invention of non-traditional textiles using traditional techniques, such as woven scarves and the use of non-traditional colors and designs in capisayos and other traditional products; and 4) the valorization of artisanal traditions through their production and display in community workshops, performance settings, and festivals, leading to 5) the development of a type of cultural autonomy that the Colombian ethnographer Gloria Stelle Barrera Jurado (2015; 2016; Barrera Jurado, Quiñones Aguilar, and Jacanamijoy Juajibioy 2018) has termed “autonomía artesanal.”

7.2 Beadwork: A Case Study in an Invented Tradition

In the contemporary artisanal industry, beadwork is currently the most widespread and profitable tradition. Unlike weaving, woodworking, and instrument-making, however, the contemporary beadwork tradition is not ancestral and has only emerged in the last several decades.²⁷ There are several reasons for the recent development and current popularity of this novel tradition among Kamëntšá artisans. The advantages of beadwork as compared to other artisanal traditions are essentially economic and could be listed as the following: 1) it is cheaper in terms of the costs of raw materials, namely plastic beads and thread; 2) it is quicker to learn the necessary skills and to produce individual products; and 3) it is more profitable because finished pieces are cheaper, sell more quickly, and make for more convenient souvenirs for tourists than heavy, bulky, or fragile artisanal products such as wooden masks and textiles. It could also be argued that beadwork is a tradition which better adapts itself to the pace and distractions of modern life, as compared to more labor-intensive

²⁷ It is necessary to distinguish between the contemporary beadwork tradition, which makes use of cheap plastic beads imported principally from the city of Pasto, and what is in fact an older beadwork tradition, which possibly dates to the Capuchin era and makes use of larger, irregular mineral beads in heavy coiled necklaces as part of the ceremonial regalia of shamans and traditional authorities (Barrera Jurado 2015, 131). Here I am discussing the commercial beadwork industry that has only emerged in recent decades.

and time-consuming traditions—and it may be for this reason that many Kamëntšá youths learn and practice beadwork even if they learn no other artisanal traditions. Figures 7 and 8 show the differing levels of intricacy in a traditional woven bracelet compared to several bead bracelets which are typical of those sold in shops all over Sibundoy.



Figure 7. A woven bracelet bearing tsömbiach designs. Although this style of bracelet is the most traditional, utilizing very fine weaving techniques, it is far more labor-intensive and time-consuming for the artisan, and therefore more costly for the purchaser. Bracelets of this style are difficult to find today.



Figure 8. A collection of bead bracelets purchased from several of my collaborators. According to my collaborators, the symbols and colors used in these bracelets represent, from top to bottom, 1) the sun or the womb; 2) the territory (green chevrons), the sun or the womb (red-yellow diamonds), and the “black gold” of the Putumayo oil fields that attract developers (black chevrons); 3) Bëtsknaté, the most important Kamëntšá festival of the year; and 4) the zigzag design known in Kamëntšá as “benach,” which can represent both the footpaths that run between family houses in the veredas and the metaphorical path that the Kamëntšá people must walk.

At first glance, the difference in detail is apparent between the woven bracelet and the bead ones. Although the first is far more finely worked and better preserves the original

forms of the symbols incorporated, which are drawn from tsömbiach symbology, bracelets like this one are difficult to find and more expensive than the simpler bead ones shown above. Beadwork is not only expressed in bracelets and necklaces. Beads are also now widely applied within other artisanal traditions, namely woodcarving, as in the use of beaded masks (Figures 9 and 10).



Figure 9. Various masks of the type called “gestos,” referring to their exaggerated facial expressions and gestures. While the most traditional masks are left bare or given only a simple layover of paint, most masks produced today are decorated with colorful beads in a wide variety of patterns and designs.

There are several implications one can draw from the recent and ongoing surge in the prevalence of beadwork. For one, it is apparent that the rising popularity of beadwork among young artisans is correlated with a reduction in the prevalence of older traditions, namely weaving and woodcarving, although both of those industries remain fairly healthy. Many of

the artisans I have worked with who are engaged in more traditional industries—weaving, woodworking, and instrument-crafting—have expressed frustration at the difficulty of selling their crafts given that the artisanal market is saturated with cheaper and more convenient bead products, although many of the same artisans engage part-time in beadwork themselves.

However, the invention of the beadwork tradition should not be seen as representing a harmful break with established traditions. In fact, there are reasons to believe that the emergence of this invented tradition has enabled the fortification the Kamëntšá artisanal tradition writ large. First, I would argue that the ease with which beadwork techniques are learned, and the relative inexpensiveness of the materials, have been of benefit to many potential artisans who otherwise may not have the time, skill, or money to partake in the artisanal industry. This is especially true for those who do not have the resources to engage in more lengthy and expensive traditions like weaving and woodworking, but for whom beadwork can provide a source of supplementary income. And for those artisans who engage in beadwork alongside more traditional crafts, the added revenue stream from the sale of the former generates additional possibilities to produce the latter. In short, there are economic realities both within the community and external to it that drive artisans to invest in the beadwork tradition over or alongside more traditional forms of artisanry. This is not to suggest, however, that the developing beadwork tradition is any less culturally significant than more established craft forms, a point that merits expanding upon.



Figure 10. A mask workshop operated by one of my artisan collaborators. The round masks in the lower center are of the “gesto” type which appear in the previous figure, while the longer ones with feather crowns are of the “taita” type, a more recently developed genre which depict shamans in ceremonial regalia. Most of these masks will have beads and paint applied before going to market.

One of the ways in which beadwork partakes in cultural reproduction is a matter of its inclusion of traditional symbolic motifs. The greater availability of beadwork products that incorporate traditional symbology allows, in turn, for the greater dissemination of these designs both within and outside of the community. One elderly weaver who is among the oldest and most traditional artisans in the community expressed this thought in the following terms:

Si no hay quien nos compre tampoco de nada vale saber tantas cosas. Es, por ejemplo, ahora ese tejido en lana con macana y hoy están haciendo con chaquira, con chaquira están dibujando. Ese tejido de lana ya casi poco, pero el dibujo sí lo están manejando. Es lo que está pasando. Para mí es bueno la artesanía [en chaquira]. (I.4)

This very traditional artisan herself only works with weaving—in fact, I bought a capisayo in the most traditional pattern woven by her in exchange for our interview—but she remains integrated in the larger artisanal community and regularly interacts with younger artisans who have adopted beadwork in their own artisanal work. I am struck by her cognizance of the apparently greater importance of transmitting traditional symbolism through beadwork than of preserving wool-weaving techniques (which, in fact, is today seldom used even by traditional weavers, who prefer synthetic fibers). Her realism vis-à-vis the economic reasons for which beadwork is taking off is also noteworthy; she acknowledges that there are clear economic incentives to prefer beadwork over more labor-intensive and expensive crafts, but she recognizes that it is the symbolic value of the craft that really matters and that the same symbolism still being reproduced in the nascent beadwork tradition.

Similar realist perspectives were articulated by several artisan women representing a collective of young mothers who regularly meet to practice their weaving, speak Kamëntšá together, and help each other with childcare needs. As they sat trying to teach me how to weave a simple chumbe on a traditional wooden loom called a wanga (I made a poor student), they explained to me that, though they were now learning to weave in the ancestral pattern, they first began their artisanal careers with beadwork, which many of them learned during the lockdown phase of the coronavirus pandemic to supplement their falling incomes. They were now learning to weave the same symbols that they initially learned to stitch into bead bracelets and the wings of bead hummingbirds—which are also a recent innovation enabled by the spread of the beadwork tradition (Figure 10). In the case of these young artisan women, beadwork served as a gateway to more traditional forms of artisanry.

