



Reweaving the Uaman Luar: Cultural Reproduction and Autonomy among the Kamëntšá

Rowan Glass*

Abstract

Where there is colonial power, there is Indigenous resistance. Latin America offers many case studies for an analysis of Indigenous cultural survival, historically and to the present day. While some have received considerable popular and academic attention, most have gone comparatively unknown, particularly in the Anglophone academic mainstream. My research aims to address this gap by interpreting processes of cultural reproduction among the Kamëntšá, a culturally and linguistically unique people of the Sibundoy Valley of southwest Colombia. Building on ethnographic data collected during three months of fieldwork with artisans, shamans, land defenders, and community members in the Sibundoy Valley, I argue that the Kamëntšá, while facing cultural, political, and ecological threats on multiple fronts, are engaged in the integral reproduction of their culture to ensure the survival and vitality of their community. The Kamëntšá experience demonstrates the viability of Indigenous cultural survival and autonomy outside of the settler-colonial and neoliberal status quo. I conclude by arguing that Kamëntšá processes of cultural reproduction contribute to ensuring their cultural autonomy, demonstrating the pluriversal dictum that “another world is possible,” and that the Kamëntšá case sheds light on cultural reproduction and autonomy construction as they operate in other subaltern contexts.

1. Introduction

The Sibundoy Valley of southwest Colombia, a transition zone between the Andes mountains and the Amazon rainforest, has long been a nexus of intercultural encounter and exchange. Its Indigenous inhabitants, the Kamëntšá people, have consequently developed strategies for preserving, recuperating, and rearticulating their culture under transcultural pressures. In this paper, I draw on three months of ethnographic fieldwork with the Kamëntšá to examine how such strategies are put into practice within the community today, not only as part of a historical

legacy responding to past intercultural encounters, but also in response to new, distinctly twenty-first-century challenges—namely, the transculturating pressures of globalization and Western modernity, locally expressed as neoliberal capitalism,³ which tend

³ For the purposes of this paper, “neoliberalism” and “neoliberal capitalism” are understood according to David Harvey’s definition: “A theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve the institutional framework appropriate to such practices... It must set up those military, defense, police, and legal structures and

*Rowan Glass (rowan.ff.glass@gmail.com) graduated from the University of Oregon in Spring 2023 with a major in Cultural Anthropology and minors in Latin American Studies and History. A combination of lifelong wanderlust and academic research has taken Rowan far afield across Latin America, the former USSR, West Africa, and Europe. Aside from editing with OURJ, Rowan is engaged in long-term ethnographic fieldwork with the Kamëntšá people of the Sibundoy Valley, a unique crossroads between the Andes and the Amazon of southwest Colombia. Rowan’s research in Colombia focuses on the Kamëntšá struggle for cultural survival and ecosovereignty over their ancestral territory. Similar themes animate Rowan’s interest in subaltern resistance movements around the world; he interned with several NGOs in Senegal in the spring and will be filming a documentary with the Zapatistas of southern Mexico this winter. Rowan also enjoys photography, creative writing, and indie films.

towards the reduction of Indigenous cultural difference. Under these circumstances, how do the Kamëntšá reproduce their culture and construct cultural autonomy?

To answer this question, I spent three months in the Sibundoy Valley during the summer of 2022 and February 2023 conducting participant observation and ethnographic interviews with Kamëntšá activists, community leaders, artisans, shamans, and others. During this time, I collected a robust dataset which sheds light on contemporary processes of cultural resistance and resilience in three core domains of Kamëntšá culture: 1) the artisanal tradition; 2) shamanism; and 3) Clestrinÿe, the most significant Kamëntšá festivity of the year. I provide an ethnographic survey of each of these cultural domains to analyze their relevance to contemporary processes of cultural change and preservation among the Kamëntšá. In doing so, I develop a grounded theory model which I term cultural reproduction, a four-pronged framework for describing cultural change through time consisting of 1) preservation, 2) recuperation, 3) rearticulation, and 4) invention. This concept and its implications for the construction of Kamëntšá cultural autonomy constitute the theoretical foundation of this thesis.

The Kamëntšá, far from giving in to the deculturating pressures of neoliberalism, globalization, and Western modernity, are engaged in the integral reproduction of their culture—or, to borrow a metaphor drawn from Kamëntšá terminology, they are reweaving the *Uaman Luar* (“sacred place of origin,” i.e., the Sibundoy Valley). Following my ethnographic analysis, I conclude this paper by exploring the implications of my model of cultural reproduction and autonomy among the Kamëntšá for Indigenous and subaltern contexts elsewhere in Latin America and beyond. I argue that the same processes of cultural reproduction which

help the Kamëntšá fortify their cultural autonomy operate—and therefore can be interpreted anthropologically—in similar contexts of subaltern resistance worldwide.

This paper begins in Section 1 by establishing the background information which defines the scope of this research, namely the geographic setting—the Sibundoy Valley—and the identity, history, and contemporary situation of the Kamëntšá people. Section 2 introduces the methodology guiding this research, identifying data collection and analysis procedures as well as methodological limitations; the latter also function as a positionality statement. Section 3 introduces the theoretical framework with which I interpret the ethnographic data in the following sections, including a final section on two Kamëntšá philosophical principles which aid in my analysis. Sections 4, 5, and 6 analyze, respectively, processes of cultural reproduction apparent within the domains of the artisanal tradition, shamanism, and Clestrinÿe. Finally, Section 7 concludes this paper by establishing the broader significance and implications of my research—for the Kamëntšá, for other Indigenous and populations engaged in cultural resistance and reexistence worldwide, and for the discipline of anthropology as a whole.

2. Background

2.1. The Sibundoy Valley: Geographic and Demographic Context

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). The Sibundoy Valley is coextensive with the upper region of the Colombian department of Putumayo, which in its

functions required to secure private property rights and to guarantee, by force if need be, the proper functioning of markets” (Harvey 2005, 2)

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. 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. 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 traveled crossroads between these two regions of southwest Colombia (Davis 1997). There are two Indigenous populations in the Sibundoy Valley: the Kamëntšá and the Inga. Although speaking different languages and of different origins—the Inga speak a dialect of Kichwa and are thought to have migrated into the valley from Kichwa-speaking populations in either the Ecuadorian Andes or the Peruvian Amazon—centuries of cohabitation in the Sibundoy Valley have resulted in much cultural mixing between the two communities, though differences remain.

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 populated by *colonos*, or non-Indigenous settlers. However, the Kamëntšá retain a presence in the towns of Sibundoy and San Francisco, while some *colonos* have moved into the *veredas*.

2.2. The Kamëntšá: Identity, History, & 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.”⁴ The Kamëntšá have resided in the Sibundoy Valley since time immemorial and 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; Juajibioy Chindoy 2008). The most credible assertions associate Kamëntšá with the extinct languages of the prehispanic Quillasinga federation of the Nariño 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 distinct, demonstrating a transcultural Andean-Amazonian base intermixed with uniquely local elements and a colonially imposed Catholic overlay. While the Kamëntšá share some philosophical and religious principles with Andean cosmologies,⁵ they also share the shamanic system widespread across Western Amazonia, characterized by the ethnomedical use of the Amazonian entheogen *yagé*⁶ and other

⁴ 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 found 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).

⁵ 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.

⁶ *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

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 medicinal flora 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.”⁷ The Kamëntšá themselves, 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 (Juajibioy Chindoy 1987; 1989; McDowell 1989; 1992; 1994). The most salient feature of Kamëntšá oral traditions with respect to their origins is the fundamental belief that the Kamëntšá have always inhabited their territory, to which they are attached by a sacred bond that is ritually affirmed

ceremonial use of *yagé* is one of the most salient features of Sibundoy Valley ethnomedicine and shamanism.

⁷ 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 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 *Bëngbë 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.”

throughout the lives of community members.⁸

As for historiographical approaches to the origins of the Kamëntšá, preliminary archaeological evidence suggests that people were living in the Sibundoy Valley by at least 600 CE, though it is probable that further excavation would produce evidence of earlier occupation (Patiño 1995). Whatever the origins of its inhabitants, 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 Inga and the Kamëntšá of the valley today (Glass 2022).

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). Despite the Sibundoy Valley’s 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 demonstrated by the oral tradition and surviving colonial-era documents (Glass 2022). The relative isolation of the Sibundoy Valley—and therefore the relative autonomy of the Kamëntšá, whose only regular contact with colonists came in the form of occasional missionaries, tax collectors,

⁸ 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.

and landlords—ended with the advent of the Capuchin Order at the turn of the twentieth century.

In the late nineteenth century, as the Colombian state sought to consolidate its national frontiers, the Capuchins, a religious order of Franciscan friars within the Catholic Church, became the latest in a long line of missionaries to enter the Sibundoy Valley. Unlike their predecessors, the Capuchins established the first long-term colonial foothold in the valley, largely due to the financial and political support of the Colombian state. The Capuchin Mission—officially titled the Apostolic Prefecture of Caquetá⁹—was officially established in 1904, beginning nearly 70 years of Capuchin domination in the Sibundoy Valley. The Mission period 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's 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” while opening the “virgin jungle” to exploitation and settlement at the hands of Colombian settlers (Bonilla 1968; Escandón 1913; Recalde 2002). In the Sibundoy Valley, the

“civilization” of the Kamëntšá (and their neighbors, the Inga) was supposedly to be 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 a sustained attack on their culture and society, 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 Capuchin 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 the former landholdings of the Kamëntšá in the hands of colonos, who soon outnumbered the Kamëntšá in their own territory. In the decades since, however, the Kamëntšá have made significant gains in securing legal protections and the reclamation of stolen land, although much remains to be done. Additionally, the Colombian Constitution of 1991 guaranteed for the first time in Colombian law, at least on paper, Indigenous peoples' right to political and territorial autonomy through the *cabildo* and *resguardo* systems, which establish Indigenous communities' right to operate local government councils on their own territory. However, both systems remain 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 and departmental levels, which often move to block Indigenous political initiatives, but also within the Kamëntšá community itself (Bonilla 1968; Comunidad Kamëntšá 1989).

The problems mentioned above notwithstanding, the effective capacity of the

⁹ Caquetá is, today, a department within the Colombian Amazon bordering Putumayo. It is also an affluent of the Amazon River which gives the department its name. Prior to the Colombian state consolidation of the country's Amazonian regions, “Caquetá” encompassed a wider geographic area, including parts of present-day Putumayo.

Kamëntšá for political and territorial self-government has gradually increased in recent years, especially since 2010, when a social movement for territorial autonomy began in the community. Over the following decade, this movement, taking up the slogan “for land, for life, for our existence,” succeeded in considerably expanding the Kamëntšá resguardos. The most significant expansion occurred in 2016 following decades of activism aimed at restoring the borders claimed for the Kamëntšá by their legendary chieftain Carlos Tamabioy, who established the boundaries of the territory in his last will and testament penned in 1700. Since the territorial dispossession of the Capuchin period, this document has remained significant to Kamëntšá ethical and legal claims to legitimate sovereignty over their ancestral territory, so much that the recent social movement has applied his name in an act of homage: “Territorio Ancestral Carlos Tamabioy.” In 2016, the Ministry of the Interior formally returned Tamabioy’s lands to the community (McDowell 2022; Ministerio del Interior and Cabildo Indígena Kamëntšá de Sibundoy 2012; “Pueblos Kamëntšá e Inga” 2016; “Termina una disputa” 2016). Despite such gains, the land tenure problems in the Sibundoy Valley are far from resolved; colonos remain the largest and richest landowners while most Kamëntšá people subsist on small plots of substandard land.

Just as problematic are the economic and ecological pressures exerted by the extractive initiatives and development projects introduced by outside interests. An important dimension of the ongoing territorial movement in the Sibundoy Valley relates to contemporary extractive development projects undertaken on Kamëntšá territory. Such projects include mining and oil drilling concessions made to multinational mining corporations 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).¹⁰ Also important is a planned highway development, the San Francisco-Mocoa Bypass, which would connect the eastern terminus of the Sibundoy Valley with the capital of Putumayo department. 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 an area of Indigenous territory. Kamëntšá protesters have blocked the completion of the partially built highway on both counts, but the issue remains unsettled, with developers hoping to resume work on the road. Some among the Kamëntšá also doubt the official line regarding the purpose of the highway, instead suspecting that its primary purpose is to facilitate the commercial exploitation 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).¹¹ The arguments in favor of these projects often depend upon denying the ancestral and contemporary presence of the Kamëntšá on the land targeted for development.

In light of these development projects, the

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ 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; Melón 2022).

Kamëntšá territorial defense movement both affirms the legal right to sovereignty over the community's ancestral territory and encapsulates ecological concerns regarding the detrimental environmental effects of initiatives such as mining and road construction. These 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 personify as *Tsbatsána Bebmá*, or Mother Earth. The Kamëntšá, then, approach the 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, gradually recovering from the historical traumas of colonialism, land theft, and systemic exclusion while confronting new iterations of these processes in the present. The history traced above demonstrates that the Sibundoy Valley remains an arena for the development of settler colonial strategies of territorial and cultural dispossession in the Indigenous Colombian context. Indeed, the history of the Kamëntšá is situated within broader processes of settler colonialism, neoliberalism, and extractivism at work across Indigenous Latin America. The past struggles of the Kamëntšá and their contemporary legacies in the form of ongoing settler colonialism, neoliberalism, and extractivism in the Sibundoy Valley constitute the background of dispossession against which the Kamëntšá enact cultural reproduction to ensure their survival and autonomy.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data Collection

This paper is the product of more than a year of research at the University of Oregon and three months of ethnographic fieldwork, conducted

from the summer of 2022 to February 2023, among the Kamëntšá people of the Sibundoy Valley in southwest Colombia. 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, including personal homes, institutional and government buildings, and cafes and restaurants. Activities included events such as community gatherings, birthday parties, shamanic ceremonies, cultural festivities, concerts, *mingas* (collective work projects), workshops, and focus groups.

Participant recruitment proceeded primarily using the snowball method, whereby one contact led to another, beginning with my Kamëntšá host family. My hosts proved essential as bridges between myself and the community, introducing me to community leaders, artisans, shamans, artists, land defenders, and others 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 independently arrange interviews, meetings, and other ethnographic events with ease.

During my first fieldwork period of eight weeks in the summer of 2022, I recorded nine individual interviews and two focus groups in total. 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 discard prepared questions as necessary. I also gave interview participants the option to modify my list of questions or suggest their own. This strategy characterizes my

interviews as collaborative endeavors in which the content of each interview was coproduced by both interviewer and interviewee, an approach suggested by Heyl (2001).

My approach to ethnographic interviewing is informed by the work of Charles L. Briggs (1986), whose *Learning How to Ask* is a classic in the literature due to his emphasis on the importance of accounting for culturally specific modes of communication when designing one's interviews. Briggs' work 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 a conversation with one individual—a 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 documented 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. Young people are expected to listen quietly and respectfully while elders confer the wisdom of the ancestors. Once the elders have said their piece, the younger people present might later be invited to participate in a more egalitarian conversation. In the encounter in question, I first asked the shaman if I could record an interview with my field recorder. Instead, he gently advised me to turn off my recorder and listen rather than ask. 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 “open conversations” (*conversaciones abiertas*).

During my fieldwork, I had many opportunities for participant observation in group activities and community events. 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, audio-recorded group conversations. The focus groups yielded about three hours of audio content in total. 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, providing insight into other themes of interest. The focus group format also helped bring out the particularities of Kamëntšá discursive procedures, which were especially apparent given the variation in age and experience among participants—an important methodological point to take into account, as noted by Romm (2014) in the Indigenous South African context.

I also recorded several semi-structured video interviews during two weeks of fieldwork in February 2023. 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. In most cases, participants and I 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.