As a final note on the significance of the nascent beadwork tradition to processes of cultural reproduction within the broader artisanal industry, I would like to remark upon instances of syncretism and mixed media in the application of beadwork to other domains of

artisanry. We have already briefly touched on the matter of bead masks, a now standardized modification of an ancestral mask-making tradition that originally only employed carving and, to a limited degree, painting. While the mask-making tradition has incorporated beadwork more extensively and visibly than any other artisanal domain, beadwork has also made an appearance in other types of woodworking, such as the production of *bancos*, the low wooden stools traditionally carved from a single block of wood. *Bancos* were traditionally merely carved and left undecorated, receiving at most a coat of paint or lacquer. Increasingly, however, artisans have applied beads and more elaborate painted designs to the bare wood in order to sell *bancos* with aesthetic as well as functional and ceremonial value. As in the case of beadwork applied to bracelets and masks, these designs often incorporate elements of Kamëntšá symbology, serving to strengthen and transmit traditional values in an aesthetically novel spin on a traditional medium in a way that retains its functional and ritual importance. The same is true of beadwork experiments in the domain of weaving, where weavers are increasingly incorporating beads into their practice. For example, I have seen *tsömbiach* belts and *coronas*, or ceremonial headdresses (Figure 11), made partially or entirely out of beads, an innovation that one would not have witnessed ten or twenty years ago. Here again, despite the application of beadwork techniques of recent provenance to established artisanal traditions, the symbolic value of the resulting products is not diminished. Today, bead products of all types are widespread in the community; many people of all ages and genders wear bead bracelets daily, while necklaces decorated with *tsömbiach* designs or in the image of jaguars and *yagé* visions are now a standard feature of shamans' ceremonial regalia.



Figure 11. Two examples of *coronas*, or crowns, elaborate headdresses used in the ceremonial dress of both men and women, especially during Bëtsknaté. Coronas are decorated with intricate woven patterns in brilliant colors and features dozens of small chumbes or fajas inscribed with tsömbiach symbology. Coronas and their chumbes are traditionally woven, but I have seen several recent examples that partially or entirely incorporate beadwork.

From the exploration of the beadwork tradition given above I draw several conclusions. First, I argue that the advent and rapid growth of the beadwork tradition within

the last twenty years is *complementary*, as opposed to *detrimental*, to the other, more established artisanal traditions. As we have seen, economic realities have driven many artisans, especially young ones and those new to the artisanal scene in general, to adopt beadwork as a primary or supplemental artisanal practice. However, in doing so, these artisans continue to incorporate and reproduce the same ancestral motifs and symbolism drawn from older traditions. Second, beadwork can serve as an easy and affordable introduction to artisanal practice and as a gateway to the eventual production of more ancestral crafts, such as weaving and woodworking. This fact is evinced, for example, by the artisan women who began their artisanal work with beadwork during the coronavirus pandemic before progressing to weaving when the accretion of experience and improving financial fortunes allowed. Third, the syncretic and creative application of beadwork, a recent arrival on the artisanal scene, to more established and ancestral artisanal domains (e.g., masks, bancos, and textiles) serves to mutually strengthen each tradition, new and old alike—especially considering that the colorful and elaborate beadwork designs applied to masks and other crafts are largely responsible for their popularity as tangible emblems of Kamëntšá heritage outside of the valley which can now be found in prestigious museums in the large cities of Colombia. Finally, although beadwork is not an ancestral tradition among the Kamëntšá, it has been welcomed by the community as a legitimate artform as well as an economic boon, to the point that many community members make daily use of bead objects and shamans have adopted them as part of their ceremonial attire. In short, although an invented tradition and a newcomer to the Kamëntšá artisanal scene, the advent of beadwork has contributed to its fortification and reproduction.

7.3 Rearticulation and Invention in the Artisanal Tradition

If the nascent beadwork tradition explored above stands as the prime example of an invented domain in the artisanal industry of the Kamëntšá, it is nevertheless not alone in

exemplifying processes of rearticulation and invention in the artisanal industry writ large. In this section, I explore several other instances of these processes as they are at work in different domains and circumstances. I argue that these processes are evident in 1) the reinterpretation or rearticulation of ancestral symbols and the rejection of foreign ones, and 2) the invention of non-traditional uses for ancestral symbols and motifs.

The first thing to recognize about Kamëntšá symbology, which is complex and multifarious, is that it is not static, like an alphabet, but rather changeful, like the dynamic words and concepts that each symbol represents. In fact, though I have been using the terms “symbology” and “symbols” to this point (*simbología* and *símbolos* in Spanish), these are not the terms used by many of my collaborators, some of whom prefer the term *labor*. The difference between these terms became clear to me during a meeting with Batá Magdalena, a master weaver well known in the community. According to Batá Magdalena, the distinction is that the former term, “symbol,” does not express change whereas the latter does. *Labores* represent things that are themselves changeful, not abstract ideas. Magdalena cited the Colombian flag as an example of a symbol, representing in abstract form an abstract notion. Then she pointed out the patterns on the chumbes on the wall of her shop and told me that those are not symbols, because neither their interpretation nor the things they refer to or represent are static. This concept requires unpacking.

Take the labor for *shinyë*, the sun, a very common motif (Figure 12). According to Magdalena, it is always situated at a certain angle, at a certain point in the sky, which varies

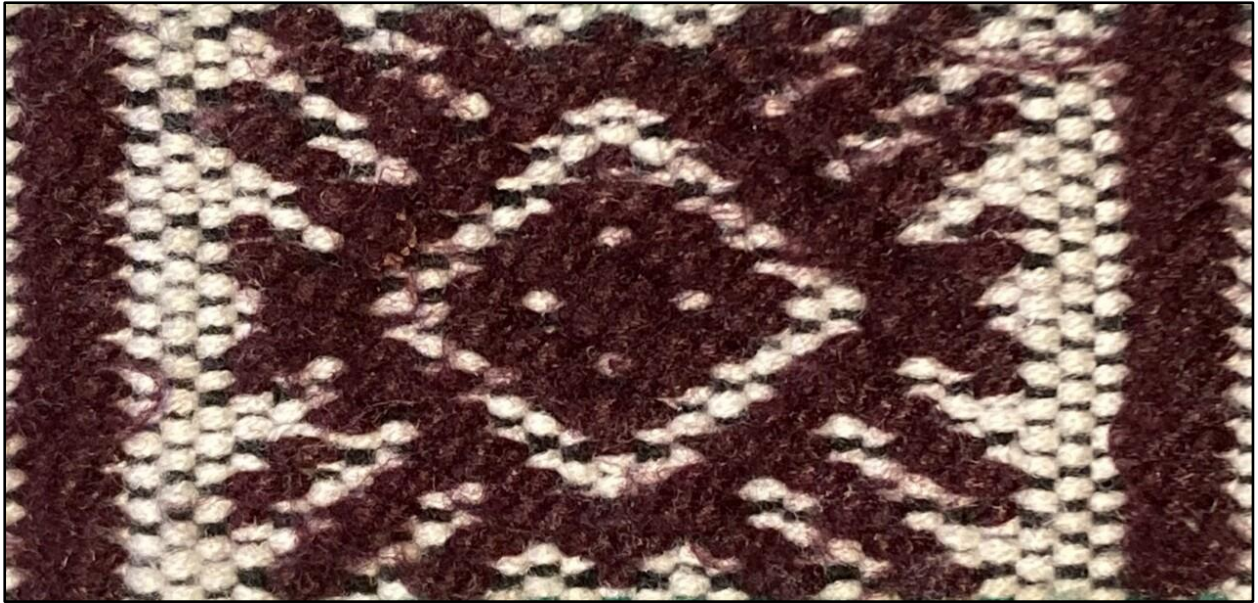


Figure 12. The shinyë motif, an emblematic *labor* representing the sun. Others have told me that this motif can also represent the womb, evincing the type of symbolic rearticulation under discussion here. This example is taken from a tsömbiach running down the middle of a scarf, a recent innovation in Kamëntšá weaving.

depending on the time of day and the standpoint of the observer—the sun is never the same sun. The sun is also, by extension, time; ancestrally, time was told, if ever it needed to be, by reference to the position of the sun in the sky.²⁸ Consequently, the *labores* of Kamëntšá symbology (it would be ungainly to go out of my way to avoid using this term) are not purely representational; they are not and cannot be read always in the same way, for the concepts and objects they refer to are not the same from one moment to the next. There is, therefore, always a process of individual and circumstantial interpretation behind the “reading” of Kamëntšá symbology, whether in the form of a sole *labor* or in the lengthy sequences of a tsömbiach. According to Magdalena, “sentimientos, ideas, historias—todo está en el tsömbiach.”

²⁸ According to Batá Magdalena, “el sol era el tiempo, porque antes no teníamos reloj.” Owing to constraints of space and thematic relevance, I was not able to remark upon Kamëntšá concepts of time in the section on Kamëntšá philosophy and cosmology, but many collaborators have told me things to the effect of “time works differently here.” Some have gone so far as to say that before colonization, “el tiempo no existía para nosotros.” This fascinating subject certainly merits further exploration, but this is not the place for it.

It is partly by virtue of the fact of variable interpretability that Kamëntšá symbology has undergone continuous change with the passage of time, preserving certain ancestral symbols while others have been reinterpreted and some wholly invented. For example, many of the central figures of Kamëntšá symbology are ancestral, having been passed down through generations of artisans with relatively little change in form or interpretation. Aesthetically emblematic symbols like the shinyë are exemplary of ancestral symbology. On the other hand, the meaning of some symbols, even well-established ones, seems to vary depending on context and the background of the person interpreting them. This has to do partly with what some older artisans identify as problems with the pedagogy of traditional symbology in the bilingual schools of the resguardos, where Kamëntšá children usually first learn weaving and other artisanal practices.²⁹ One artisan collaborator explains the pedagogy in the context of resguardo schools as the difference between learning how to write and learning how to draw:

Nos gusta tejer, nos gustan los colores, nos fijamos mucho en la observación. Vamos al jajañ, observamos, miramos y eso estamos plasmando. Es sanación. A nosotros no nos enseñan a escribir [i.e., to weave *labores*], que es otra parte del lenguaje simbólico. No nos enseñan a escribir, por eso yo hacía la comparación de que hoy, de pronto, quizá están enseñándoles mal a los niños en la academia a tejer.

Porque ellos tienen poco de copias impresas, ahí les dibujan el labor y no les enseñan a memorizar. Cuando ya quiere ir a tejer, si no está con la copia, hasta ahí llega el labor. Para nosotros no. Yo creo que hoy en día se debe hablar de esa educación desde lo propio, desde el pensamiento, que le inyecte el pensamiento, porque ese pensamiento lo va a sanar. (FG.1)

According to these artisans, the fact that many Kamëntšá children learn the weaving of traditional symbols only by rote memorization has distorted their knowledge of the original values of these symbols. In effect, the speaker believes that in the weaving classes offered at resguardo schools, children do not learn how to write so much as to trace and copy. This may be, but an overlooked consequence of this fact is that it opens those symbols to new

²⁹ This is as opposed to the traditional system in which children learn artisanal crafts in the home with their parents and other adults. This still occurs but is increasingly infrequent.

possibilities of interpretation. Thus, resguardo education is partly responsible for cases of symbolic rearticulation wherein established symbols are resignified and assigned multiple values.

However, it should not be understood from this that all cases of symbolic rearticulation are a matter of misinterpretation on the part of young artisans who were not properly taught the “authentic” values of the symbols they have learned to produce by rote. Professional, skilled, and knowledgeable artisans are also active in the process of resignifying established symbols. For instance, one of the older artisans in my focus group meetings shared the following anecdote regarding the ambiguous interpretation of a symbol assigned different values by various people:

Mi mamá dijo, “El peine.” Por eso, para nosotros, el peine es un símbolo de pensamiento, porque con el peine nos hicieron el aseo, como venirnos a cambiar el pensamiento. Mi mamá dice, “Eso que quede en la labor.” Unos dicen que es el peine, otros dicen que es la munchira [a type of caterpillar]. Imagínense que coincide. Sea como sea, para nosotros es el pensamiento. Otra separación de que uno haga en la parte del dibujo, de la labor de ahí, es la munchira. Si no, ahí mismo dicen, los ojitos de cuy. Todo es natural, por eso hasta ahí va *uaman soyëng* [“sacred things”], muy valioso. Todo va, como yo le decía, en la cosmovisión indígena. Uno marca con una labor, con un dibujito. La marca de nosotros es la labor. (FG.1)

It strikes me that although this speaker remarks on these different interpretations of the same *labor*, she does not claim a single definitive value for it. Instead, she recognizes each meaning as a legitimate possible interpretation—the symbol is simultaneously a hairbrush, a caterpillar, and even the eyes of a guinea pig. “All is natural,” she explains, “all these things are sacred.” Furthermore, this interlocutor seems to recognize each of these symbols, whatever their referent, refer to the same meaning: thought. She shrugs off the ambiguity in meaning: “it all fits in the Indigenous cosmovision.” What is interesting here is that an ancestral symbol has taken on multiple referents which are superficially contradictory or mutually exclusive but which, at least in this case of this interlocutor, refer to the same

concept. This evinces preservation on the level of abstract meaning and rearticulation on the level of symbolic interpretation.

Another example inheres in the symbol called *shinyë*, the sun (Figure 12, shown above). While I have not heard this symbol referred to by any other name, its interpretation seems to be in doubt—or, if not ambiguous, then in superposition. For as often as it has been described to me as representing the sun, it has also been said to depict a woman's womb.³⁰ What seems to be happening is that the symbol conventionally known as *shinyë* is actually a composite of two symbols. Those who tell me it refers to the sun tend to say so with reference to the angular rays emitting from the central diamond design. Those who say it refers to the womb tend to point to the diamond itself, or to the crosshatch matrix contained within it. This distinction finds support in the fact that others among my artisan collaborators have, with a greater degree of unanimity, characterized diamond-shaped designs *without* associated sunrays as wombs. This leads me to believe that either 1) both meanings are ancestral and have always co-inherited, or 2) one meaning is ancestral and the other is a more recent rearticulation of a traditional design. The fact that the symbol goes by the term *shinyë* leads me to tend towards the latter explanation. Other examples of similar processes—i.e., cases of ambiguity in meaning or the semantic resignification of ancestral designs—abound, although for lack of space I will not explore them further here.³¹

³⁰ This association suggests the body-territory principle explored above, as well as the notion of the territory as mother. It also brings to mind the Andean philosophical concept of *yanantin*, complementary dualism, insofar as the sun is the paternal principle thought to inseminate the fertile ground of the earth with its rays. This, in turn, recalls the shamanic use of quartz crystals in the Lower Putumayo and Vaupés, deep in the Colombian Amazon. These crystals, thought to embody the solidified semen of the sun, are (or once were) worn around the neck by shamans seeking to potentiate their powers with the vital essence of the sun (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1968). In short, it is perhaps logical that two apparently quite disparate concepts should be joined in the selfsame symbol.