Writing fieldnotes also constituted a mainstay of my ethnographic methodology. My writing practice was informed by several staple texts of this method (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011; Konopinski 2013; Sanjek 1990). In the field, I never went anywhere without a weatherproof notebook and pen in my coat pocket, with which I captured many ethnographic details to be

expanded upon later at my computer. My fieldnotes, in combination with my interview transcripts, provided the basis for the analytic memos that I would expand upon during the data processing and analysis stage of my research.

3.2. Data Processing and Analysis

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 “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 my original model of cultural reproduction, a theoretical framework grounded in and emergent from the ethnographic data.

Data processing began with clean-verbatim transcription of my collected audio recordings, which totaled about 12 hours of content. In tandem with the audio transcription, I also began coding my fieldnotes by identifying and sorting repeating themes. 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. As recommended by Saldana (2016), I applied a minimum of two rounds of coding to each transcript. I also periodically wrote analytic

memos as a preliminary form of engaging with the themes and patterns emerging from my data. I used the qualitative coding software Delve to facilitate the coding process. Over several coding cycles, I eventually reduced my codebook to a list of about twenty high-frequency codes consistent across transcripts. Core categories in my codebook include specific expressions of cultural reproduction, autonomy, cultural domains, and Kamëntšá philosophical concepts. These formed the basis of the grounded theoretical framework I began to construct from the data.

A note on translation: All interview excerpts quoted in this paper, as well as published Spanish-language materials which I cite, are in my own translation. Where the appropriate translation seemed ambiguous, I have retained terms in Spanish and Kamëntšá in brackets.

3.3. 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 presents a quandary—who and what can be trusted, and how do I know? However, as one collaborator succinctly explained, it is not my job to determine absolute truth; as an ethnographer, 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. This is, in fact, the task of the ethnographer in general—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 their individual research journey.

The inclusion of visual methods, namely photography and video, brought to light problems of representation in the history of anthropology’s use of these methods, particularly where Indigenous people are concerned. In adopting these methods, 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 video 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 did when requested.

Another limiting factor was my inability to speak Kamëntšá. 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 this inability imposes on the available data—should not be understated. Kamëntšá ritual speech precedes many important events in the community, and although speakers tend to repeat themselves in Spanish, 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, but 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 assert that further work with the Kamëntšá will necessitate learning their language.

A final limiting factor is one of access. In general, I found many 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. 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 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—this research was conducted as ethically and thoroughly as possible, but it is from the perspective of an outsider. 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. The methodology highlighted above takes every precaution to limit misrepresentation or inaccuracy in the portrayal of the Kamëntšá people and culture, but as an outsider, it cannot be eliminated.

4. Theoretical Framework

4.1. Transculturation: Loss, Gain, Synthesis

The first theoretical tool underpinning my treatment of the ethnographic data is transculturation. This term was first introduced in 1940 by Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz Fernández to describe the synthesis of Indigenous, African, European, and Asian elements that defines Cuban culture. For Ortiz, transculturation is defined first and foremost as a movement of cultural change occurring in three 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, but the

applicability of Ortiz's theory to other situations of colonial contact and cultural transformation would later cause it to circulate among scholars. Those interested in describing similar processes in other contexts found it invaluable, especially where Indigenous cultures elsewhere in the Americas demonstrated cultural survival, adaptation, and resilience under the deculturating pressures of nationally and globally dominant cultures. As Spitta (1995) writes, "Transculturation 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.

4.2. Cultural Reproduction: Preservation, Recuperation, Rearticulation, Invention

The grounded theory framework that I term cultural reproduction encompasses a range of social processes and practices involving both the reproduction of traditional cultural elements *and* the creation of novel cultural forms based on traditional models that may, in the future, become tradition themselves.¹² Cultural reproduction is a continuous and iterative

¹² 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.

intergenerational process by which elements of a culture are *preserved*, *recuperated*, *rearticulated*, and *invented* as part of a continuous cultural transformation through time.¹³ The four principal mechanisms by which cultural reproduction occurs are defined below:

1. *Preservation* describes the stable conservation and maintenance of traditional cultural elements transmitted intergenerationally, with minimal modifications.
2. *Recuperation* describes the retroactive reclamation of traditions imminently threatened by devaluation or loss of cultural knowledge.
3. *Rearticulation* describes the re-signification of traditional elements, whereby traditions are modified during the process of intergenerational transmission.
4. *Invention* describes the synthesis of novel traditions which emerge from, draw on, or recombine features already extant in the culture. Invented traditions derive from preexisting traditions, but it bears remembering that all traditions were once invented from the cultural resources that preexisted them.

The combined operation of the four mechanisms outlined above constitutes the broader social process of cultural reproduction in

¹³ "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.

application to the Kamëntšá case, but this framework could also be applied to describe cultural change and continuity through time in other contexts. This is especially true in situations of transculturation, interculturality, and institutional power imbalance—the general situation in which Indigenous peoples in Latin America presently exist. Indeed, it is in such circumstances that cultural reproduction bolsters Indigenous efforts to enact autonomy against external pressures. To better understand processes of autonomy among the Kamëntšá within a broader regional and theoretical context, I now turn to a description of the ways in which Indigenous cultural autonomy has been theorized in Latin American more broadly.

4.3. Cultural Autonomy in Indigenous Latin America

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). Movements for autonomy in the Latin American context are therefore movements not only for autonomous self-government and justice, but also for the recuperation of culture, territory, and identity.

More important than academic interpretations of autonomy are the autonomous movements of Latin America themselves, which

articulate and mobilize locally grounded visions of autonomy through specific acts of political, cultural, and territorial resistance throughout the region. Ethnographic case studies of these movements proliferate, documenting local manifestations of a growing international reaction to the legacies of colonialism and the rampant abuses of neoliberal multicriminalism in the lives, cultures, and territories of numerous marginalized groups.¹⁴ These case studies profile movements for autonomy along multiple lines and in vastly different cultural and regional contexts, but all contribute to a developing discourse around the theory and praxis of autonomous alternatives to the status quo (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).

Cultural autonomy describes the right to cultural difference 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 interference from nationally or 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 today. Cultural autonomy applies to many spheres of social life, including language, Indigenous intellectual property, and forms of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, among other elements. In the

¹⁴ See the following ethnographic case studies, which vary considerably region, culture, and theoretical focus: 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.

case of this study, the domains under study include the artisanal tradition, shamanism, and Clestrin̄ye (Barrera Jurado 2015; 2016; Barrera Jurado, Quiñones Aguilar, and Jacanamijoy Juajibioy 2018). Indeed, any definition of cultural autonomy which is attuned to a specific culture must also account for the specific principles and categories of Indigenous theory that emerge from that culture. In that vein, we will next consider two Kamëntšá theoretical principles core to processes of cultural reproduction and autonomy construction in the Sibundoy Vally.

4.4. Indigenous Theory: Intergenerationality and Ancestrality among the Kamëntšá

Intergenerationality and ancestrality are the two characteristic principles of the transmission and valorization of traditional knowledge among the Kamëntšá. *Intergenerationality* describes a social practice of cultural, practical, and philosophical knowledge transmission that occurs across generational lines. *Ancestrality*, on the other hand, describes a mode of thought, namely the 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 practice which enables the reproduction of Kamëntšá knowledge, which is imbued with significance by the principle of ancestrality.

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 various settings, often in the form of narrative performances enacted for the benefit of younger audience members who are expected to receive the lessons 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 *shin̄yak* (hearth fire) in every family home (Figure 1), but increasingly Kamëntšá homes are no longer built with hearth fires, a fact that many of my collaborators lament as detrimental to the intergenerational process.

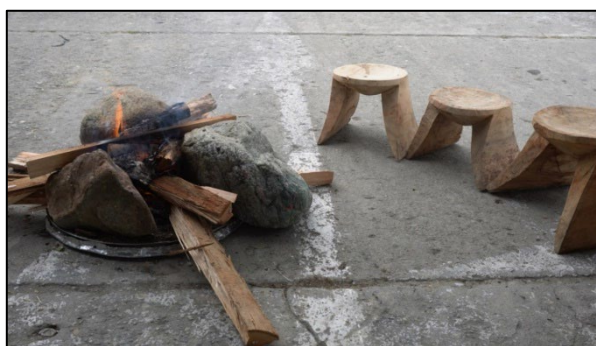


Figure 1. A *shin̄yak* and several *bancos*, or low wooden stools hewn from a single block of wood. Hearths like this one, with the three stones representing father sun, mother moon, and their children the stars, were once installed in every Kamëntšá home, around which people would sit on *bancos* and 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, such as curing ceremonies, community gatherings with a ritual component, *cabildo* events, concerts, and festivals like Clestrin̄ye.

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. In each of these cultural domains, children and apprentices typically learn from elders and established practitioners. They learn from observing, mimicking, and dialoguing

with elders through implicitly pedagogical contexts. 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:

These artisanal goods have come down through the generations, since the elders have taught us how to make them since time immemorial, and that's how we've learned. That has been passed down through the generations. In the same way, our mother tongue has also been passed down from one generation to the next. (I.1)

According to my interlocutors, this process creates a feeling of reciprocal obligation to pass their own knowledge and skills on to the younger generations as their elders did to them. According to another collaborator, a Kamëntšá shaman:

We must create memory (*hacer memoria*) of the ancestors, to make memories, stories, so that our culture is not lost. In the future, perhaps we ourselves will not exist, but the next generations will be able to say, “thanks to our elders, who have left us this.” (I.5)

This shaman believes that it is imperative to preserve cultural knowledge for the benefit of future generations long after he himself is gone. This points to the continued centrality of the principle of intergenerationality in Kamëntšá thought and practice today.

If intergenerationality describes the social process of knowledge transmission and cultural reproduction between generations, then ancestry is the philosophical principle that undergirds this process and valorizes that knowledge. McDowell (2022) defines ancestry 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 my collaborators attribute problems in the Kamëntšá community to the failure to properly adhere to the wisdom of the ancestors. These same collaborators have therefore commented on the necessity of a “recuperation” (*recuperación*) and “strengthening” (*fortalecimiento*) of ancestral knowledge. It is this valorization of ancestral wisdom (*lo ancestral*) which constitutes the ethical foundation of the intergenerational process, itself the motor of traditional knowledge transmission in this community.

The theoretical framework traced above guide the ethnographic analysis that follows in the next three sections. Transculturation describes a process of cultural synthesis that emerges from situations of intercultural power imbalance. Cultural reproduction, a grounded theory model of cultural change and continuity, is the primary theoretical tool of this paper and describes four specific operations of cultural survival in transcultural situations: preservation, recuperation, rearticulation, and invention. Cultural reproduction is understood as contributing to the construction and maintenance of cultural autonomy, which is understood in the Indigenous Latin American context as the right to self-determination with respect to culture, territory, and identity. Finally, it is necessary to account for two principles of Indigenous philosophy which undergird processes of cultural reproduction in the Kamëntšá context: intergenerationality, or the reproduction of traditional knowledge between generations through time; and ancestry, or the valorization of traditional knowledge and culture. Which this guiding theoretical framework established, I now turn to an analysis of contemporary processes of cultural reproduction and autonomy in three domains of Kamëntšá culture.

5. Cultural Reproduction in the Artisanal Tradition

5.1. 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 exported and exhibited internationally on occasion, 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 of the community itself. The most significant of the woven products of the artisanal tradition is the ubiquitous *tsömbiach*, the long belt embedded with pictograms representing various aspects of the Kamëntšá world, from which the extensive Kamëntšá symbolic repertoire is derived.

In this section, I discuss processes of cultural reproduction at work in the artisanal tradition of the Kamëntšá to show that, although the specific media and techniques used have changed, the cultural significance of the industry and its products has not diminished. I argue that cultural reproduction in the artisanal industry is expressed by 1) the recent advent and subsequent widespread adoption of the beadwork tradition; 2) the rearticulation and negotiation of the meanings of certain traditional symbols; 3) the invention of nontraditional products using traditional techniques, and the use of nontraditional colors and designs in traditional products; and 4) the development of a type of cultural autonomy that the Colombian ethnographer Gloria Stelle Barrera Jurado has

termed “artisanal autonomy.” (2015; 2016; Barrera Jurado, Quiñones Aguilar, and Jacanamijoy Juajibioy 2018). The reproduction of the Kamëntšá artisanal tradition contributes to the construction of cultural autonomy in the community.

5.2. Beadwork: Case Study of an Invented Tradition

In the contemporary artisanal industry, beadwork is currently the most widespread and profitable practice. Unlike weaving, woodworking, and instrument-making, however, the contemporary beadwork tradition is not ancestral and has only emerged in the last several decades, in part deriving from commercially successful applications of beadwork in other Indigenous contexts, namely that of the Huichol people of central Mexico (Barrera Jurado 2015).¹⁵ The advantages of beadwork as compared to other artisanal traditions are essentially economic: 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. Beadwork is a tradition which better adapts itself to the pace and distractions of modern life, as compared to more labor-intensive and time-consuming traditions—and for this reason, many Kamëntšá youths learn and practice beadwork even if they learn no other artisanal traditions.

The rising popularity of beadwork among

¹⁵ 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.

young artisans is correlated with a reduction in the prevalence of older traditions, namely weaving and woodcarving, although both of those industries retain their cultural importance. Many of the artisans I have worked with who are engaged in more traditional industries—weaving, woodworking, and instrument-making—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 of the Kamëntšá artisanal tradition. 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. Economic realities both within the community and externally drive artisans to invest in the beadwork tradition over or alongside more traditional forms of artisanry. While this introduces the risk of commercializing the artisanal tradition, it is also clear that greater economic control on the part of artisans correlates with greater autonomy in the realm of artisanal production.

However, the developing beadwork tradition holds no less cultural significance than other artisanal trades. Critically, beadwork partakes in

cultural reproduction through 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 expressed this thought in the following terms:

If nobody buys from us, it isn't much use to know all the different practices. For example, we used to weave with wool, but now they're doing it with beads, drawing [*dibujando*] with beads. Now there's not much wool weaving anymore, but the same designs are still being made with beads. That's what happening. For me, artisanry with beads is a good thing. (I.4)

This traditional artisan only works with weaving, but she remains integrated in the larger artisanal community and regularly interacts with younger artisans who have adopted beadwork in their own craft. Through this interaction, she came to recognize the importance of transmitting traditional symbolism through beadwork in new, innovative ways. Her acknowledgement of 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 the same symbolism is still being reproduced in the nascent beadwork tradition.

Similar 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 that, before they learned to weave in the traditional way, they first began their artisanal careers with beadwork. Many of them learned beadwork during the lockdown phase of the coronavirus pandemic to

supplement their falling incomes. When I met with them, they were 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. In the case of these young artisan women, beadwork served as a gateway to more traditional forms of artisanry.

Therefore, despite the recent appearance of beadwork on the artisanal scene and the correlated decline in other forms of artisanal work, its emergence does not represent a hard break from more “traditional” forms of artisanal practice. As the following analysis shows, the nascent beadwork tradition instead demonstrates the intergenerational extension of the Kamëntšá artisanal tradition, contributing to cultural autonomy in the artisanal domain.

Relative to older artisanal forms, beadwork simplifies traditional symbolic representations. Figures 2 and 3 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 2. 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 3. A collection of bead bracelets. 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) Clestrinye, the most important Kamëntšá festival of the year; and 4) the zigzag design known in Kamëntšá as *benach*, which represents both the footpaths that run between family houses and the metaphorical path walked by the Kamëntšá people.

The difference in detail is apparent between the woven bracelet and the bead ones. Although the first is more finely worked and better preserves the original forms of the symbols incorporated, bracelets like this one are difficult to find and more expensive than the simpler bead ones shown above. However, the bead bracelets, though simpler in form and using new materials, still make use of the traditional symbology.

Beads are also now applied within other artisanal traditions, as in the use of beaded masks (Figures 4). In the case of these masks, the use of beads also marks an evocative spin—and certainly a marketable one—on a traditional medium.



Figure 4. 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.

While the mask-making tradition has incorporated beadwork more extensively and visibly than any other traditional artisanal domain, beadwork has also made an appearance in other types of woodworking, such as the production of *bancos*, low wooden stools traditionally carved from a single block of wood. Increasingly, artisans have applied beads and more elaborate painted designs to the bare wood 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, some artisans have recently produced *tsömbiach* belts and *coronas*, ceremonial headdresses (Figure 5), made partially or entirely out of beads. Here again, despite the application of recently developed beadwork techniques 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 5. Two examples of coronas, or crowns, elaborate headdresses used in the ceremonial dress of both men and women, especially during Clestrinÿe. Coronas are decorated with intricate woven patterns in brilliant colors and feature dozens of small chumbes or fajas inscribed with *tsömbiach* symbology. Coronas and their chumbes are traditionally woven, several recent examples partially or entirely incorporate beadwork.

From this exploration of the beadwork tradition, I draw several conclusions. First, 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. Economic hardships have driven many artisans and prior non-artisans alike, especially young ones, 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—and

therefore preservation—of more ancestral crafts, such as weaving and woodworking. This fact is demonstrated, for example, by the 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.

5.3. Cultural Reproduction in the Artisanal Tradition

The nascent beadwork tradition explored above stands as the prime example of an invented domain in the artisanal industry of the Kamëntšá, but it is not alone in exemplifying processes of rearticulation and invention in the artisanal industry. In this section, I explore several other instances of cultural reproduction as they are at work in different domains and circumstances. Cultural reproduction is evident in 1) the rearticulation of ancestral symbols and the rejection of foreign ones; 2) the invention of nontraditional uses for ancestral symbols and

motifs; 3) the wholesale invention of new artisanal forms using traditional symbols and materials; and 4) the adaptation of pan-Indigenous artisanal objects. These processes, like beadwork, contribute to the creative fortification of Kamëntšá cultural autonomy in the artisanal tradition.

First, it is important to understand that the meanings inherent in Kamëntšá symbology are not static, like an alphabet, but ever-changing, like the dynamic words and concepts that each symbol represents. That is, each symbol represents a constantly expanding set of ideas, and can therefore be interpreted and reinterpreted in various ways. A representative example is the symbol for *shinyë*, the sun, a very common motif (Figure 6). According to Marisol, it is always situated at a certain angle, at a certain point in the sky, which varies 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 approximated by reference to the position of the sun in the sky.¹⁶ Others have told me that this very same symbol also represents the womb. Consequently, the figures of Kamëntšá symbology are not static representations; they cannot always be read 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 symbol or in the lengthy sequences of a *tsömbiach*. According to one artisan, “feelings, ideas, stories—everything is in the *tsömbiach*”—and here the *tsömbiach* stands in for the

¹⁶ According to Batá Marisol, “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.

Kamëntšá symbolic repertoire in general.

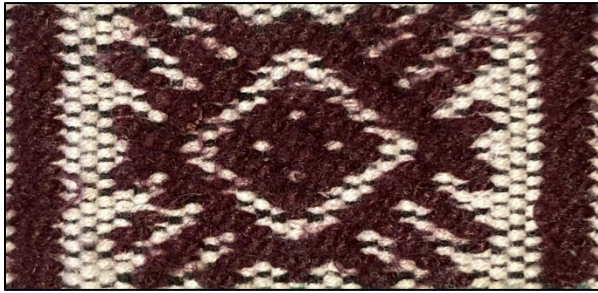


Figure 6. The shinyë motif, an emblematic symbol representing the sun. Others have told me that this motif can also represent the womb, demonstrating a type of symbolic rearticulation. This example is taken from a tsömbiach running down the middle of a scarf, a recent invention in Kamëntšá weaving.

It is partly by virtue of this 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, most of the central figures of Kamëntšá symbology—those representing, for example, the sun, rivers, mountains, animals, and the footpath—are ancestral, having been passed down through generations of artisans with relatively little change in form or meaning. On the other hand, the meaning of some symbols, even well-established ones, seems to vary depending on context and the person interpreting them. This has to do partly with the pedagogical problems of imparting traditional symbology in the bilingual schools of the resguardos, where Kamëntšá children usually first learn weaving and other artisanal practices.¹⁷ One artisan collaborator explains learning Kamëntšá artisanal practices in the context of resguardo schools as the difference between learning how to write and learning how to draw:

We like to weave, we like colors, we pay a lot

¹⁷ 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.

of attention to observing things. We go to the garden, we observe, we look, and we weave what we see. It's healing. In school they don't teach us to write [i.e., to weave symbols], which is another part of symbolic language. They don't teach us to write, that's why I say that today they might be bad at teaching the children in the schools how to weave... Because they don't have many printed copies [of symbols], in the school they draw the symbols for the children, but they don't teach them to memorize. Then, when a child wants to weave, if they don't have a copy to look at, they don't know how to make the symbol. That's not true for us [professional weavers]. I think that today we need to talk about artisanal education from our own culture [*desde lo propio*], from our own thought, and we need to inject it with our thought, because that thought will cleanse it [*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, this artisan believes that in the weaving classes offered at resguardo schools, children do not learn how to “write” traditional symbology so much as to trace and copy. Even so, one consequence is that it opens those symbols to new possibilities of interpretation. Thus, resguardo education is partly responsible for cases of symbolic rearticulation wherein established symbols are resignified and assigned multiple values—what the artisan quoted above terms “distortions,” then, may rather be regarded as creative rearticulations.

However, not 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 and highly knowledgeable artisans

are also involved in the process of rearticulating established symbols. For instance, one of the older artisans in my focus group meetings shared the following anecdote regarding the ambiguous interpretation of a single symbol which is assigned different values by various people:

My mother said, “this is a comb.” That’s why, for us, the comb is a symbol of thought [*pensamiento*], because with the comb they cleaned us, they showed us how to change our thoughts. My mother says, “that’s what is in this symbol.” Some say it’s a comb, others say it’s a caterpillar. Imagine, it’s the same symbol! Whatever the case, for us it means thought. [Others say] this symbol represents the eyes of a guinea pig. All these interpretations are natural, these are all *uaman soyëng* [“sacred things”]. It all fits in the Indigenous cosmivision. One leaves a mark with a symbol, with a little drawing. Our mark is this symbol. (FG.1)

Although this artisan remarks on these different interpretations of the same symbol, 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 comb, a caterpillar, and even the eyes of a guinea pig. “All is natural,” she explains, “these are all sacred things.” Furthermore, this artisan seems to recognize each of these symbols, whatever their representational form, on a symbolic level refer to the same meaning: thought. She shrugs off the ambiguity in meaning: “it all fits in the Indigenous cosmivision.” Here an ancestral symbol has taken on multiple referents which are superficially contradictory or mutually exclusive but which, at least for this interlocutor and her reading of this symbol, refer to the same concept. This demonstrates both 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 6). While I have not

heard this symbol referred to by any other name, its interpretation is variable. As often as it has been described to me as representing the sun, it has also been said to depict a woman’s womb.¹⁸ What seems to be happening is that the symbol conventionally known as *shinyë* is 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, on the other hand, 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 leaves two possibilities: 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* and not the Kamëntšá term for “womb” provides evidence for the latter explanation. Other examples of similar processes—ambiguities in meaning and the rearticulation of ancestral designs—abound, although this one exemplar is sufficiently demonstrative.¹⁹ Suffice it to say that this appears

¹⁸ 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. According to McDowell (personal communication, April 21, 2023), the quartz crystal is (or was) also in use in the Sibundoy Valley: “The quartz crystal, called *waira wawa* in Inga, was very much in evidence when I was in the valley. I recall *médicos* having the patient blow on the crystal for diagnostic purposes. I was told they are created where lightning strikes the ground, and you only find one if you are destined to be a *médico*.”

¹⁹ During my work with artisans, I encountered many other examples of ambiguity or negotiation in the meanings of the

to be a widespread phenomenon in Kamëntšá symbolism.

The above discussion demonstrates that ancestral symbols have been reinterpreted and assigned multiple—though apparently 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 symbologies. These intrusions threatened, for a time, the cultural continuity of the Kamëntšá artisanal tradition; however, the artisans' eventual collective disavowal of foreign symbols and objects constituted an act of artisanal autonomy. One of my collaborators is an elderly 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. She 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. Although this weaver framed the arrival of outsiders as beneficial to the artisanal community, others were more critical. In general, my collaborators were quick to denounce what they interpreted as the “artisanal theft” and “artisanal injustice” that they claim undergirded the attempts of outside organizations to “develop” the Kamëntšá artisanal industry.

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 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, artisanal goods became commodities, and with this change came alienation between the artisan and her work. In her study of the Kamëntšá artisanal industry, Gloria Stella Barrera Jurado (2015) writes:

These dynamics of commercialization of Kamëntšá objects generated fundamental changes in various aspects of their artisanal universe... For that reason, the production of objects foreign to the material culture of Kamëntšá began to appear, such as table placemats, ties, belts, wallets, various articles of clothing, objects for interior decoration, and souvenirs for tourists visiting the Sibundoy Valley. (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, activists and artisans began rejecting the outsiders' artisanal impositions beginning in the 1980s. Barrera Jurado writes:

Finally, the artisans enacted actions of resistance and social control by beginning to erase the designs introduced by outsiders from the artisanal inventory. At the same time, the Bilingual Institution and Artesanías de Colombia [Colombian NGOs] sought, in the 1980s, to reduce the effects of commercial and technical homogenization and of the loss of identity-specific elements [*elementos identitarios*] caused by the action of these outsiders [*gringos*]. (165)

The rejection of the designs introduced by outsiders represents an agentic decision made by Kamëntšá artisans who saw their traditions under

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.

threat. This rejection exemplifies the distinction between *invented* traditions that emerge *from within* the community itself and *imposed* or *introduced* traditions brought by outsiders. Certainly, the symbolic repertoire of Kamëntšá artisans has expanded and certain ancestral symbols have been intergenerationally resignified. However, these changes have emerged from within the artisanal tradition itself and by the doing of Kamëntšá artisans; consequently, there is nothing foreign or inauthentic about these rearticulations and innovations. Instead of reproducing designs introduced by outsiders for commercial purposes, the artisans chose to recuperate and rearticulate their own traditions on their own terms. In other words, they drew on preexisting cultural resources to create new recipes with ancestral ingredients, strengthening their cultural autonomy.²⁰

In tandem with the symbolic rearticulations and innovations discussed above, Kamëntšá artisans are also engaged in processes of *formal* innovation—that is, the application of traditional designs and neotraditional media for the creation of novel artisanal objects. Kamëntšá artisans are thereby engaged in expanding their artistic and commercial repertoire, reproducing their craft through the creative recombination of ancestral motifs. This process is exemplified by the appearance of woven scarves and knapsacks,²¹

²⁰ This activity bears semblance to Claude Lévi-Strauss's concept of *bricolage*, referring to a mode of creative thought in which a subject, be it an individual or a culture, creates and innovates by recombining whatever is at hand, making use of preexisting cultural resources to develop new syntheses in thought and design. This type of synthetic/syncretic invention using the cultural resources at hand aptly describes cultural reproduction in the Kamëntšá artisanal tradition (Lévi-Strauss 1962).

²¹ Here I refer to the generic type of artesanía known in Colombia as a *mochila*. The *mochila* is a type of woven shoulder bag originally affiliated with the Arhuaco people of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta on the Caribbean coast of Colombia. Since the development, from the 1960s, of a Colombian artisanal industry of national and international importance, the *mochila* has diffused far and wide through Colombian artisanal communities, particularly other Indigenous ones, to the point that it is now emblematic of

both nontraditional objects, which incorporate ancestral designs such as capisayo colors or tsömbiach symbols, as in Figure 7.



Figure 7. Examples of rearticulation and invention in the weaving tradition. These objects were displayed at the booth of a weaver during the artisanal fair in Sibundoy's Interculturality Park during the weekend prior to Clestrinje in February 2023. From a neighboring stall, I purchased a scarf incorporating the same capisayo colors, a nontraditional use of a traditional design.

The bag in the middle uses traditional colors in a nontraditional medium: a knapsack, a product with which the red, white, black, and blue stripes of the capisayo pattern are not traditionally associated. The bag is also decorated with a tsömbiach around the middle, another nontraditional 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 individual innovation by the artisan who wove this bag.

Indigenous Colombian artesanías writ large. Like the bead designs of the Huichols of Mexico which have become generalized among Latin American artisanal communities far and wide and which have informed the development of the Kamëntšá beadwork industry, the appearance of the *mochila* onto the Kamëntšá artisanal scene in recent decades signals both the syncretic, creative, bricoleur nature of Kamëntšá artesanías in particular, and a kind of a pan-Indigenous dialogue in which artisans from Mexico to Argentina readily adopt and adapt each other's innovations in aesthetics and technique (Villegas and Villegas 2000).



Figure 8. At a workshop sponsored by the Sibundoy cabildo as part of a series of cultural events prior to Clestrinje 2023, an experienced weaver teaches a younger woman how to weave using a tabla, a wooden plank with embedded poles that serves to begin 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 children were present and eager to learn to weave with the elders invited by the cabildo.

The bag shown above is one clear example of the application of traditional designs to nontraditional forms in a process of symbolic preservation, rearticulation, and invention. At the same time, synthetic and syncretic designs like these are increasingly common within the artisanal community, suggesting a considerable exchange of ideas between artisans. In other words, creative exchange between artisans serves as the point of origin for a new tradition, one of experimental mediums. In fact, that these innovations may soon become established traditions themselves is a natural consequence of the intergenerational nature of knowledge and skill transmission within the community (Figure 8). Just as beadwork has quickly become one of the most salient artisanal forms in the community in just a few decades, now eagerly learned and applied by Kamëntšá children, the formal artisanal innovations being introduced today may be naturalized and pass into tradition for future generations of artisans.

It appears that, given the slower pace of cultural change in the past, overt modifications

or innovations in the traditional artisanal repertoire of the Kamëntšá were once limited compared to their abundance today—but they were never entirely absent, for all traditions are ever-changing. Today, however, the relative flexibility and openness to change that characterizes the contemporary artisanal community has resulted partly from loosening of conservative rules formerly governing the use of certain artisanal objects. For example, the bag shown above would not have been permissible to weave or wear in the era in which the capisayo colors—red, blue, and white stripes against a black background—were forbidden to all but current and former governors of the Kamëntšá cabildos, a situation that persisted into the late twentieth century. Anyone without the proper authority discovered wearing the governor's colors would be beaten and shunned, for his transgression was to undermine the traditional government along with the respect and privileges conferred on it. Likewise, women were not allowed to wear any sort of capisayo regardless of color or pattern. Men, on the other hand, were not supposed to make use of the tsömbiach, which was designed to be wrapped around a woman's womb or to swaddle the body of an infant. These days, however, the capisayo design once restricted for all but the highest male authorities of the Kamëntšá is worn by all as an emblem of the community in general. Today, women wear capisayos while men make use of tsömbiach belts. These changes suggest the far-reaching sociocultural impact of the rearticulation and invention of artisanal traditions.