³¹ During my work with artisans, I encountered many other examples of ambiguity or negotiation in the meanings of the same symbols. A comparative study of the rearticulation or resignification of specific designs in the Kamëntšá symbolic repertoire would make a valuable intervention in the literature. This, however, is not the place for that.

The above discussion seeks to demonstrate that ancestral symbols have been reinterpreted and assigned multiple, though apparently generally reconcilable and complementary, meanings in the recent history of the Kamëntšá artisanal industry. Also significant, however, is the former intrusion, and eventual erasure on the part of Kamëntšá artisans, of foreign symbolologies. One weaver, a very old woman who is well respected in the artisanal community for being one of the first artisans to establish a cooperative and exhibit her wares at the fairs and competitions sponsored by the nascent heritage industry of the 1970s and 80s, explained to me how merchants and organizations arrived in the Sibundoy Valley from Bogotá and abroad with the stated intention of fomenting and improving the artisanal industry there. Her story follows:

Nos hemos dedicado en artesanías que antes los mayorcitos, la mayoría de las abuelitas sabían tejer, pero ellos no tenían comercio dónde ni cómo ni a quién. Nos dedicamos nomás a mantener, pero cuando ya llegaron algunos compradores, gracias a ellos nos vino a apreciar, nos reconocían y llevaban a mostrar a otros países. A ellos les gustó. Nos había mandado unos tres americanos. Ellos vinieron a crear una junta, un grupo. Después de eso, nos ayudó a crear una cooperativa. Gracias a ellos tuvimos 80 trabajadoras.

Sí, nos ayudó como 10 años. Gracias a ellos fuimos ampliando el trabajo, ampliando más cositas. Una americana era holandesa, se llamaba Susana. Elita nos ayudó de hacer el dibujo más amplio y más dibujitos. Claro que a nosotros entre más que sabíamos un poquito, de ver que había compra, a nosotros nos vino en la mente ampliar el dibujito y nos venía más a la mente. Nos ayudaba que teníamos que hacer más dibujos y nos venía más inteligencia para poder dibujar en esas telas.

Así fueron ayudándonos más y más. Ya fuimos ampliando el trabajo, nos compraban harto, llevaban hartos los señores. Lástima que ya se nos fueron los que vinieron a fundar, a ayudarnos. Se nos fueron, ya ellos entregaron al cabildo y en el cabildo no marchó bien. Se fueron haciéndonos perder estas cosas. Ya nos fuimos apartando todos, ya individualmente, unos para acá, otros para allá.

A mí me tocó salir a otros pueblos, a otras regiones. Los buenos amigos de por allá nos recibieron, también allá formaban grupitos. De cada región salían otros artesanos de otra manera. Así nos fueron recogiendo y también formaron una artesanía de Colombia. (I.4)

Although this informant frames the arrival of outsiders as beneficial to the artisanal community, others have not described this history so kindly. In general, my collaborators were quick to denounce what they interpreted as the “robo artesanal” and “injusticia

artesanal” that they claim undergirded the attempts of outside organizations, such as Artesanías de Colombia, to “develop” the Kamëntšá artisanal industry. One of the major issues raised by my collaborators regarding these actors is that, more than appropriating and reproducing Kamëntšá artisanal techniques and designs without the knowledge or consent of the artisans who taught them, these non-Indigenous Colombian and foreign merchants went so far as to introduce foreign designs into the artisanal repertoire of the Kamëntšá. These changes, it was explained, were meant to foment the commercialization of Kamëntšá handicrafts, but in fact they introduced designs devoid of any cultural significance to the artisans, meant only to generate revenue through sale to tourists and outsiders. In effect, artesanías became commodities, and with this change came a form of alienation between the artisan and her work. In her study of the Kamëntšá artisanal industry, Gloria Stella Barrera Jurado (2015) writes:

Estás dinámicas de mercantilización de los objetos kamsá generaron cambios fundamentales en diferentes aspectos de su universo objetual... Por lo tanto se comenzó la producción de objetos ajenos a la cultura material de los kamsá, como individuales para mesa, corbatas, cinturones, monederos, diferentes prendas de vestir, objetos para la decoración de espacios y *souvenirs* u objetos recordatorios de la visita al valle de Sibundoy. (161)

Naturally, the production of objects wholly foreign to the Kamëntšá artisanal repertoire implied an attack—intended or not—on the cultural underpinnings of the ancestral artisanal tradition. Witnessing their culture and traditions eroding under the influence of outsiders, whom some in the community decried as Cold War spies for the Americans (164), activists and artisans began rejecting the outsiders’ artisanal impositions beginning in the 1980s.

Barrera Jurado writes:

Finalmente, también se generaron acciones de resistencia y control social por parte de los artesanos al ir borrando del inventario artesanal los diseños creados por estos agentes externos. Igualmente, con las acciones de la Institución Bilingüe y de Artesanías de Colombia en los años ochenta, se buscó contrarrestar los afectos de homogenización mercantil, técnica y de pérdida de elementos identitarios generados por la acción de estos gringos. (165)

This represents an agentic decision made on the part of disgruntled artisans who saw their genuine traditions under threat—and we may recognize here a distinction between *invented* traditions that emerge *from within* the community itself, and *imposed* or *introduced* traditions brought by outsiders.



Figure 13. Examples of artisanal rearticulation and invention in the weaving tradition. The bag in the middle uses traditional colors—the red, blue, white, and black stripes characteristic of traditional capisayos—in a non-traditional medium: a mochila, or woven bag, a product with which the capisayo pattern is not traditionally associated. The bag is also decorated with a tsömbiach design around the middle, another non-traditional use of a traditional design. While bags bearing tsömbiach symbology have been commonplace for some time, one of my close collaborators remarked on the use of capisayo colors as novel, suggesting invention on the part of the artisan who wove this bag.



Figure 14. At a weaving workshop sponsored by the Sibundoy cabildo, a batá, an experienced weaver recognized by the community for her skill at the loom, teaches a younger woman how to weave using the *tabla*, a wooden plant with embedded poles that serves to initiate the process of weaving a tsömbiach. Once the basic form is completed on the tabla, the tsömbiach is transferred to an upright wanga to complete the weaving process. Workshops like these evince the importance of intergenerational knowledge transmission within the artisanal industry. Notably, many young children were present and eagerly learning how to weave and to craft *coronas*.

...

7.4 Artisanal Autonomy

Kamëntšá language through artisanry

(Herzfeld 2003)



Figure 15. A weaver sits at his wanga, the wooden loom used to weave tsömbiach belts and other Kamëntšá textiles. This man is weaving a capisayo inscribed with tsömbiach symbology. The colors and design are not traditional, evincing a process of innovation in the domain of weaving that has only emerged in recent decades.