The relaxation of rules regarding the proper use of artisanal objects may be seen as a loss of regulations having a preservative function vis-à-vis the artisanal tradition. It may be true that such stringent restrictions slowed the rate of innovation and change in the artisanal arts and in the community's use of artisanal products. However, the relaxation of those customs have resulted in a greater flexibility of artisanal

production and use which has contributed to the reproduction of this vital domain of Kamëntšá culture. The fact that many formerly gendered garments are now gender-neutral while others, newcomers to the artisanal universe of the Kamëntšá, have established a place for themselves in its repertoire, attests to the continued strength and relevance of the artisanal tradition of this community (Figure 9). These changes are representative of the proliferation of innovations and experiments that characterize the contemporary artisanal industry.



Figure 9. 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. Just as men are beginning to weave, so too are women beginning to carve.

A final point relevant to the innovation and syncretism in the Kamëntšá artisanal tradition

merits attention: the prevalence of *borrowed* traditions of external Indigenous and pan-Indigenous provenance now being *incorporated* and *naturalized* within the Kamëntšá artisanal repertoire. This process differs from the coercive imposition of non-Indigenous designs discussed above by instead drawing on authentic Indigenous traditions borrowed from other cultural contexts. For example, the bead art of the Huichols, an Indigenous people of central Mexico, has significantly influenced the development of the Kamëntšá beadwork tradition (Barrera Jurado 2015). Another example is the adoption, by Kamëntšá shamans, of the dreamcatcher, which was originally an Ojibwe technology before becoming emblematic of the pan-Indianism movement in North America beginning in the 1960s (Oberholtzer 2017; Figure 10).



Figure 10. A Kamëntšá dreamcatcher. Note that it is hung from a chumbe and wrapped in a beadwork band.

The borrowing, by Kamëntšá artisans and shamans, of symbols and artforms from other Indigenous communities—in Colombia, Latin America, North America, and beyond—has been enacted for pragmatic, symbolic, and political reasons. As far as pragmatism is concerned, the commercial success of Kamëntšá beadwork speaks for itself, even though it draws from the bead art of the Huichols, an Indigenous people of central Mexico. Similarly pragmatic is the advent of the woven knapsack as a significant artisanal product among in the Kamëntšá despite its origin with the Arhuacos of northern Colombia; it is a

popular and recognizable design that the Kamëntšá can make their own while still catering to a tourist clientele, both domestic and foreign, that recognizes it as a characteristically Colombian artform. In other words, the adoption of techniques and designs recognized as “Indigenous” (even if only to regions and peoples located hundreds or thousands of kilometers from the Sibundoy Valley) enable Kamëntšá artisans to both profit from and participate in a pan-Indigenous, transnational artisanal tradition—one which is, in fact, a *mélange* of disparate and unrelated traditions from across the Americas.

The political reasons for which Kamëntšá artisans may have adopted techniques and designs from other Indigenous groups across the Americas shed light on the development of a pan-Indigenous affiliation that transcends national and regional divides—one that serves Indigenous peoples themselves, not only tourists and commercial endeavors. The adoption of different Indigenous groups’ artforms is an extension, in the age of globalization and pan-Indigenous transnational identity-building, of the same transcultural processes of borrowing, adaptation, and modification that have always made the Sibundoy Valley what it is—a site of cultural exchange, transformation, and creativity in which disparate elements and traditions are syncretically accommodated and recombined in a perpetual process of cultural reproduction and synthesis. A similar principle undergirds the cultivation of an Amazonian pan-shamanism within the Kamëntšá shamanic tradition, discussed in the next chapter.

5.4. Artisanal Autonomy

The foregoing discussion has served to survey and interpret processes of cultural reproduction currently at work in the artisanal industry of the Kamëntšá, a cultural domain which has undergone considerable and rapid changes in recent decades. Cultural reproduction in the

artisanal tradition serves Kamëntšá cultural autonomy in the following ways: 1) the valorization, preservation, and intergenerational transmission of ancestral knowledge, skills, and philosophical principles; 2) language recuperation and revitalization through intergenerational transmission and apprenticeship; 3) the interdependence of the artisanal tradition and other cultural domains of the Kamëntšá, including shamanism and Clestrinŷe—the subjects of the following two chapters.²² In this section, I briefly discuss each of these categories with reference to Gloria Stella Barrera Jurado’s notion of artisanal autonomy (2015; 2016; Barrera Jurado, Quiñones Aguilar, and Jacanamijoy Juajibioy 2018). This discussion demonstrates the close relationship between cultural reproduction and autonomy within the artisanal tradition of the Kamëntšá.

Barrera Jurado is a Colombian ethnographer who spent several years working with Kamëntšá artisans, investigating what she came to term “artisanal autonomy,” which the artisanal collective she worked with defines as “the ability to make our own decisions related to the regulation, interpretation, and meaning of traditional artisanal knowledge, affirming that the Kamëntšá people has collective rights over its material and immaterial heritage” (Barrera Jurado 2015, 195). Artisanal autonomy as thus understood has important ramifications in other domains of Kamëntšá culture and social life and can be situated within a broader movement for social justice and decolonization. For Barrera Jurado,

The struggle for autonomy seeks to create more just social relations through collective democratic action with an intercultural basis in spiritual, historical, and symbolic

²² This list is by no means definitive. For lack of space and time, for instance, I cannot include a discussion of orality and the *tsömbiach* narrative tradition (see Aldana Barahona and Sánchez Carballo 2021) in my discussion of the importance of artisanry for language recuperation. This and other points undeveloped here warrant in-depth exploration elsewhere.

principles, granting the market economy the means to secure the material means for the wellbeing of community members. (196)

This is an effective and compelling definition, and one that emerges from the Kamëntšá artisans with whom Barrera Jurado worked. However, it is possible to expand on this definition of artisanal autonomy in consideration of the following points, which are intended to highlight additional dimensions in which the reproduction of the artisanal tradition contributes to the overall fortification of the culture and community of the Kamëntšá.

The artisanal industry of the Kamëntšá plays an essential role in the cultural reproduction of the community at large insofar as it emerges from and strengthens ancestral lifeways, skills, knowledge, and thought. These ancestral values are not only embodied in and transmitted through artisanal objects themselves, in their capacity as the principal representations of the tangible cultural heritage of the community. More importantly, they are also transmitted and reproduced intergenerationally by pedagogy and apprenticeship, through which elders pass on to younger generations the skills and knowledge that their forebears in turn taught them. This is an integral process, in which the manual skills required to turn a block of wood into a mask or a bundle of yarn into a *tsömbiach* are inextricable from the cultural, ethical, and philosophical values and principles that give meaning to the art. This process is essentially territorial, for the principles that define Kamëntšá territoriality find embodiment in the artisanal objects elaborated by the community. As Barrera Jurado writes,

The artisanal object itself is a territory. In their carved or woven symbols one can identify places such as rivers, mountains, paths; and also real people, heroic characters, mythological or fantastical beings, all of which are represented in the carnival masks or in beadwork designs. These

motifs occupy a real place in the biophysical spaces of the Sibundoy Valley. These objectual territories demonstrate the relationship between the artisans and Mother Earth and its dimensions of fertility in the objects used in rituals for healing or to protect people. (197).

Or, in the words of a young musician and artisan,

The symbols [*la escritura*, lit. “the writing”] are a language. Imagine that our grandmothers [*nuestras mamitas*], those who weaved, did not know how to read, they didn’t know how to write, but in their weavings they told stories, they said “We’re going to make this figure in pairs.” When we speak of symbology and language, it’s because in each symbol we are telling the story of our territory. (I.7)

In short, artisanal objects are one of the vessels through which culturally essential values are reproduced through their elaboration and dissemination within the community.

Language recuperation and revitalization is a second crucial way that reproduction of the artisanal tradition bears important implications for Kamëntšá cultural autonomy. First it is necessary to understand the current situation of the Kamëntšá language, which is in a difficult position. Though exact figures are difficult to determine,²³ only a small percentage of the population, mostly older people, speaks it fluently. Others speak it to varying degrees and many understand when it is spoken but cannot competently produce it themselves. Young people are most at risk of losing the language and many only know scattered and generic phrases, such as the basic salutations which are still

²³ At time of writing, Colombian linguist Adrián Múnera is engaged in fieldwork documenting the current status of the Kamëntšá language and ongoing revitalization efforts for his PhD dissertation at the University of Buenos Aires. The publication of his results will include the first substantial and recent statistical data on the current number of speakers, efficacy and rate of transmission, etc.

customary in formal contexts and intergenerational encounters within the community. Language classes do exist in the bilingual schools operated in the resguardos, but many of my collaborators are critical of the pedagogy implemented in them, which often fails to teach the language to any substantial degree.²⁴ In general, the linguistic situation of the Kamëntšá remains grim, and many in the community are not confident of its survival in the coming generations (Fabre 2001; Radio Nacional de Colombia 2019).

In contrast to the challenging situation of general decline in which the Kamëntšá language finds itself, one of its relative safe havens is the artisanal domain. The Kamëntšá artisanal tradition constitutes a culturally meaningful venue within which the Kamëntšá language survives and is reproduced to a greater degree than in most other domains of social and cultural life in the community (Figure 11).



Figure 11. The new and the old coexist in an artisan's workshop. The headdress and cascabeles (a type of percussion instrument) are of an ancestral type, while the bead hummingbirds are a recent but very popular innovation. All are integral parts of the contemporary artisanal industry. Kamëntšá is spoken in this workshop.

The importance of the artisanal tradition as a means of safeguarding and reproducing the Kamëntšá language is overtly recognized by many

²⁴ Allegations of bureaucratic incompetence and nepotism are often assigned blame for the inefficiencies of the pedagogies implemented in the “bilingual” schools. It is worth noting, however, that others among my collaborators have rejected these allegations. Further investigation into the true efficacy of the school programs is necessary.

of my collaborators in the community. As one weaver quite clearly put it, “the mother tongue [*la lengua materna*] can be strengthened through artisanry” (I.2). This is logical considering the centrality of both intergenerationality and ancestrality within the artisanal tradition; the valorization of the ancestral and its transmission in the artisanal context is best achieved through the linguistic medium that best conveys the values and principles of the Kamëntšá, i.e., their own language, rather than Spanish. Moreover, even outside of the artisanal workshop or the apprenticeship scenario, artisans generally have a heightened awareness of the sociocultural importance of speaking the language and strive to do so in other areas of their lives. Take the following account given by a professional woodworker who produces masks and instruments:

Those who are Kamëntšá in origin, “I am Indigenous,” they say, “I am Kamëntšá,” but they can't even say hello [in Kamëntšá]. That's why here, if you're Indigenous, you must by [customary] law speak Kamëntšá, at least enough to say hello, because it's said that colonos [i.e., non-Indigenous people] actually learn more Kamëntšá than we Indigenous people. In my family, we teach my daughters Kamëntšá. As a father, I teach them to speak Kamëntšá because I—thank God—didn't lose my mother tongue, I keep it alive with my wife, my family, because that's the very basis of our community, the traditional Kamëntšá language. I like people who appreciate artisanry, like how I play traditional music, I maintain the mother tongue, and I carve wood. I like it a lot. I teach them these things so that maybe tomorrow they'll have a better future. There are young people, young Kamëntšá men and women, who don't like to speak the mother tongue. That's what's being lost, our culture. That's why I thank God that my father taught me artisanry and that's why we're here, it

provides for us [*es nuestro sustento*]. (I.3)

While this artisan recognizes the challenges facing his native language, he is committed to keeping it alive both through his artisanal work and in other contexts, such as with his family. He also recognizes the connection between the reproduction of cultural elements—traditional music, the mother tongue, and the woodcarving tradition—and what he terms “a better future” for coming generation; the reproduction of these interrelated cultural elements is essential to the fortification of the community’s cultural autonomy. Other interviews and observations from my fieldwork demonstrate that this multidimensional approach to the question of language recuperation is generalized within the artisanal community.

As the woodworker’s anecdote demonstrates, the artisanal tradition plays an important role in the recuperation and strengthening of the Kamëntšá language despite its presently tenuous position. If the language revitalization efforts currently underway in the community are to succeed, they may only be able to do so in collaboration with the artisans who are already essential to keeping the language alive. And insofar as language is one of the pillars upholding Kamëntšá culture, the importance of the artisanal domain for the defense of the community’s cultural autonomy is beyond doubt.

Lastly, the artisanal tradition strengthens cultural autonomy through its support of other traditions and practices, including shamanism and Clestrinÿe, as discussed in the following chapters. In brief, neither of the latter domains could exist in their current form without artisanal objects, a primary component of both—and it is likely that neither would be able to reproduce itself in their absence. The symbols and figures most representative of each tradition—namely, the shaman who leads a yagé ceremony, or the red-masked Matachín who leads the Clestrinÿe procession into town each year—are products of artisanal work. As long as taitas wear their

distinctive feather headdresses, jaguar tooth necklaces, distinctive capisayos, cascabeles, and bead accoutrements, the artisans who make those objects—magical symbols of the shaman’s power—will continue their weaving. As long as the Matachín and all the other figures in the Clestrinÿe procession are in need of a newly carved mask every year, the woodworkers who make those masks and the instrument-makers who provide the thousands of drums, rattles, flutes, and other instruments that accompany the procession will return to their workshops. In other words, the reproduction of all practices that make Kamëntšá culture distinctive depends integrally on the reproduction of the artisanal domain—and vice versa. If Kamëntšá cultural autonomy is truly to be realized—in whatever form it must take given local conditions—then the artisanal tradition will play a central role in determining its development.

6. Cultural Reproduction in Kamëntšá Shamanism

6.1. Overview

The shamanic tradition of the Kamëntšá is an important domain in which to explore contemporary processes of cultural reproduction and autonomy at work in the community. In this section, I discuss two aspects of the shamanic tradition in which these processes are evident: 1) the *jajañ*, the ethnobotanical garden full of medicinal and magical plants which shamans rely on for their work and thus preserve ecologically and culturally; and 2) the integration of Kamëntšá shamanism into a regional “shamanic network” (*red chamánica*) which allows the community to benefit from a broader ayahuasca tourism industry while valorizing local traditions, especially in terms of music and art. The reproduction of the Kamëntšá shamanic tradition in both categories contributes to fortifying the community’s cultural autonomy. Before analyzing its merits, however, it is first necessary

to briefly contextualize Kamëntšá shamanism.

The shamanic tradition of the Sibundoy Valley, which varies little between the Kamëntšá and the Inga, is well documented. In most respects it is essentially Amazonian, bearing many similarities to the shamanic traditions of the jungle lowlands that the valley overlooks. Broadly speaking, Amazonian shamanism centers on the personality of the shaman as a spiritual healer and an intermediary between the material world and the spirit world. The Amazonian shaman is a well-respected and occasionally feared figure known to possess magical powers and who is sometimes thought to ally himself with spirits that can prove helpful to his friends and dangerous to his enemies.²⁵ In general, shamans are primarily regarded as medicine men whose primary medicine—often regarded as a sacrament in various Indigenous and syncretic Catholic spiritualities—is generally known by its Quechua name as *ayahuasca*, a powerful entheogenic decoction which induces intense psychological and physiological effects. The powerful visions that emerge from the combination of these plants typically last several hours and vary in intensity depending on the amount consumed; it is not uncommon for people under their influence to lose all normal sense of self, time, and space until the effects pass. Yagé—the ayahuasca concoction used ceremonially by Kamëntšá shamans—is known to produce visions and feelings often considered deeply meaningful (Hamill et al. 2019; Homan 2016; Morales-García et al. 2017). As healers, shamans are frequently referred to as “traditional doctors” (*médico tradicional*), in contrast to the

clinician doctors of Western medicine.²⁶ The Amazonian shamanic complex is generally a highly salient institution in the many Indigenous communities that feature it, wherein shamans enjoy high social prestige and ayahuasca is recognized as an important aspect of the culture even beyond its medical use (Anderson, Labate, and De Leon 2014; Bristol 1965; 1966; Ramírez de Jara and Pinzón Castaño 1992; Reichel-Dolmatoff 1975; Rodríguez-Echeverry 2010; Schultes 1988; Schultes and Hoffman 1992; Schultes and Raffauf 1992; Taussig 1987).