Men are also traditionally not weavers, but instead woodcarvers, indicating changes afoot in the gendered associations of the different artisanal traditions. If men can now weave, will women begin to carve?

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Appendix A:

Glossary

Orthographic note: The Kamëntšá language does not have a standardized orthography. The spellings used here reflect those I have read before or which appear intuitive to me based on pronunciation. Note that many words I have spelled with “k” are sometimes spelled elsewhere replacing this letter with “c,” following Spanish orthography. The same applies to my preference for “ua” to represent the sound that others have signified with “w.” I make exceptions for some words that are more commonly spelled with these letters, such that I have preferred “Clestrinŷe” over “Klestrinŷe” and “Wayra” over “Uaira.” In general, my intention is solely to follow what seems the most common and easily recognizable spelling of each term. When in doubt, I have referred to the orthography used in the *Diccionario bilingüe* compiled by Juan Bautista Jacanamijoy Juajibioy (2018).

Artesanía: An artisanal product or the artisanal industry itself.

Aslëpay: “Thank you.” Etymologically, derives from “Dios le pague,” a Catholic form of giving thanks that was probably adopted into Kamëntšá during the Capuchin period. This term implies more intensity than the more common “pai,” which is shared with the Inga community.

Aslëpay ainanokán: “Thank you from the heart.” A more intense variant of “aslëpay.”

Ayahuasca: The most common term in Western Amazonia for a hallucinogenic brew prepared from a decoction of the liana *Banisteriopsis caapi*, also known as the ayahuasca vine. More commonly known as yagé in Colombia, this drink is regarded as a sacred medicine and forms the centerpiece of Sibundoy Valley traditions of shamanism and ethnomedicine. From the Quechua: “vine of the soul” or “spirit vine.”

Bacó: “Uncle.” An honorific term of respect and endearment for elder men.

Batá: “Aunt.” An honorific term of respect and endearment for older women.

Benach: “Path.” Refers to physical paths, such as the trails that run between family homes in the vereda, as well as a common symbolic motif usually represented as a zigzag. Also the name of an art gallery and café that recently opened adjacent to Interculturality Park in central Sibundoy, which now serves as one of the principal cultural centers of the Kamëntšá community.

Bëngbë Tabanok: “Our Tabanok.” One of several terms referring to the ancestral territory of the Kamëntšá. See *Tabanok*.

Bëngbë Uaman Luar: “Our sacred place.” One of several terms referring to the ancestral territory of the Kamëntšá.

Bëngbë Uaman Luar Tabanok: “Our sacred place of origin.” The most elaborate of several terms referring to the ancestral territory of the Kamëntšá.

Bëtsknaté: “Great Day.” Refers to the most significant annual festivity of the Kamëntšá, always occurring the Monday prior to Ash Wednesday. Often erroneously known to outsiders and in the literature as the “Carnival of Pardon” (*Carnaval del Perdón*), this festivity is one of the cornerstones of Kamëntšá expressive culture. Ancestrally, Bëtsknaté was once considered the most important day in the harvest season known as Clestrinje, but the two words have gradually been associated to the point that they are now usually used interchangeably.

Bishana: The most traditional soup of the Kamëntšá, incorporating many of the most basic and abundant foodstuffs to grow in the jajañ and ancestrally prepared without salt.

Biyá: “Speaker.” Refers to the speaker of a certain language, as in *Kamëntšá Biyá*, “those of the Kamëntšá language.”

Biyán: “Language.” One of the central pillars of Kamëntšá life, alongside *juabna* “thought” and *nemoria* “identity,” “origin.”

Botamán: “Beautiful.” A common adjective often applied to denote philosophical concepts and principles, e.g., *botamán benach*, “to walk beautifully,” *botamán juabna*, “to think beautifully.”

Botamán benach: “To walk beautifully.” An oft-quoted philosophical and ethical principle. Often paraphrased in Spanish as “caminar bonito.”

Botamán juabna: “To think beautifully.” An oft-quoted philosophical and ethical principle. Often paraphrased in Spanish as “pensar bonito.”

Cabildo: An Indigenous tribal council. The cabildo structure dates to the colonial Spanish Americas, where they were a form of Indigenous self-government of limited powers. In contemporary Colombia, cabildos are the legislative bodies with jurisdiction over resguardos, or Indigenous reservations.

Capisayo: The traditional woven cloak or poncho worn by Kamëntšá men. Traditionally, different colors, patterns, and designs were worn by different people depending on identity and status, with the most traditional red-black-blue-white striped pattern proscribed to all but cabildo governors and ex-governors under threat of official punishment. Today capisayos of all types are widely worn and are a recognized symbol of the Kamëntšá community.

Capuchins: Friars of the Capuchin Order, a Franciscan religious order within the Catholic Church. Capuchin friars, with the endorsement of the Colombian state, ruled the Sibundoy

Valley through the Apostolic Prefecture of the Caquetá and Putumayo between 1904 and 1970.

Chagra: A generic term for the Indigenous horticultural and ethnobotanical gardens cultivated by various Indigenous peoples in southern Colombia and adjacent regions. From the Quechua *chakra*. Often used interchangeably with *jajañ*, the emic Kamëntšá term.

Chamán: The Spanish term for “shaman.” Occasionally used to describe the Indigenous shamans better known locally as *taitas* or *médicos tradicionales*.

Chicha: A genre of fermented beverages, usually derived from maize but sometimes made with fruit or other foodstuffs. Very commonly served in ceremonial contexts or at parties, festivals such as Bëtsknaté, mingas and cuadrillas, and other community gatherings.

Chumbe: From the Quechua *chumpi*, refers to woven belts, especially of the Inga community, though the term is also widely used among the Kamëntšá. Used interchangeably with *tsömbiach* and *faja*.

Clestrinÿe: A major annual festival celebrated by the Kamëntšá on the Monday prior to Ash Wednesday. Today the term is typically used synonymously with *Bëtsknaté*, “Great Day,” but in former times, Clestrinÿe referred to the harvest season, over which multiple festivities were spread, while Bëtsknaté was only the most significant of all the festival days. The Clestrinÿe / Bëtsknaté celebration known today is a syncretic and partially invented synthesis of various traditions, old and new, of both Indigenous and Catholic provenance.

Colón: A town and municipality of the Sibundoy Valley founded by Capuchins and inhabited mostly by colonos and Ingas. Situated between Sibundoy to the west and Santiago to the east.

Colono: A non-Indigenous inhabitant of the Sibundoy Valley. Sometimes used interchangeably with *blanco*, “White,” although skin color is secondary to ethnicity.

Cuadrilla: A form of *jenajuabachan*, mutual aid, involving a collective of community members, usually between fifteen and sixty and belonging to a single family or several related ones, dedicated to carrying out communal labor projects. Typical projects include harvesting the crops of each member of the collective in turn. Remuneration is in the form of mutual aid, not money or food, as in the case of the *mengay* or *minga*. Cuadrillas and mingas were once very common forms of collective labor, but they are no longer widely practiced.

Cuy: Guinea pig, a domesticated delicacy often served roasted for special events. Not as widely eaten today as in former times.

Faja: Spanish term for a woven belt or sash. Used interchangeably with *chumbe* and *tsömbiach*, especially to refer to smaller exemplars.