Kamëntšá shamans are generally highly respected figures in their community; they are uniformly accorded the title of *taita* (Quechua: “father”) as a sign of respect and acknowledgement of their authority. Taitas generally descend from family lines of shamans; it is not unusual for this profession to be passed from father to son in an unbroken progression. Each family line may have its own idiosyncratic traditions and practices, though all shamans in the community are in regular contact with each other. It is possible, therefore, to speak of a general body of Kamëntšá shamanic tradition. The regular venue in which shamanic ceremonies are enacted is the *maloca* (Figure 12), a type of roundhouse modelled on those common in the lower reaches of the Amazon, though today generally built of finished wood or brick rather than the logs and thatch common in more remote regions. Wealthy and high-profile shamans generally have their own malocas on family estates, while others practice out of their homes.

²⁵ I use the masculine pronoun here because shamanism has generally and traditionally been a male domain. In many communities in the Amazon, women are not allowed to drink ayahuasca, let alone lead ceremonies (Thalji and Yakushko 2018). These restrictions are generally linked to reproductive notions and are related to the generalized taboo on women drinking ayahuasca during menstruation. While women can and do drink yagé in the Sibundoy Valley, to my knowledge there has never been a female shaman among the Kamëntšá.

²⁶ The two medical systems are generally seen as mutually complementary rather than exclusive. To paraphrase my collaborators: if your body is unwell, see a doctor; if your spirit is unwell, see a shaman. In cases of serious illness, it is not uncommon for people in the Sibundoy Valley to seek help from both sources (Seijas 1969).



Figure 12. A taita's maloca in vereda La Menta. Note the stenciled tsömbiach designs on the band around the second-floor veranda. This maloca is only a few years old and evinces a modern take on a classic design.

In ceremony, Kamëntšá taitas are distinguished by their elaborate regalia, generally consisting of a capisayo of the traditional design, feather headdress, jaguar tooth necklace, bead necklaces and bracelets, and other symbolic and magical accoutrements. Except for the recent addition of bead artisanry, the paraphernalia of the Kamëntšá shaman has changed little over the decades. In addition to his personal effects, shamans usually decorate their workplaces—whether maloca or living room—with objects and artistic designs representative of their profession. Shamanic art is distinguished by its vivid colors, motifs of animal transformation and jungle life, and its attempts to visually capture the visions experienced upon imbibing yagé. Also typical of the shamanic workspace is the presence of an altar or desk which syncretically combines Indigenous and Catholic objects and symbols; it is not uncommon to find a cross or a portrait of the Virgin Mary set alongside a jaguar pelt or quartz crystal.

Other aspects typical of ceremonial performance include burning incense for purposes of purification as well as playing music and singing songs to put patients at ease and provide auditory accompaniment to their *pinta*, the strong visions that yagé brings. Often these songs are sung in a mix of Kamëntšá and Spanish

and offer praise to yagé or to nature. The most common instruments are *cascabeles*, hollowed out seeds strung on bead necklaces worn diagonally over the chest, and the harmonica, with which the shaman sporadically plays a distinctive yagé song throughout the night. Guitars, drums, and other instruments are also sometimes employed. Subjectively, the music that usually attends a yagé ceremony, coming and going over the course of the night, is often experienced as a pleasant and centering presence that helps accompany and orient one's *pinta*. Many shamans are themselves musicians outside of their shamanic duties, and it is not uncommon for participants also to play music throughout the night. Overall, music is an integral part of the yagé ceremony.

The performative and aesthetic aspects of the ceremony cannot be disentangled from its spiritual and medicinal aspects. For example, the shamanic *limpieza* describes a cleansing ritual meant to purge patients of illness and malignant spirits (Figures 13, 14), and in a more expansive sense refers to the interior purification that occur through the yagé ceremony itself. If, as a popular Kamëntšá saying puts it,²⁷ the body is a territory, then much like the territory in which the Kamëntšá live, it must be cultivated and cleansed of contaminants to flourish. In Kamëntšá ethnomedicine, personal wellbeing is attained following the purgatory action of yagé, which is well known for its emetic effects, namely vomiting and diarrhea (Seijas 1969). The wellbeing of the individual, achieved through bodily and spiritual cleansing catalyzed by yagé, precedes and facilitates the social and communal healing which finds maximum expression in Clestrinÿe, the Kamëntšá festivity that will be discussed in the next chapter.

²⁷ The saying is usually quoted as "The body is the first territory."



Figure 13. A shaman performing in public at the artisanal fair leads a *limpieza*, or cleansing ritual, with a volunteer patient. *Limpiezas* may be performed on their own, but they always follow a *yagé* ceremony. They are often experienced by patients as profoundly emotional and cathartic, compounding the therapeutic and curing function of the *yagé* ceremonies which they bring to an end. Patients are usually shirtless during the procedure, which most traditionally involves whipping the body with nettle leaves; this is said to facilitate blood flow.



Figure 14. A *limpieza* performed by a shaman in his *maloca* prior to a musical performance, the *wayra* in his hand a blur as he shakes it to the rhythm of his chant. Note the incense being burned for cleansing purposes, the stenciled *tsömbiach* symbol on the left pillar, the palm fiber fire fan (a traditional woven object now rarely seen) hanging on the right pillar, the

mix of ancestral and recently invented elements in the shaman's regalia, and the syncretic Indigenous-Catholic features surrounding the altar behind him. Note also the dreamcatchers suspended from the ceiling, a non-traditional craft that signals the recent advent of pan-Indigenous influences in the community. Unlike the one shown in Figure 13, the object of this purification is a space rather than a person.

Having briefly surveyed Kamëntšá shamanism in its general outline, it is now possible to proceed with an analysis of the ways in which the reproduction of the shamanic tradition contributes to Kamëntšá cultural reproduction and autonomy at large. The first domain in which this occurs is that of the *jajañ*, the ethnobotanical garden which once surrounded every Kamëntšá home and which is the repository of a great deal of traditional ecological knowledge within the community. Shamans valorize and maintain this knowledge by use of the *jajañ* for magical and medicinal purposes in shamanic practice.

6.2. Cultural Reproduction in the *Jajañ*

The *jajañ* is the ethnobotanical garden of the Kamëntšá. The term is often used interchangeably with *chagra*, which comes from the Quechua and is the broader regional counterpart of the specifically Kamëntšá *jajañ* (Figures 15, 16). Among the Kamëntšá, the *jajañ* is a garden containing edible, medicinal, and magical plants which traditionally surrounded each family dwelling and provided for the primary sustenance of the family. Whereas large fields were held in common and used to cultivate staple crops such as maize and beans for the sustenance of the community, the *jajañ* provided food, medicine, and magical protection to single families. In this sense, the *jajañ* system as it formerly existed—in which every family kept and cultivated large, complex gardens with dozens of plant species whose interrelationships and properties were well known and accounted for—was once a vital repository of ecological knowledge and integral to the dietary and

medical wellbeing of the community (Agreda España 2016; Bristol 1965; Jacanamijoy Juajibioy 2019; Mujuy Ajeda 2019; Palacios Bucheli and Bokelmann 2017).



Figure 15. A mural depicting a woman in her jajañ painted on the side of a resguardo schoolhouse. In the Kamëntšá jajañ system, women are the keepers of botanical lore. The text in the left corner reads “My colorful garden.” The geometric designs in the background allude to the corona and the beadwork tradition, while the cosmic imagery on the woman’s tunic refers to the visions of the Milky Way associated with yagé.



Figure 16. A jajañ at an artisan’s house on the outskirts of Sibundoy. Although still actively cultivated, this jajañ is not as complex or dense as the most traditional gardens.

The jajañ system has been in decline since at least the 1980s owing to the advent of monoculture as the predominant land use strategy in the Sibundoy Valley—a system introduced by and for the colono landowners who, by the end of the century, had succeeded in buying, swindling, and stealing the majority of the valley’s plots from its Indigenous

inhabitants²⁸ (Bello Torres 1987; Bonilla 1968; Comunidad Camëntšá 1989; “Pueblo Kamëntšá” 2015). Today, many of my collaborators lament the gradual disappearance of the jajañ system, which is now only visible in its most complex forms in the most distant and traditional of the valley’s outlying veredas. Even in such cases, there exists a generational divide wherein elders tend to the jajañ, but without the assistance and observation of younger people who formerly learned to cultivate their gardens intergenerationally, by the example of elders. One shaman describes both the importance and the threatened loss of the jajañ tradition in the following terms:

For me the jajañ is as the grandparents of my grandparents, the ancestral ones whom I knew, taught us. From the jajañ comes every kind of medicine and every type of medicinal plant, it’s all there in the jajañ. There’s corn, beans, taro, squash, arracacha, cabbage, *achira* [*Canna indica*]... Within the jajañ is the medicine that the elders, the ancestors, have taught us. That’s what we have to conserve and care for. Unfortunately, the state itself has started polluting the air, trying to destroy everything that exists in the jajañ... We, as the caretakers [*dueños*, lit. “owners”] of our territories where we live, we try to care for it, and not to use herbicides, no... That does us harm. As landowners, as a community, we are struggling against the use of herbicides. Instead we encourage using hand tools to work the land. (I.5)

The herbicides that this interlocutor refers to are

²⁸ As discussed in Part I, processes of territorial dispossession began considerably early, going back to the colonial era, though it was only with the advent of the Capuchins in the early twentieth century that the Sibundoy Valley’s Indigenous communities lost the majority of their land to outsiders. It is important to distinguish colonial and Capuchin dispossession and land use patterns from the monoculture system that is predominant in the valley today, however. Unlike in earlier phases of colonization, the Sibundoy Valley’s land area today is overwhelmingly dedicated to cash crop production.

those of the monoculture system encroaching on the remaining jajañs of the Sibundoy Valley. This is the challenging situation facing those who continue to uphold and preserve the culturally and ecologically²⁹ integral jajañ system. Many in the community seem resigned to the fate, apparently foretold, of the jajañ, sure that it is destined to give way to the monoculture systems which threaten it. However, the continued centrality of the jajañ within the Kamëntšá shamanic system suggests that there can be hope to the contrary.

The shamanic tradition may play an important role in mitigating and even reversing the apparent loss of the jajañ system among the Kamëntšá, thereby contributing not only to the strengthening of an important cultural tradition, but at the same time fortifying the ecological wellbeing of the territory—much as shamans, through ceremony and the plant medicine yagé, help preserve the personal health and wellbeing of their patients. More specifically, Kamëntšá shamanism contributes to 1) the *preservation* and 2) the *recuperation* of the jajañ and its associated traditions insofar as shamans are among those in the community most responsible for cultivating jajañs and maintaining the traditional ecological knowledge that they safeguard and depend on.

In its ethnomedical aspects, Kamëntšá shamanism has an important preservative function with respect to the jajañ. During my fieldwork, every shaman I encountered kept his own jajañ, even though most Kamëntšá families no longer do. Most also depend primarily on their personal jajañs for the medicinal plants that their shamanic practice relies on.³⁰ One Inga shaman

explained with reference to his chagra—recall that both the shamanic and the jajañ-chagra systems of the Kamëntšá and Inga are highly similar—that “it is our own pharmacy, our traditional pharmacy.” All the traditional medicines of the Kamëntšá are there, and for as long as the Kamëntšá ethnomedical tradition persists within Kamëntšá shamanism, the jajañ will remain instrumental within that tradition. Furthermore, as long as shamanism in general remains a salient aspect of Kamëntšá culture—and its integration within a regional shamanic network will ensure this continued reinforcement—then the ecological knowledge on which the shamanic tradition depends will be passed on to the next generation of apprentice shamans. This process establishes the preservative nature of Kamëntšá shamanism with respect to the jajañ, demonstrating their mutually interdependent relationship.

A key example of the preservative function of Kamëntšá shamanism with respect to the jajañ is the *Datura* genus of flowering plants, which belong to the nightshade family (*Solanaceae*) and which are locally known as *borrachera* (“intoxicant,” “inebriant”). The Sibundoy Valley is home to the world’s greatest diversity of *Datura* cultivars, which have long been cultivated by the valley’s inhabitants; some of the thirteen distinct varieties found in the Sibundoy Valley are incredibly divergent from *Datura* varieties found in nature (Figure 17). *Datura* is a highly toxic plant that nevertheless has long occupied an important role within Kamëntšá ethnomedicine and shamanism. Formerly, it was sometimes mixed with yagé or taken on its own for its extremely potent hallucinogenic effects, which are known to be highly unpleasant in the best of cases and can result in insanity or death in the

²⁹ Compared to the ecologically harmful and culturally empty monoculture system imposed and run by settlers and now dominant in the Sibundoy Valley, the botanically diverse jajañ system stands as a far more efficient, ecologically sustainable, and culturally meaningful land use strategy. The relational and mutual nature of plant cultivation and communal labor in the jajañ makes it an excellent arena for the investigation of how Kamëntšá concepts of territoriality are put into practice.

³⁰ Yagé, the single most important plant medicine in Kamëntšá shamanism, is a notable exception. Although *Banisteriopsis caapi* and secondary additives *can* be cultivated in the

Sibundoy Valley, the vine itself is native to the Amazonian lowlands and generally grows much better in the hot and humid jungle than at the comparatively cold elevation of the Sibundoy Valley. Yagé vines cultivated in the Sibundoy Valley are generally stunted in their growth and most yagé is prepared from vines imported from the lowlands.

worst of cases (Bristol 1965; 1969; Schultes and Hoffman 1992; Seijas 1969). Today, *Datura* is no longer used as a hallucinogen,³¹ but the plant retains magical associations for which it is still very commonly cultivated in the valley, even where other jajañ plants are now absent.



Figure 17. A *Datura* cultivar in the jajañ of an artisan in vereda Palmas Bajas. Different cultivars vary by flower color and shape, leaf shape, flexibility or rigidity of vines and branches, etc. Phenotypically, some hardly resemble at all *Datura* varieties found in nature or in cultivation outside of the Sibundoy Valley.

As a magical plant, *Datura* is planted next to houses to provide protection to their inhabitants and its leaves are combined with other jajañ plants to create curing baths. For these applications, the plant remains one of those most widely employed by shamans for medical and magical purposes. Without the importance of *Datura* within the Kamëntšá ethnomedical and shamanic traditions, first as a hallucinogen and then as a plant with magical properties, it is likely that *Datura*'s cultural value would be forgotten. The continued importance of plants such as *Datura* within the shamanic tradition, however, ensures the continued cultivation of the jajañs and preserves the traditional ecological

knowledge vested within them.