Gesto: From the Spanish “gesture” or “expression.” Refers to a genre of masks known for their rounded features and exaggerated expressions. Distinguished by gender according to the

hair (undifferentiated for men, parted for women) and by identity or profession accorded to the facial expression depicted and the colors and patterns represented by the beadwork applied to the wood.

Gobernador: From the Spanish “governor.” Refers to the highest political authority of an Indigenous cabildo serving a one-year term. Incumbent and ex-gobernadores are afforded extreme respect within the community. Women in this position are called *gobernadoras*.

Inga: An Indigenous people inhabiting the Sibundoy Valley east of the San Pedro River, which bisects the valley from north to south, as well as several other territories of southwest Colombia. Speakers of a dialect of Kichwa, or Ecuadorian Quechua, the Inga are the northernmost extant group of Quechua-speakers in South America. The Inga of the Sibundoy Valley share many cultural practices and traditions with their Kamëntšá neighbors which are not shared with Inga groups in other regions of Colombia, evincing a process of considerable local transculturation between both groups.

Ingano: An alternative and somewhat antiquated term for the Inga often encountered in older literature but rarely heard spoken today.

Jabenachan: One of the pillars of Kamëntšá thought and ethics described in the book *Hacer memoria para recuperar el ser kamëntšá* (Grupo de Memoria Kamëntšá 2022). Translated as: “Open paths so that other people may learn. It is a duty to open good paths so that the coming generations can recognize the wisdom of the elders and can replicate it with respect and love.”

Jaguashetsam: One of the pillars of Kamëntšá thought and ethics described in the book *Hacer memoria para recuperar el ser kamëntšá* (Grupo de Memoria Kamëntšá 2022). Translated as: “Planting does not only refer to plants, trees, flowers, but also to the cultivation of good deeds within oneself, the family, and the community. Going to plant is a constant duty in everyday life.”

Jajañ: The horticultural and ethnobotanical garden of the Kamëntšá, where numerous varieties of edible, medicinal, magical, and ornamental plants are cultivated. One of the centerpieces of traditional Kamëntšá lifeways, the jajañ is simultaneously a food pantry, a pharmacy, and a laboratory and has been described as a “policultivo” system as opposed to the monoculture land use system which has replaced it in parts of the valley. This term is used interchangeably with *chagra*.

Jashakam: One of the pillars of Kamëntšá thought and ethics described in the book *Hacer memoria para recuperar el ser kamëntšá* (Grupo de Memoria Kamëntšá 2022). Translated as: “If we have planted with love, the harvest will be abundant, just as one plants three grains of maize and returns to a harvest of many ears.”

Jenajabuacham: One of the pillars of Kamëntšá thought and ethics described in the book *Hacer memoria para recuperar el ser kamëntšá* (Grupo de Memoria Kamëntšá 2022). Translated as: “Mutually assist one another, learn to offer help, for we all need each other one way or another and the elders always desire that their children help each other.

Jenantsamian kukuats: One of the pillars of Kamëntšá thought and ethics described in the book *Hacer memoria para recuperar el ser kamëntšá* (Grupo de Memoria Kamëntšá 2022). Translated as: “Lend each other a helping hand to develop some project, without selfishness and always with a mind to help because we are passengers. Lending a hand is a gesture of solidarity that teaches us to be more human.”

Jenojuaboyan: One of the pillars of Kamëntšá thought and ethics described in the book *Hacer memoria para recuperar el ser kamëntšá* (Grupo de Memoria Kamëntšá 2022). Translated as: “Think before speaking so as not to speak wrongly. *Botamán jenojuaboyan*, think beautifully throughout your life.”

Jomësh: Taro root (*Colocasia esculenta*). A starchy root vegetable that was once on the ancestral staple foods of the Kamëntšá but is now cultivated with dwindling frequency, replaced by non-ancestral rice, potatoes, and bread. Also called *barbacuano* and *cuna* in Spanish.

Juabna: “Thought.” Sometimes used to refer to Kamëntšá philosophy; in this sense, one of the pillars of Kamëntšá life and culture.

Juakjayan: One of the pillars of Kamëntšá thought and ethics described in the book *Hacer memoria para recuperar el ser kamëntšá* (Grupo de Memoria Kamëntšá 2022). Translated as: “Hold back for another moment, hold in your thoughts, learn to cultivate good thoughts and keep them to be shared at the right moment and with those who need to hear them.”

Juashentsam: One of the pillars of Kamëntšá thought and ethics described in the book *Hacer memoria para recuperar el ser kamëntšá* (Grupo de Memoria Kamëntšá 2022). Translated as: “Plant in children’s minds the knowledge of the ancestors so that it can be transmitted from one generation to another. Plant with love and without selfishness because the seeds of knowledge must grow within them.”

Juastajuam: One of the pillars of Kamëntšá thought and ethics described in the book *Hacer memoria para recuperar el ser kamëntšá* (Grupo de Memoria Kamëntšá 2022). Translated as: “Gather food to offer, *juatšümbonam*, we all need each other one way or another. *Wakjnaité*, day of the dead.”

Labor: A Spanish term preferred by some of my artisan collaborators as an alternative to “symbol.” Refers to the unique pictographic designs that decorate tsömbiach belts and other artisanal products. The difference between “labor” and “symbol” is said to be a matter of the dynamism and changefulness embodied in the latter versus the static abstraction represented by the latter.

Laguna de la Cocha: A large volcanic lagoon situated in the Andean highlands between the Sibundoy Valley and the city of Pasto in the department of Nariño. Colombia’s second largest inland body of water. The name literally translates as “Lagoon Lagoon,” from the Quechua *qucha*.

Limpieza: From the Spanish “cleansing,” “purification.” Refers to a purification ritual performed by shamans by shaking a wayra around the bare torso and head of a sitting patient while chanting rhythmically. Often performed at the close of a yagé ceremony to cleanse the body of evil spirits, which are frequently “sucked” out by the shaman and spat out of the open door or window of his maloca as an act of banishment.

Luar Kawsay: A Kamëntšá band whose name, a Kamëntšá-Inga portmanteau, means “space of life.” One of the most significant acts in the Kamëntšá community today, they often play both in public and at private curing ceremonies run by the family patriarch, a shaman based in vereda La Menta, the most distant and most traditional vereda in the valley.

Madre Naturaleza: In Spanish, “Mother Nature.” One of the terms often used to personify nature as a collective mother.

Madre Tierra: In Spanish, “Mother Earth.” One of the terms often used to personify nature as a collective mother. Used interchangeably with *Pachamama* and *Tsbatsána Mamá*.

Maloca: A large ceremonial roundhouse typically employed by shamans in yagé ceremonies and as a venue for community events.

Mama: From the Quechua “mother,” a term of respect and endearment for older women, equivalent to the masculine “taita.” Often rendered in the diminutive as “mamita.”

Mengay: From the Quechua *minga*, a pan-Andean form of collective labor traditionally reciprocated with food and drink, not money. Compare to *cuadrilla*.

Mocoa: The capital city of the Colombian department of Putumayo, of which the Sibundoy Valley constitutes the uppermost region by elevation. Located in the foothills of the Andes-Amazon interface about eighty kilometers or four hours from the Sibundoy Valley along one of Colombia’s deadliest roads, locally known as the *Trampolín de la Muerte*.

Munchira: A local word for a type of caterpillar.

Nariño: A Colombian department comprising the Pacific coast and Andean highlands of southern Colombia, bordering Ecuador to the south and the Sibundoy Valley in the neighboring department of Putumayo to the west. Its capital city of Pasto is the nearest urban hub to the Sibundoy Valley, at sixty-five kilometers and about two hours away by road.

Nemoria: ...

Pachamama: The pan-Andean goddess of the earth, fertility, and the harvest and a common cosmological referent for many contemporary Indigenous peoples in South America. Often translated as “Mother Earth,” the term is more literally rendered as “World Mother” in Quechua and Aymara. Often used interchangeably with *Madre Tierra* in Spanish and *Tsbatsána Mamá* in Kamëntšá.

Páramo: A type of alpine tundra and wetland ecosystem unique to the Andes. The páramos of Colombia are of great ecological importance and provide the majority of Colombia's drinking water but are disproportionately threatened by climate change and environmental degradation. The páramos surrounding the Sibundoy Valley are the source of its irrigation water and are revered by Kamëntšá land defenders.

Pasto: Officially known as San Juan de Pasto. The capital city of the Colombian department of Nariño and the nearest large city to the Sibundoy Valley.

Pinta: Spanish for “paint” or “spot.” Refers to the hallucinatory visuals associated with yagé. “Buena pinta” or “suma pinta” refer to auspicious visions that form an important part of the curative process.

Putumayo: A department of southern Colombia that straddles the Andes Mountains and the Amazon rainforest, sometimes colloquially referred to as the gateway to the Colombian Amazon. The high-elevation region of this department, the Upper Putumayo, is coextensive with the Sibundoy Valley. This department also gives name to the Putumayo River, one of the primary affluents of the Amazon River, which has its headwaters in the hills surrounding the Sibundoy Valley.

Remedio: Spanish: “remedy.” Refers to yagé in its capacity as a powerful medicine. Participating in yagé sessions is often framed as “drinking *remedio*.”

Resguardo: Spanish: “reservation.” Refers to Indigenous territories granted a degree of legal autonomy according to the terms of the Colombian Constitution of 1991. Resguardos are under the jurisdiction of cabildos, Indigenous councils elected on an annual basis.

Ruana: A Colombian Spanish term for a poncho or mantle. Commonly used by outsiders to refer to the woven cloaks better known to the Kamëntšá as capisayos.

San Andrés: An Inga town at the western end of the Sibundoy Valley.

San Francisco: The easternmost town of the Sibundoy Valley, principally inhabited by colonos and Kamëntšá.

Santiago: The principal Inga town of the Sibundoy Valley, located near its western terminus.

Shaman: A traditional doctor or medicine man in Indigenous ethnomedical traditions, especially one skilled in the use of yagé.

Shinŷak: Kamëntšá: “fire,” “hearth.” Refers to the three-stone hearth that was once a central feature in every Kamëntšá home. The three stones represent both astral bodies, i.e., the sun, the moon, and the stars, and the family, i.e., father, mother, and children. The shinŷak is a site of family gathering and the exchange of ideas and knowledge through orality and narrative.

Shinyë: Kamëntšá: “sun.” Refers to both the astral body and a very common motif in Kamëntšá symbology which can represent either the sun or the womb.

Sibundoy: The principal town of the Sibundoy Valley. The municipality of Sibundoy, containing several veredas, or outlying rural districts, in addition to the urban hub, had a population of 14,104 according to the 2018 Colombian Census. Coterminous with *Tabanok*, one of the sacred sites of the ancestral territory of the Kamëntšá.

Sibundoy Valley: An intermontane basin in southwest Colombia situated between the Andean highlands of Nariño to the west and the Amazonian lowlands of Putumayo to the east. The ancestral home of the Kamëntšá people and one of several Inga territories.

Sinchi: A Quechua-derived term for a yagé shaman among the Inga.

Sinchiwaira: A Quechua term for a yagé shaman among the Inga.

Sinchiyachi: A Quechua term for a yagé shaman among the Inga.

Suma pinta: From the Quechua *suma*, “beautiful,” and the Spanish *pinta*, “paint” or “spot.” Refers to pleasant, curative, or deeply meaningful visions associated with drinking yagé.

Tabanok: “Place of return,” a common term within the Kamëntšá community for the town of Sibundoy or the place that it now occupies. Sometimes used metonymically to refer to the entirety of the Kamëntšá ancestral territory. Commonly stylized as “TBNK” in graffiti and street art throughout the town of Sibundoy.

Tabla: A weaving device consisting of a plank of wood with six embedded stakes or poles around which threads are wrapped and layered in the beginning stages of weaving a tsömbiach. Traditionally, this process was carried out with sticks embedded in the ground in the *jajañ* outside, but the *tabla* is now the preferred instrument.

Taita: From the Quechua “father.” An honorific used as a term of respect and endearment to refer to older men, especially traditional authorities and shamans. Not all taitas are shamans, but all shamans are taitas; many outsiders assume the two are synonymous, but this is not the case. Shamans are sometimes called *médicos*, or “doctors,” to distinguish them from taitas who do not practice traditional medicine.

Tamabioy: The name of a Kamëntšá vereda situated between the towns of Sibundoy and San Francisco. Also the surname of a famous, semi-legendary cacique, Carlos Tamabioy, whose name has been invoked by the Kamëntšá-Inga territorial autonomy movement that began in the valley circa 2010.

Tatxumbwá: A Kamëntšá term for a shaman or traditional doctor skilled in the use of yagé.

Tsbatsána Bebmá: “Mother Earth.” A form of personifying the earth in maternal terms. Used interchangeably with *Madre Tierra* and *Pachamama*.

Tsbatsána Mamá: “Mother Earth.” A form of personifying the earth in maternal terms. Used interchangeably with *Madre Tierra* and *Pachamama*. “Mamá” is a Spanish loanword bearing slightly different connotations than the more ancestral “bebmá.”

Tsömbiach: A traditional woven belt inscribed with symbols, or *labores*, unique to the Kamëntšá artistic and symbolic tradition. The production and use of the tsömbiach is associated particularly with women, who traditionally weave it in their homes, wear it wrapped around the waist and stomach, and wrap it around babies as a swaddle. The tsömbiach is thought to have magical and protective powers and is perhaps the most emblematic artisanal product of the Kamëntšá community.

Uaman Luar: Literally “sacred place,” but often paraphrased as “sacred place of origin.” Though not an ancestral term but rather a recent invention on the part of land defenders and activists, this is one of the most common terms referring to the ancestral territory of the Kamëntšá.

Uaman soyëng: “Sacred things.” Refers to practices and objects considered of great importance to the cultural and spiritual integrity of the Kamëntšá people.

Variante San Francisco-Mocoa: Also known as the San Francisco-Mocoa Bypass, this is a planned, partially constructed, and currently suspended highway development project that, if completed, would connect the easternmost town of the Sibundoy Valley (San Francisco) with the departmental capital of Putumayo (Mocoa). Ostensibly, the construction of the bypass is meant to replace the dangerous and decrepit road that currently connects these towns, and which witnesses multiple deadly accidents on an annual basis. However, land defenders and Indigenous activists warn that its true purpose is to open the natural resources of the protected area it would run through to neoliberal extraction. *La Variante*, as it is locally known, is an infamous white elephant in this region, receiving tens of millions of dollars of investment but showing no signs of completion anytime soon.