In addition to its preservative function with respect to the jajañ system, Kamëntšá shamanism also has a recuperative function, serving to promote the recovery of the jajañ system within the community at large. This occurs primarily through the valorization of the jajañ tradition against monoculture, which the majority of the Kamëntšá community recognizes as a major threat to both cultural and territorial integrity and autonomy within the Sibundoy Valley. One collaborator, the nephew of one of the most prominent shamans of the Sibundoy Valley—both of them maintain jajañs of their own—speaks of this process at length:

The jajañ is polyculture [*policultivo*] and it is without order, it has no structure. The jajañ is an equilibrium. There are the medicinal plants, corn, minor species, everything, even artisanry, everything comes together there. One plant cares for the next. If in one place there is a medicinal plant, then there must be another plant that protects against pests [*plagas*], unlike monoculture, which is with one plant at a large scale and using chemicals. That has affected things a lot, because before [monoculture], there were no pests here. Now pests have started coming for the medicinal plants. Even corn, which we cultivate for our subsistence, is attracting pests. It is very difficult to conserve because of what we said about monoculture. But I think there are ways to recuperate through the jajañ, the traditional practices we are implementing through collective work, supporting each other in the community, with the cabildo or with people who own land. Something beautiful is the traditional seed bank, which we share. That's what we do here. If I don't have a plant, others will come and bring it, we share and exchange among ourselves, because that's a form [of recuperation]. If I lose a plant in my garden, I can say, "No, I gave it to someone else, let's

³¹ I am told that some shamans in isolated areas far from town still sometimes add borrachera to yagé as a medical last resort in extreme cases. However, I have encountered no definitive evidence of this practice. All collaborators I spoke to about the topic acknowledged the extreme toxicity of the plant and the dangers of its use.

exchange again and bring it back here.” It’s a big preoccupation, because the native seeds we used to have are being lost, the fruit trees are being lost. It is our duty to recuperate the territory through these practices, the practices we have been taught, the form of planting under a good moon [*en buena luna*], also of cultivating under a good moon.³² That’s why the moon is our mother [*la mamita*], the lunar cycles tell us when to cut and when to plant. Even in medicine, they tell us what day to take medicine.³³ Returning to these practices is our duty. In that sense, we are doing it here with what I told you about the four hectares of earth, and we are strengthening it more each day, learning with the elders. (I.7)

The “four hectares” that this collaborator refers to in the last paragraph are an area of land formerly owned by the Church in the Sibundoy Valley, but recently bought and developed by a *minga*, a collective labor team dedicated to projects relevant to the whole community. The *minga* consists of 43 Kamëntšá families who acquired this land to cultivate a communal *jajañ* for the benefit of those whose lands in the floodplain of the valley’s base are seasonally inundated. As the shaman’s nephew explains:

It’s a seed bank where we plant everything from the *jajañ*. That’s how we recuperate, there can be different movements and different forms of expressing oneself. We are doing it through the medium of dialogue, and

we already recuperated four hectares, which are for the people in the lower parts of the valley that flood when it rains. Those people can’t cultivate land when it rains, but here they can plant. They have their corn, cabbages, beans, taro, *guasimba* [*Tigridia*], tomatoes, blackberries. We see this as a form of action, and each person can decide if they want to participate in the social movement or if they instead want to help the community in other ways. (I.7)

Insofar as the shamanic tradition preserves and maintains the *jajañ* system for purposes of the Kamëntšá ethnomedical tradition, it has a key role to play in processes of general recuperation of the *jajañ* such as the case described here. It bears recalling that, as a “polyculture” system rather than a “monoculture,” the *jajañ* is characterized by relationships of mutuality and interdependence between the plants that make it up. To sustain and recover the *jajañ* for medical purposes, therefore, is also to promote its preservation and recuperation for all other purposes, such as for the purposes of communal food security sought through the *minga* described above. As this collaborator demonstrates, these are both valid ways to support the community in its processes of cultural reproduction and autonomy by way of the *jajañ*.

The difference between the Kamëntšá *jajañ* and the settler colonial monoculture systems, as two diametrically opposed land use strategies, represents the broader ideological and philosophical conceptions of territory that underpin each. The Kamëntšá conception of territory is, like the *jajañ*, relational and mutualistic; each aspect of the Kamëntšá lifeworld forms part of a continuous fabric from which no individual feature can be extracted in isolation, like the unique and beautiful *tsömbiach* textiles for which Kamëntšá weavers are justly famous. In the monoculture fields that now spread across the valley where once there were family plots containing dozens of different

³² Ancestrally, the Kamëntšá regard certain lunar phases as auspicious for conducting activities such as planting and harvesting, gathering wood, and performing rituals. This is perhaps a remnant of the pre-Columbian calendar of the Sibundoy Valley (McDowell 1989; 1994).

³³ We see here a relationship between the lunar cycles, the *jajañ*, and the taking of medicine (i.e., *yagé*); as this collaborator says, “everything comes together here.” It has not been possible to develop this theme in this thesis, but it is also worth noting that certain groups in the valley are actively seeking to reconstruct and recover the old precolonial calendar, which follows a lunar Andean model. Shamanism and the *jajañ* will be instrumental in this endeavor, should it prove successful.

species, there is no relationality, no interdependence—only a flat homogeneity that poisons the earth, unravels cultural ties, and eventually succumbs to its own unsustainable nature.

While the importance of the *jajañ* system to the shamanic tradition goes beyond its pharmaceutical uses, this presents one of the most distinctive examples of cultural preservation within Kamëntšá shamanism. Suffice it to say that from the examples and ethnographic references given above, the case is clear for Kamëntšá shamanism as one of the major factors behind current processes of preservation and recuperation of the *jajañ* system as a central facet of the integrity and wellbeing of both Kamëntšá culture and territory. Shamans are instrumental as guardians of the botanical knowledge contained in the *jajañ* and their preservation is necessary for the reproduction of this culturally and ecologically essential cornerstone of Kamëntšá life (Figure 18).



Figure 18. A selection of medicinal plants on display at a shaman's booth at the artisanal fair in Interculturality Park, central Sibundoy, the weekend preceding Clestrinÿe 2023. Kamëntšá shamanism makes extensive use of the medicinal and magical plants of the *jajañ*.

6.3. Cultural Reproduction through the Shamanic Network: Art and Music

Kamëntšá shamanism also contributes to broader processes of cultural reproduction and autonomy through the integration, in part ancestral and in

part invented, of Kamëntšá shamanism into a regional “shamanic network” which puts Kamëntšá shamans and their practices in dialogue with their counterparts in other Indigenous communities in the Colombian Amazon and beyond. This integration allows for 1) the *preservation* of distinctive aspects of Kamëntšá shamanism while simultaneously enabling 2) *rearticulation* and *invention* in local shamanism by drawing upon other shamanic traditions in the broader regional network.

For the purposes of this discussion, I define the “shamanic network” as the type of Indigenous-Catholic syncretic shamanism making use of *yagé* which is generalized throughout Western Amazonia, often drawing on New Age spiritualities in addition to its original blend of Amazonian animism and a colonially imposed Catholic overlay. It is important to distinguish this generic type of shamanism, which is a historically recent development, from the patchwork of diverse but related shamanic traditions which long pre-date it in the same region—broadly speaking, Western Amazonia and its borderlands. The former is the aestheticized and syncretic shamanism that attracts urbanites and tourists to *yagé* ceremonies which are generally similar in form and content throughout the Amazon basin—and which increasingly take place far outside of it, from urban hubs in South America to clandestine ayahuasca circles in the United States and Europe (Homan 2016; Labate and Cavnar 2014; Ramírez de Jara and Pinzón Castaño 1992; Valderrama 2003). The “shamans” who lead these ceremonies are often not Indigenous and may even not have learned from Indigenous shamans, though most claim to follow ancient teachings of vague provenance, which may have as much to do with yoga and chakras as with *yagé* and *chacrana*. Some however, are Indigenous, and this fact is relevant as it concerns the salience of the shamanic network in Sibundoy Valley shamanism. Although the Kamëntšá shamanic tradition long predates the recent development of

a somewhat homogenized shamanic network in Amazonia and beyond, Kamëntšá shamans have not missed the chance to capitalize on this development.

Although yagé has been consumed by numerous peoples of Western Amazonia since time immemorial, it is only in recent decades that an ayahuasca tourism industry has emerged in the communities that have always made use of the medicine. The Sibundoy Valley has not been affected in this way quite so much as other areas, but a local yagé tourism industry has still developed there in response to outside interest. The Kamëntšá—and not only their shamans, but other members of the community as well—have successfully capitalized on the Sibundoy Valley’s reputation as a nexus within the regional shamanic network. They do so by adapting representative elements of the general shamanic aesthetic in much of their art and music in ways that both rearticulate Kamëntšá elements while creatively incorporating outside elements. This participation in a broader shamanic context serves to strengthen Kamëntšá shamanism and thereby the culture at large. Incorporation into the shamanic network opens Kamëntšá shamanism to a dialogue with its regional counterparts and opens other aspects of the community to visitors first attracted by yagé. Two examples of cultural rearticulation exemplified by Kamëntšá shamanism are the following: 1) The recent proliferation of street art in the town of Sibundoy which incorporates both generalized aesthetic elements characteristic of regional “shamanic art” and aesthetic elements particular to the Kamëntšá and their local shamanism; and 2) the similarly recent proliferation of “medicine music” in performative contexts which, likewise, both borrows from the regional network and includes and valorizes specifically Kamëntšá elements. The dialectic between local valorization and regional integration in both shamanic art and music serves to strengthen Kamëntšá shamanism by establishing a place for it within a larger regional, intercultural, and

increasingly international context.³⁴

The town of Sibundoy—or *Tabanok*, the endonym preferred by most murals (Figure 19)—is replete with street art, almost all by Kamëntšá artists, despite the town’s majority colono population. Much of this art incorporates shamanic symbolism, particularly around the use of yagé.



Figure 19. One of the more elaborate murals making artistic use of the Kamëntšá term for the town of Sibundoy, here spelled *Tabanokh*. Many other murals throughout town use a vowelless stylization: “TBNK.” Note the gesto masks against the background and the figure of the *Matachín* in full regalia front and center. Murals like these demonstrate ongoing claims of Kamëntšá territoriality on settled land.

For example, just as many artisanal artforms among the Kamëntšá attempt to capture the essence of the yagé experience, so too are these aspects present in Kamëntšá street art, which frequently makes use of hallucinogenic imagery (Figure 20). However, Kamëntšá artists incorporate elements typical of what could be called “shamanic art” or “ayahuasca art” of a regional type with symbols representative of the Kamëntšá community in particular. This merger enables the valorization of the specifically Kamëntšá elements within the broader regional

³⁴ I do not develop this point further here, but it is worth noting that many shamans in the Sibundoy Valley, both Inga and Kamëntšá, travel far and wide to dispense their medicine in ceremony. One rather infamous case saw a Kamëntšá shaman arrested and jailed for a month in the U.S. for arriving with *Banisteriopsis caapi* vines in his luggage—a banned substance under U.S. law (Anderson, Labate, and De Leon 2014).

framework of the shamanic network. Processes of preservation, rearticulation, and invention are all present in the domain of Kamëntšá “yagé art.”



Figure 20. A mural next to the cabildo building in Sibundoy. This mural depicts what appears to be a shaman or a stylized Matachín blowing the Clestrinje horn, out of which is growing what may be a Banisteriopsis caapi plant, whose leaves are sprouting eyes. Note also the tsömbiach designs around the window and left side.

Figure 20 exemplifies these processes as they are expressed in Kamëntšá street art. This mural, painted on the side of a building next to the Kamëntšá cabildo building in Sibundoy, is typical of this culturally fused genre of street art. As its central subject, it takes a distinctly Kamëntšá figure, representing either a shaman or a stylized Matachín, the emblematic, red-masked leader of the Clestrinje procession. The figure’s dress—capisayo, necklaces, and crown—are all distinctively Kamëntšá, as are the Clestrinje horn he blows and the tsömbiach designs painted around the borders of the mural. Designs representative of generalized yagé shamanism, however, are also present, suggesting that the artist—in a move characteristic of emerging Kamëntšá street art—has drawn on the aesthetic styles of non-specific “shamanic art.” These features, which are typical of the shared artistic tradition of the shamanic network, include the references to yagé (the vine growing out of the Clestrinje horn) and the eyes, a common visual motif in both ayahuasca art and the experience of the medicine itself, which are seen sprouting from the vine. This artwork demonstrates an

aesthetically syncretic preservation and rearticulation of existing cultural elements alongside the introduction of external elements, i.e., those typical of broader yagé shamanism. This mural is not the only example of this process in the domain of Kamëntšá street art, but it does demonstrate many distinctive elements of this emerging artistic rearticulation.

The use of color is another feature unifying Kamëntšá art and ayahuasca art more broadly—and this is a topic on which several of my collaborators have remarked, as the use of color in all Kamëntšá art, not just in street art, is one of the most distinctive features of the community’s aesthetic tradition. The shaman’s nephew quoted previously, also a young musician and artisan, provides more detail:

Why do we use such vivid colors in our *ruanas* [capisayos]? Because through them we want to represent energy, we want to represent that force, because if we sing a song and we are with something that doesn’t radiate energy, we haven’t succeeded in linking artisanry, linking music. Before making music, we take *remedio* [yagé] to become inspired. (I.7)

The importance of color across various domains of Kamëntšá culture, also expressed in the artisanal domain, finds more overt support in street art incorporating the colors and designs typical of shamanic art in general. The murals depicted in Figure 21 illustrate this intersection, where symbols unique to Kamëntšá culture coexist with designs found throughout the shamanic network.

The community-building function of Kamëntšá art in relation to shamanism must also not be overlooked. Art is a focal point in the community, and much of this art is inspired by yagé. The art café called Benach, which opened in downtown Sibundoy several years ago, is key in this respect, serving as a place of community gathering and incorporating many of the

shamanic designs under discussion here.



Figure 21. Murals on the side of Benach, a café and art gallery across the street from the Kamëntšá cabildo in central Sibundoy. The figures and symbols are Kamëntšá—mamitas, coronas, borrachera, pathways—while the yagé-inspired colors and designs resemble those typical of the shamanic network more generally.

Figure 22 shows a sign outside Benach which illustrates the kind of intercultural encounter at play in Kamëntšá art. Here, the internationalized graffiti style of the American inner city meets a distinctly Kamëntšá aesthetic which integrates local elements—native *frailejón* plants, depictions of Kamëntšá elders, *Datura* flowers, and yagé imagery—with those drawn from a regional shamanic network, such as the ayahuasca vines and geometric patterns.

The same processes apparent in Kamëntšá art are also evident in the domain of music, specifically what has come to be called “medicine music” (*música medicina*) in the context of both community performance and yagé ceremony.

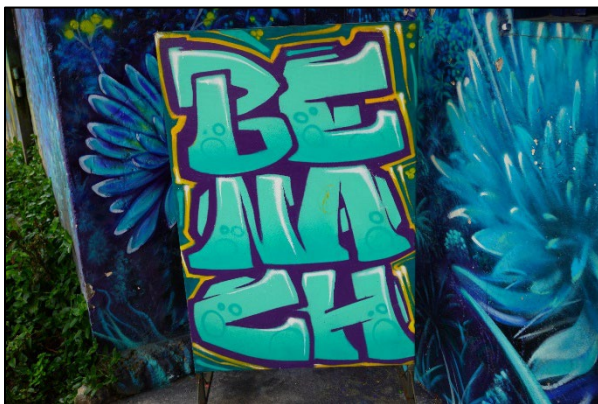


Figure 22. A signpost outside of Benach in central Sibundoy. In Kamëntšá, “benach” means “path” and bears both literal and metaphorical connotations. Its metaphorical value is often expressed in the proverb *botamán benach*, meaning “to walk beautifully.”

“Medicine music” describes a musical genre that has emerged from the shamanic networks and ayahuasca cultures of South America, with considerable external contributions, through the blending of several preexisting musical genres or influences. Songs in this genre often involve lyrics about ayahuasca, spirituality, nature, healing, etc., and frequently blend Indigenous elements with internationally inspired New Age spirituality.³⁵ The result is a homogenized mélange of heterogenous sources of inspiration. Medicine music typically provides musical accompaniment at events associated with the shamanic network, including concerts as much as ayahuasca ceremonies. Having spread far and wide along the transmission routes of the shamanic network, medicine music is widely heard today in the Sibundoy Valley.