Vereda: An outlying rural district and administrative subdivision contained within a municipality. The majority of the Indigenous population of the Sibundoy Valley, both Kamëntšá and Inga, live in veredas outside of the major towns of the valley.

Virgen de las Lajas: An apparition of the Virgin Mary venerated at the Las Lajas Sanctuary, a minor basilica in southern Nariño. Her veneration was introduced into the Sibundoy Valley by the Capuchins and she is now considered the patron saint of the Kamëntšá. Her image is paraded during the Bëtsknaté procession and set up in the Sibundoy cathedral, while pious Kamëntšá devotees make pilgrimage to her sanctuary throughout the year.

Wakjnaité:

Wayra: A bundle of dried leaves gathered from tropical grasses of the genus *Pariana*. More widely known in Quechua as a *chakapa*, this instrument is widely employed by shamans

leading yagé ceremonies. The wayra is shaken to the rhythm of the shaman's chant as a form of agitating and controlling the spirits thought to inhere in magical and ethnomedical contexts.

Yagé: An entheogenic brew derived from the decoction of *Banisteriopsis caapi* and any number of secondary potentiating plants, more widely known outside of Colombia as *ayahuasca*. Revered by the Kamëntšá and many other Indigenous peoples of Western Amazonia as a sacred medicine, it is a cornerstone of the Sibundoy Valley shamanic and ethnomedical tradition.

Yanantin: The pan-Andean philosophical principle of complementary dualism.

Appendix B:

Interview and Focus Group Descriptions with Anonymized Participant Information

I. = interview

FG. = focus group

M = male / F = female

I.1: June 23, 2022. This interlocutor (M) is a middle-aged artist and taita who runs a shop in Sibundoy. He is known as a traditionalist who always wears traditional garments and prefers to speak Kamëntšá over Spanish. He is also an activist who has been a significant figure in political and territorial movements within the community. Our conversation revolved around themes of autonomy, territoriality, extractivism, and the land defense movement.

I.2: June 28, 2022. This interlocutor (F) is a middle-aged weaver who runs an artisanal collective with a store in Sibundoy selling textiles, beadwork, and masks. She is also the daughter of a noted Kamëntšá anthropologist and ethnolinguist who produced a considerable volume of scholarship on the myths and narrative art of the Kamëntšá. Our conversation was about artisanal work, its importance within the community and Kamëntšá culture, and its relationship to autonomy and territoriality. We also discussed the work and influence of her father within the community.

I.3: July 5, 2022. This interlocutor (M) is a middle-aged woodcarver who makes a living producing masks, instruments, and other traditional artesanías. He also plays a *saraguay*, one of the archetypal characters in the procession of the Bëtskнатé celebration. His family is influential within the artisanal industry of the community and his carving work is on display in Sibundoy's central Interculturality Park. Our conversation centered around his artisanal work, its relationship to autonomy and territoriality, the importance of woodcarving and traditional masks within the community, and processes of cultural reproduction within the carving tradition.

I.4: July 23, 2022. This interlocutor (F) is an elderly artisan who has been weaving all her life and continues to work into old age. Her daughters are also traditional weavers and important artisans within the community in their own right. Our conversation was about her childhood and early life growing up during the Capuchin mission and partaking in the expansion of the artisanal industry following its collapse. We discussed processes of change in the artisanal tradition over her lifetime and touched on what she termed "artisanal theft" or "artisanal injustice," referring to the appropriation of Kamëntšá artesanías and artisanal techniques by outside organizations without proper remuneration to artisans in the community.

I.5: July 29, 2022. This interlocutor (M) is an older shaman who performs ceremonies in a maloca in one of the outlying veredas outside of Sibundoy. One of the more popular choices among foreigners and tourists looking to try yagé, this shaman runs comparatively large ceremonies with groups of ten to twenty patients with the help of his sons, who are apprentice shamans in training. Our conversation was about the relationship between yagé, Kamëntšá ethnomedicine and shamanism, territoriality, and autonomy. We also touched on the importance of traditional land use patterns, such as the jajañ tradition, as opposed to the

unsustainable and ecologically harmful monoculture practices introduced by settler colonialism.

I.6: July 29, 2022. This was a double interview conducted during a yagé ceremony with an Inga shaman and his wife, both land defenders in the bi-ethnic Guardia Indígena, an autonomous and bi-ethnic unit of activists Kamëntšá and Inga activists who regularly patrol the Indigenous territories of the valley and surrounding areas. Recorded under the influence of yagé, our wide-ranging conversation touched on the importance of the yagé tradition, the *jajañ*, the relationship between the Kamëntšá and the Inga, and the relationship between women and territoriality.

I.7: August 4, 2022. This interlocutor (M) is a young musician and artisan who plays in the band Luar Kawsay, a Kamëntšá-Inga portmanteau meaning “Space of Life,” which performs songs in both Kamëntšá and Spanish. His family also runs an artisanal workshop that produces masks, textiles, instruments, and other *artesanías*. Our conversation touched on the importance of music in contemporary Kamëntšá society, intergenerationality, and the importance of transmitting Kamëntšá ethical values and philosophical principles through music and art.

I.8: August 5, 2022. This interlocutor (M) is an old friend of Dr. John H. McDowell and a relative of my host family in vereda Tamabioy. Known to be suspicious of outside researchers, he only agreed to speak to me when he learned that I was recommended by Dr. McDowell. We met at the family house in the vereda to converse, beginning with an oral history of his youth in the Sibundoy Valley as it was fifty or sixty years ago. Our conversation also touched on issues of kinship, territoriality, and the transmission of traditional knowledge and the ethical values and philosophical principles of the Kamëntšá.

I.9: February 22, 2023. This was a follow-up interview conducted with the same interlocutor recorded in I.8, who I found to be an incredibly insightful and articulate conversationalist whose oratory skills must have been inherited from the traditional narrative contexts described by John McDowell at the time that the two knew each other in the 1970s and 80s. In this conversation, we discussed Bëtsknaté / Clestrinýe two days after its celebration and this informant provided me with many details regarding the historical development of this festival. We also discussed elements of Kamëntšá philosophy in relation to processes cultural reproduction witnessed by this informant over the course of his lifetime.

FG.1: July 30, 2022. This was the second of three focus group discussions—and the first of two that I recorded—with a group of artisan women at the house of a prominent artisan who runs a shop in Sibundoy. There were about eight women who ranged in age from a teenage girl to an old *batá* in her seventies, all of whom are traditional weavers and many of whom worked with other researchers in the past on themes of artisanal autonomy and the weaving tradition. The theme of this discussion was “territory,” but the conversation was wide-ranging, covering themes of kinship and intergenerationality, philosophical principles and the “three pillars of Kamëntšá life,” *tsömbiach* symbology, and *artesanías* in relation to cultural reproduction.

FG.2: August 6, 2022. This second focus group meeting took place with the same people and in the same house as the previous one, though with the addition of an old *bacó*, an uncle of one of the artisan women, who was invited to talk about how he remembered life in the Sibundoy Valley in his youth. This served as thematic contrast to the subject of this discussion, which was “the future,” as in the possible futures of the Kamëntšá people. The conversation was once again wide-ranging, approaching that question with reference to issues of autonomy, cultural reproduction, gender roles, birth rituals and midwifery, and more.

Appendix C:
Untranslated Interview Quotations

[INCOMPLETE]

Appendix D:**Table of Figure and Maps**

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