An ethnographic anecdote illustrates my point. One night in February 2023, I returned to my host family’s home to the sounds of song emanating from the living room. I walked in to find the whole family—all accomplished musicians, several of whom have their own bands—singing a song that, after a few stanzas, I recognized. It wasn’t a Kamëntšá song, though my friends were putting a Kamëntšá twist on it using their own instruments and style. It was a song called “Cuñaq,” from the 2018 album *Call of the Wild* by the band Curawaka. A collaboration between a Norwegian singer and several Latin American musicians, Curawaka, according to the band’s website, seeks “to share the medicine

³⁵ For an example of an authentic Indigenous tradition which forms part of the invented and generic sort of music that has emerged from the shamanic network, one very common element is a style of guitar strumming that originated with Kofán shamans in the Middle Putumayo. This style has since spread through the shamanic network to the Sibundoy Valley and other Indigenous communities elsewhere in Colombia and in other countries.

frequencies with a wider public and connect to the mysteries of Spirit through music and dance.” The Norwegian frontwoman often sings in various Indigenous languages, in addition to Spanish and Portuguese, and has been invited to speak on “music as medicine” at events like the Plant Spirit Summit, an event held in the Amazon which brands itself as providing “ancient medicine for modern times” at the intersection of Western science and Indigenous plant medicine. Events like these are typical of the shamanic network, where Western interest in hallucinogens and New Age spirituality merges with Indigenous shamanism in the Amazon and elsewhere. Medicine music emerged from this fusion and provides the typical soundtrack to such gatherings.

How did it happen that a Kamëntšá family—whose members ordinarily write and play their own songs within a distinctly Kamëntšá musical tradition—came to adopt a song by a Norwegian woman who wears feather headdresses while singing in an accented mix of Spanish and Quechua? At first, I thought it strange that Indigenous musicians with a vibrant musical tradition of their own should adopt the homogenized or even appropriative music produced by non-Indigenous artists in imitation of Indigenous traditions. But upon further reflection, I realized this was not the first time I had seen this type of musical fusion. In June 2022, I was invited to attend a concert in Sibundoy that was named simply “Música Medicina,” featuring several Kamëntšá bands as well as the musician Nicolás Lozada, a non-Indigenous singer who positions himself as a “singer-songwriter of medicine music in the Colombian Amazon.” His songs are about the healing powers of yagé and the spirits of nature, couched in vague terms that could not be identified with any particular Indigenous group or shamanic tradition. And yet he was received warmly by the Kamëntšá public who came to see him play, as warmly as they received the Kamëntšá bands on stage alongside him. This event demonstrates that Kamëntšá

music exists alongside non-Indigenous, generic medicine music (Figure 23). Later I would hear several of Lozada’s songs played during yagé ceremonies. Clearly, Kamëntšá performers viewed generic medicine music as more than a derivative imitation.



Figure 23. The band Jashnan, an all-women musical collective, playing at a Kamëntšá music festival in February 2023. Frequently groups like this one, which sing in Kamëntšá and use traditional instruments and costumes, perform alongside non-Indigenous groups in the medicine music tradition.

The ease with which Kamëntšá musicians have accepted and even repurposed songs brought by the music medicine tradition indicates the negotiation of local valorization and regional integration underway in the Sibundoy Valley, where Kamëntšá shamanism and its corollaries (in this case, associated traditions of art and music) meet contemporary ayahuasca shamanism. Kamëntšá shamanism and its practitioners have struck a balance between the preservation and rearticulation of their own traditions. At the same time, they accommodate external integrations bridging the local with the regional. This is essentially a contemporary expression of the processes of transcultural accommodation that have long patterned cultural change and adaptation in the Sibundoy Valley.³⁶ Indeed, long before medicine music entered the scene, Kamëntšá musicians were taking cues from their Inga counterparts in the Sibundoy

³⁶ For more on “accommodation,” see Glass 2022.

Valley, a process which continues today. According to the shaman's nephew quoted previously, whose band is comprised of both Kamëntšá and Inga musicians:

That's why our group is called Luar Kawsay, meaning "space of life," and *kawsay* is in Inga, it means "life" in Inga. Space of life. Since we coinhabit our territory here with the Inga community, and in our family we also have Inga relatives, we wanted to accommodate it in that sense and mix the sounds [*las sonoridades*]. Music plays a role both for the recuperation [*el rescate*] of our culture and for the strengthening of it among the coming generations. We are seeing music arrive from outside [the Sibundoy Valley]. We ourselves have adapted rhythms from outside. For example, from Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia... But we have adapted them to our own context, with our own phrases in Kamëntšá, with our own style of sound which the medicine [*yagé*] inspires in us. Imagine, everything is linked, because even the capisayos we wear speak through our music. (I.7)

The key point is that in both cases discussed here—visual art and music—there is no tension or conflict between the valorization of Kamëntšá cultural elements and those introduced from outside. This process is underpinned by the Kamëntšá shamanic system; the fusions under discussion here are fueled by Kamëntšá shamanism's participation in a developing shamanic network, which brings multiple Indigenous shamanisms into dialogue with traditions outside of the ancestral purview in Amazonia, elsewhere in Latin America, and beyond. This is one of many expressions of cultural reproduction by which the shamanic tradition strengthens Kamëntšá cultural autonomy.

6.4. Autonomy through the Shamanic

Tradition

In this chapter, I have surveyed several of the most noteworthy dimensions of the Kamëntšá shamanic tradition in relation to contemporary processes of cultural reproduction within the community. These forms of cultural reproduction contribute to the strengthening of Kamëntšá cultural autonomy in several respects.

First, it bears remembering that shamans are, traditionally, one of the most important and authoritative roles in Kamëntšá society. To this day, their authority is not in doubt, whether in an ethnomedical, ceremonial, or political context. It is very common for cabildo governors to also have expertise in the handling of *yagé* and other plant medicines; and cabildantes often take *yagé* together, sometimes in ceremonies led by ex-governors, to build rapport or discuss community politics. Some scholars have also noted that the healing and reconciliatory function of *yagé* can serve to heal political rifts within the community, again suggesting the importance of the shamanic tradition as a political regulatory institution in Kamëntšá society (Gómez Montañez et al. 2020). Given these examples, shamanism clearly has an important role to play in future political developments towards greater autonomy among the Kamëntšá, but this is a subject in need of further research.

In terms of cultural autonomy, the shamanic tradition has always been deeply important to Kamëntšá culture across various domains, from ethnobotany and medicine to art and music. As discussed previously, the artisanal domain also comes into play here, providing the shaman with the tools of his trade. Despite the incursions of outside cultures and the integration of Kamëntšá shamanism into a broader regional network, this tradition has managed to maintain and valorize its particularities through tried-and-true transcultural processes of accommodation and reproductive processes of preservation, rearticulation, and invention. As a vital part of Kamëntšá culture in general, the future of the

shamanic tradition is guaranteed, and will indeed continue to play an important role in future developments towards further cultural autonomy—not in spite of, but with the support of the intercultural encounters which the Sibundoy Valley will continue to host.

Finally, the importance of shamanism to autonomy among the Kamëntšá is expressed by its contributions to the preservation and recuperation of the *jajañ* system, which itself constitutes an ancestral land use system far more sustainable, culturally and environmentally, than the encroaching monoculture system. Insofar as the shamanic system relies on and contributes to the traditional ecological knowledge embodied in the *jajañ*, the possibility of the full recuperation of this system and of a fuller territorial renaissance remains open. If such a renaissance is to occur, shamans and those invested in the shamanic tradition will lead the charge. Indeed, the experience of many shamans as community leaders and land defenders in the process of reservation expansion which began in 2010 attests to the importance of this tradition to the fight for cultural and territorial autonomy among the Kamëntšá.

7. Season of Flourishing: Clestrinje and Ritual Renewal

7.1. Overview

For many Colombians outside of the Sibundoy Valley, the only knowledge they have of the Kamëntšá people is what outsiders know as the “Carnival of Pardon,” a misnomer referring to the valley’s most significant annual Indigenous festival. What the Kamëntšá know as *Clestrinje* or *Bëtsknaté* is not a carnival, and originally it was not about pardon—these are misinterpretations imposed by the Catholicism brought to the valley by the Capuchin fathers. In fact, *Clestrinje*, though largely codified and standardized today, is a relatively recent invention with both ancestral and foreign roots. In this section, I examine the

significance of *Clestrinje* to contemporary processes of cultural reproduction and autonomy in Kamëntšá society. First, however, it is necessary to understand what *Clestrinje* is and where it comes from, for the history of the festival parallels its contemporary importance as one of the primary mechanisms of Kamëntšá cultural reproduction. After a brief historical overview, I then analyze the importance of the *Clestrinje* / *Bëtsknaté* tradition in relation to processes of cultural reproduction towards autonomy in the Kamëntšá community today.

Before proceeding, I must address the matter of terminology. Today, in general conversation, *Clestrinje* and *Bëtsknaté* are used interchangeably, though *Bëtsknaté* predominates. Ancestrally, however, these terms did not mean the same thing. Essentially, *Clestrinje* could be translated as “season of flourishing” and once referred to the harvest season or the summertime of the pre-Columbian calendar of the Kamëntšá. *Bëtsknaté*, on the other hand, refers to a single day—indeed, it translates directly as “Great Day” or “Big Day,” marking the most significant day in a season full of celebrations. One collaborator spelled out the difference more clearly in the following terms:

Clestrinje refers to a span of time, but *Bëtsknaté* refers only to a single day. That’s why the traditional song says “*Clestrinje*, *Clestrinje*,” that’s why it’s ancestral. The song doesn’t say *Bëtsknaté* anywhere. *Bëtsknaté* is new, modern, and from the new generations. *Clestrinje* was a period of sunshine, a period of summer, of abundance and much flowering [*floración*]. *Bëtsknaté* was the most important day of *Clestrinje*. (I.9)

As for *Bëtsknaté*, on the other hand,

The Great Day was a Tuesday, but it was very different. In those days [prior to the 1970s], there were no processions. Nor was there Mass. The Mission prohibited the celebration of the ancestors and *Clestrinje* was almost

stamped out. Clestrinÿe was prohibited until the 70s. In the 70s there was a growing awareness of the history of racism in Colombia, there were laws that dictated protections and respect for Indigenous customs. The missionaries who arrived after the Capuchins helped recuperate Clestrinÿe, but they started calling it “Carnival,” a term that stuck. (I.9)

From here on, I will use *Clestrinÿe* to refer to the overall festival season, which includes a range of cultural activities that take place in the two weeks or so preceding the Bëtskнатé, the Great Day itself. The term *Bëtskнатé* will be used to refer only to the day of celebration that takes place each year on the Monday preceding Ash Wednesday. This is in keeping with the ancestral distinction, which still bears relevance for the order of events preceding Bëtskнатé, even if it is no longer widely recognized within the community. With these definitions in mind, the next section describes the historic and modern practices surrounding Clestrinÿe and Bëtskнатé. What today superficially appears to be a single and well-consolidated tradition is really a syncretic composite, partially ancestral but largely invented, of several pre-Columbian traditions combined and subsumed under a colonial Catholic overlay. The complex historical roots of Clestrinÿe in relation to the operation of cultural reproduction through it are the subject of the following discussion.

7.2. Not the “Carnival of Pardon”: Case Study of an Invented Tradition

Outside of the Sibundoy Valley, and even sometimes within the Kamëntšá community itself, Bëtskнатé is more widely known as the Carnival of Pardon (*Carnaval del Perdón*). This term developed from institutional Catholic efforts to coopt the various Indigenous festivities that comprised Clestrinÿe prior to and throughout the Capuchin period. For most of the twentieth

century, under the Capuchins, Indigenous celebrations such as Clestrinÿe were banned, but continued in secret in the veredas and far from the strict oversight of the friars. During these years, the integrity of the various Clestrinÿe celebrations suffered, and in some areas of the Sibundoy Valley they were at risk of disappearing. The ambiguous nature of the various former Clestrinÿe celebrations can be attributed to the clandestine nature of their practice for most of the twentieth century.

The successors to the Capuchins, following the latter’s removal from the valley around 1970, sought to consolidate Catholic orthodoxy in the Sibundoy Valley, where religious practice and belief remained much too syncretic for some in the Church. To this end, agents of the Church recognized an opportunity in the Clestrinÿe celebrations that still occurred in a disparate and fragmented manner: if these practices could be Catholicized, it might allow them to spread the gospel more effectively among the Indigenous peoples of the Sibundoy Valley under the veneer of protecting their cultures.³⁷ At the same time, since it was no longer expressly forbidden to celebrate Indigenous identity, activists and intellectuals within the community interested in valorizing their own culture also began thinking about how to market it to outsiders. According to one collaborator, the notion of Bëtskнатé as the maximum expression of Kamëntšá culture was introduced by Kamëntšá university students in the 1980s in order to market the event as show for outsiders—and thereby attract interest and investment in the community.

These two concurrent and interrelated processes—on the one hand, the opportunist

³⁷ I use the plural “Indigenous peoples” here to include the Inga, who celebrate their own variant on the Sibundoy Valley festival template called *Atun Puncha* (“Great Day”), also called *Kalusturinda*, a Quechuacized variant of the Kamëntšá *Clestrinÿe*. In most respects, the Inga festival is highly similar to the Kamëntšá version, from which it probably borrows heavily, although there are some differences between the two traditions. The Inga variant was codified in tandem with the Kamëntšá festival and occurs the day after, i.e., the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday.

evangelizing of the Church; and on the other, the agentic resignification of the festival within the community itself—explain the coalescence and emergence of a unified Clestrinÿe tradition in the late twentieth century. However, the precise origins and nature of the different traditions which eventually coalesced into Clestrinÿe in its current form are foggy. It is known that some of the character archetypes associated with modern Clestrinÿe once had their own festivals dedicated to them throughout the year. Originally, some of those festivals were not strictly associated with Clestrinÿe, so it is the origin of the Clestrinÿe tradition which is the subject of this analysis.



Figure 24. The Matachín leads the Bëtskнатé procession into Sibundoy on February 20, 2023. The Matachín, it is said, represents the ancestral solar god worshipped in the pre-Christian Sibundoy Valley; his red mask is the visage of the sun. This original significance is no longer widely recognized in the community, however.

The festival season of Clestrinÿe originally took place in September, beginning at noon as a sun-worshipping festival; prior to the advent of syncretic Catholicism in the Sibundoy Valley, the Kamëntšá worshipped a solar god of Andean origin (Figure 24). Clestrinÿe was also, in part, a harvest festival which celebrated Kamëntšá cosmological beliefs in the origin of life. Clestrinÿe, more than only a sun-worshipping festival or a harvest festival, was a holistic and integral celebration of life. In those days, Clestrinÿe was understood as, in the words of one collaborator, “a celebration of the power of life, of one’s ability to be part of that miracle, the

miracle of creation” (I.9).

In its original form, Clestrinÿe was totally unique to the Sibundoy Valley, the various individual days and celebrations that comprised it tuned to the cyclical rhythms of the Kamëntšá calendar. As it was consolidated and codified in the late twentieth century, however—and especially as Catholics in the Sibundoy Valley sought to identify Catholic principles where, ancestrally, there were none—many of these unique features were reduced or removed from the collective consciousness of the community. The notion of “pardon” became the primary attribute of Clestrinÿe in both the local and national consciousness, even though this addition was entirely of orthodox Catholic origin. Thus, ancestral elements related to the festival’s original emphasis on intracommunal reciprocity and harmony were rearticulated as Catholic rites focused on pardon and absolution from sin. A clear example of this process is the Clestrinÿe flower, which my interlocutor describes in the following terms:

Clestrinÿeshá is the flower that is placed on the head. These days people use any flower, but in the old days they only used the Clestrinÿe flower, which grows wild and is at risk of extinction. The placing of the flowers was a rite of blessing meant to bring good luck, health, abundance, and harmony. These days it’s more to show than to feel [*más para mostrar que para sentir*]. Now people know that they’re being filmed. (I.9)

The flower today signals an act of forgiveness (of fundamentally *negative* attributes) rather than one of blessing (an act with *positive* connotations). A symbolic rearticulation thereby occurred in this aspect of the festival, though one that favored the Catholic reinterpretation rather than the Kamëntšá ancestral model. The identification of the festival as a “carnival” likewise signaled a Catholic interpretation, linking the Kamëntšá celebration to others identified as “carnivals”

throughout Colombia. In this sense, there was also a nation-building directive behind the festival's designation as the "Carnival of Pardon." By the 1980s, the consolidation of the Clestrinje was complete; the extended festival season of Clestrinje had been reduced to a single day—Bëtsknaté—characterized by the procession practiced today.



Figure 25. The "castle" erected in the street next to the Sibundoy cabildo, where the procession goes after Mass.

The procession is led by the figure of the Matachín—no longer widely remembered as a personification of the ancestral sun god—and accompanied by the masked San Juanes, the whirling Saraguayes, flagbearers, and other characters of symbolic value. The procession begins in a church outside of Sibundoy before proceeding into town, filing into the cathedral for Mass, and then progressing to the cabildo building across Interculturality Park, where a "castle" of woven palm shoots has been erected (Figure 25). Alongside the Indigenous elements, there are, notably, introduced Catholic elements whose religious significance is clear. A key example is the entourage of women who carry aloft between them a portrait of the Virgen de Las Lajas, an apparition of the Virgin Mary which is the patron saint of the Kamëntšá (Figure 26). This tradition was another introduced by the successors to the Capuchins in a bid to Catholicize the festivals that their predecessors never succeeded in stamping out.



Figure 26. The Virgen de Las Lajas accompanies the procession from the vereda where it begins until the cathedral in Sibundoy, where it is deposited in a place of honor as the rest of the procession files in for Catholic Mass. This tradition was added to the Bëtsknaté procession in the 1970s.

A complicating factor is what some collaborators have referred to as the increasing commercialization of the festival through the years. As certain scholars have shown in other cases of heritage declaration in Colombia (Escallón 2019), the consequences of commercialization are not always to the benefit of its recipients. Some of my collaborators have voiced concerns that the crowds of tourists entering the valley every year for Clestrinje may risk watering down or commercializing the festival tradition. The salience of this risk was illustrated one night in February 2023 when, sitting around the dinner table with my host family, one collaborator reacted with evident disgust upon seeing Clestrinje branded a "shamanic new year" by an American influencer visiting for the festival. It is, of course, nothing of the sort. My friend's reaction hints at the harm that such misinformed interpretations can do when they are uncritically broadcast to thousands of equally uninformed followers.

Where does this leave Clestrinje today? It is still the most important festival of the Kamëntšá year, but it is now a deeply syncretic one—and one that lends itself, therefore, to a profusion of different interpretations and meanings, some ancestral and others Catholic, and all in a state of continuing evolution (Castaño 2021). One could

therefore analyze Clestrinÿe as a discursive field in which competing visions of Kamëntšá pasts and presents are played out over constantly shifting terrain. Whether one chooses to emphasize and valorize the ancestral elements and interpretations or the colonially imposed Catholic ones—or whether one forgoes interpretation altogether in lieu of the commercialization and simplification fueled by mass tourism—has meaningful bearings on the contemporary significance and prospects of the most important festival in the Kamëntšá year. Regardless of the semiotic contestations behind the invention and development of Clestrinÿe, this festival presents an excellent venue in which to observe several expressions of Kamëntšá cultural reproduction.

7.3. Cultural Reproduction through Clestrinÿe

The ethnographic trope of the festival has traditionally been characterized by anthropologists as a “release valve” which, in the structural functionalist terms of Radcliffe-Brown (1952), provides controlled and temporary sanction for an outpouring of collective emotion that, once released, enables the return to a stable status quo. This is a serviceable description of the festival in general terms, but this explanation is insufficient for the interpretation of Clestrinÿe developed here. The structural functionalist model of anthropologists like Radcliffe-Brown does not account for the dynamics of power and its negotiation which animate many festivals and celebrations cross-culturally. For the Kamëntšá, the element of collective catharsis through festival is important, but Clestrinÿe is more than just its ritual inversion of the social order (Sandoval Zapata and Lasso Otaya 2014). It is, more than society’s inversion, its renewal, valorizing the ancestral principles that enable the perpetuation of Kamëntšá society and culture (Quiñones Triana 2019; Tobar and Gómez 2004). Or, in McDowell’s (1992) terms, during Clestrinÿe

“the ancestors appear to walk the earth once again, and the modern people renew their contract with the ancestral model” (110).

This “contract” invokes the ethic of reciprocity, the exchange of advice, and the mediation of intracommunal conflicts—significantly, *not* the Catholic notion of pardon, which implies absolution from one’s sins. Fulfilling this contract guides the course of events during the festival as a form of remembering and honoring the ancestors, paying one’s respects to and asking advice from the elders and traditional authorities, and also renewing the crucial bond between the Kamëntšá people and *Tsbatsána Mamá*, Mother Earth. According to one collaborator, there are six original functions of Clestrinÿe, paraphrased in the following terms:

1. Giving thanks to the ancestors, elders, and traditional authorities.
2. Fomenting unity within the family.
3. Recognizing that the whole community is one family.
4. Resolving conflicts in the family and in the community.
5. Finding love or courtship [*conquistar*] through music.³⁸
6. Requesting council from the elders and traditional authorities so that young people and aggrieved parties in conflict could resolve their problems amicably. This rite was confused with the Catholic notion of asking pardon, giving rise to the lasting misnomer. (I.9)

This list highlights some of the major underlying

³⁸ I do not develop this point further here, but it is interesting to note that several collaborators told me that, traditionally, and to some extent still today, young people use the dancing and music of Clestrinÿe to mingle with their peers and find a romantic partner. Since everyone plays an instrument during the festival, they would use certain musical cues to signal their interest, as if flirting with sound. Similarly, I am told that music could also be used as a challenge, to show discontent and interpersonal conflict; the insulted party would then return the challenge with a musical cue of their own. Further investigation of this type of musical communication is necessary.

themes of Clestrin̄ye for this collaborator, but it bears reiterating that the precise meaning of the festival depends on who is interpreting it. This collaborator inclines towards the ancestral model and the interpretations favored during his youth, when the Sibundoy Valley was a very different place. Now new interpretations are in vogue. However, although the interpretations and practices have changed, Clestrin̄ye, more than any other event in the Kamëntšá year, continues to embody the annual renewal of the principles that undergird Kamëntšá social life and culture. Clestrin̄ye is the expression of collective resistance, harmony, and continuity in which all other elements of Kamëntšá culture and thought are concentrated—arts and artesanías, music, language, philosophy, and more—which provides for the perpetual reproduction of Kamëntšá culture.

One central mechanism of cultural reproduction in Clestrin̄ye is the practice of asking for advice from elders and traditional authorities. This is the ancestral practice which, in part, gave rise to the Catholic misnomer identifying Clestrin̄ye as the “Carnival of Pardon.” Traditionally, this act took place in the Kamëntšá language. The person seeking advice, usually relating to a conflict between families or within the community, would approach an elder and speak a formulaic phrase to the effect of “father, please regale me with your wise knowledge” (I.9). The elder would then respond in ceremonial language with personalized advice meant to help defuse the situation. Sometimes this person would also serve as mediator between two aggrieved parties, helping both come to a mutual understanding. According to Gómez Montañez et al. (2022):

For the Kamëntšá, advice [*el consejo*] is synonymous with wisdom, so that providing advice is a spiritual practice that aims to reconfigure the victimizer’s thinking. Any conflict resolution process, carried out at home or in the cabildo, must begin with

ceremonial words of advice by an elder. These are not intended to judge, but to educate or re-educate. In the cabildo, for example, it is the governor [*taita gobernador*] who is in charge of teaching through words, and it is thanks to this that in many cases guarantees of non-repetition are achieved. (132)

This practice, in addition to invoking the authority and wisdom of the elders and traditional authorities, also valorizes the principle of orality. Oral tradition is important among the Kamëntšá, as the spoken word is the vehicle by which interpersonal and intracommunal harmony is maintained:

The word *joybuambayan*, or orality, is an element that has facilitated the exchange and preservation of knowledge for Indigenous peoples... The word, when pronounced by a member of the community, implies commitment and respect for the other, making orality an elemental value to harmonize and regularize social relations that strengthens ties that converge components such as *knowing how to listen* [*saber escuchar*], a basic foundation for a healthy convenience, a proof of respect, trust and esteem for the other person. (139–40)

It is unclear to what extent the practice described above is preserved in its ancestral form, unmodified by the Catholic resignifications of Clestrin̄ye over the past half century. However, there still inheres in the practice a mediating and regulatory function, whereby the act of asking and giving forgiveness strengthens the ancestral values of interpersonal respect and intracommunal harmony. The reciprocal and relational nature of Kamëntšá social life is restored and maintained. In the words of my collaborator, the festival reinforces “that the whole community is one family” (I.9). Figure 27 exemplifies a contemporary expression of the

ancestral exchange of advice, though the Catholic element of pardon is more pronounced in this case, as it often is in Clestrinÿe today. Even where the Catholic practice has overtaken the ancestral one, however, there remains the important process of rearticulation, which allows ancestral practices to persist under a colonially imposed overlay—another indicator of contemporary Clestrinÿe’s deeply syncretic character.



Figure 27. One taita, a shaman, offers another taita a shot of aguardiente, a strong Colombian liquor. Gestures like this exemplify the centrality of forgiveness, reciprocity, and the maintenance of communal harmony within Clestrinÿe.

Also key to the communal spirit of Clestrinÿe is the emphasis on the sharing of drink. This occurs with offerings of aguardiente (Figure 27), but even more commonly with *chicha*, or Andean maize beer. At traditional social events in the community, *chicha* always flows freely. During Clestrinÿe, the *cabildo* brews enormous amounts of *chicha* and distributes it all day and night to keep the celebrants well-stocked. The sharing of *chicha* has important symbolic value and can be interpreted as another social regulatory function within Clestrinÿe. It is not uncommon for requests for advice or forgiveness to be accompanied by an offering of *chicha*, an act signifying the restoration of interpersonal and intracommunal harmony (Figure 28).



Figure 28. *Chicha*, a pan-Andean alcoholic beverage typically fermented from maize, is a staple of community festivities and especially Clestrinÿe. On the Great Day, huge quantities of *chicha* are stored in the *cabildo* for free and generous distribution to those dancing outside.

Of a similar function to the sharing of *chicha* is the prevalence of *yagé* ceremonies leading up to the Clestrinÿe celebration. *Yagé* performs an important mediating function within the Kamëntšá community whereby the cleansing and healing of an individual’s body is seen as a prerequisite for the healing of the social body and the territory writ large. Clestrinÿe extends this metaphor, putting the harmonizing power of *yagé* in the service of the revitalization of the community, the renewal of its “ancestral contract.” As Gómez Montañez et al. (2022) writes:

Just as *yagé* disposes the physical body to the spiritual opening that connects, it is important that the body itself is disposed to such connections, no longer in the healing space, but in the net festive-collective space of integration and coexistence. For this, *yagé* gives way to the *chicha*, allowing transactions to develop and channel as appropriate to the passage of the different ritual orders of *Bëtsknaté*. (213)

The prevalence of both *chicha* and *yagé*, both of a mediating and harmonizing function in the community, attests to the importance of such processes of mediation within Clestrinÿe itself.



Figure 29. Religious syncretism runs deep in Bëtsknaté. In the 1970s, after the lifting of the ban on its celebration which was imposed by the Capuchins, the missionaries who succeeded them managed to establish Mass in the cathedral of Sibundoy as a central feature of the Bëtsknaté procession, imposing a Catholic vision of repentance and “pardon” over an Indigenous emphasis on community and reciprocity, and thereby resulting in the inaccurate but lasting misnomer identifying Bëtsknaté as the “Carnival of Pardon.”

Another important factor to account for is the layered significance of the Bëtsknaté procession itself. Bëtsknaté starts in the early morning in each family home in the valley. Families rise together, put on their regalia, pick up their instruments (everyone plays an instrument, contributing to the cacophony of sound that characterizes the Great Day), and then walk out the door and meet up with the other families of the vereda. The whole vereda then walks to the church in vereda Sagrado Corazón, about a mile outside of Sibundoy. The whole community gathers there until the Matachín and his entourage arrive—the San Juanes, the Saraguayes, the flag-bearers, the horn-blowers, all bedecked in the elaborate and traditional clothing that signifies Clestrinÿe (Figure 30). They wait there until the women bearing the portrait of the Virgen de Las Lajas leave the church and join the throng. From there, all march together to celebrate Mass in the cathedral of Sibundoy (Figure 29).



Figure 30. This mural on the side of the cabildo building in Sibundoy evokes the wisdom of the ancestors. The elders in the painting are dressed in Clestrinÿe regalia.



Figure 31. A man and a woman play music in Interculturality Park as the Bëtsknaté procession files into the cathedral built by the Capuchins that looms over Sibundoy. The man’s regalia and his choice of harmonica as instrument suggest that he may be a shaman.

On one level, the Kamëntšá occupation of the cathedral can be seen as an inversion of Mass, whereby colonially imposed rites are subversively undermined by the remnants of a religious tradition that precedes Catholicism in the valley (Quiñones Triana 2019; Sandoval Zapata and Lasso Otaya 2014; Tobar and Gómez 2004). In the words of one collaborator, “Bëtsknaté is a seizure of the city that was once Tabanok. The Mass is profaned, it is the seizure of a different cosmivision” (I.9). Except once the Bëtsknaté procession arrives in Interculturality Park, not everyone files into the cathedral, where the taita gobernador and the other members of the cabildo take their seats alongside the priests to pay homage to the Catholic god. In fact, most

of the procession holds back outside, preferring to continue the festivities free from the forlorn atmosphere of the cathedral—an unusual site of formality and quiet in an otherwise boisterous and unrestrained day (Figure 31).

What of those who do not join Mass, those who remain outside and continue the revelry? Interculturality Park, at the center of Sibundoy, is said to sit at the heart of Tabanok itself—the “place of return” of the Kamëntšá, the “general womb” of the Kamëntšá people (Gómez Montañez et al. 2022, 216). The central plaza of Sibundoy sits atop an ancient cemetery where the bones of the ancestor repose under the cobblestones laid down by the Capuchins. In the park today one finds a series of wood carvings depicting episodes from the history of the Kamëntšá: the taitas and shamans in their capisayos and jaguar tooth necklaces, the Capuchins with their brown robes and tonsures, the Matachín and other masked figures from Kamëntšá myth and folklore. All convene in the place where the spiritual power of the ancestors—what Taussig calls an “underground of time” (1987, 372)—meets the assembled community at the heart of Tabanok, enabling a return to mythic time whereby the Kamëntšá people renew their contract with the ancestral model through music, dance, shamanic rituals,³⁹ and acts of remembrance (Gómez Montañez et al. 2022, 216). Clestrinÿe is therefore, fundamentally, an annual performance of cultural reproduction and autonomy.

7.4. Autonomy through Renewal

Clestrinÿe is the single cultural institution which best represents and embodies the totality of Kamëntšá culture. Insofar as this ritual can be seen as a holistic reiteration of Kamëntšá philosophical principles and cultural

expressions, the persistence of this ritual both contributes to and is itself the product of the processes of cultural reproduction that permeate Kamëntšá society writ large. In this sense, the preservation and continued rearticulation of Clestrinÿe must be recognized as one of the pillars of Kamëntšá cultural survival in the contemporary period. It is the venue in which the Kamëntšá today renew society by reiterating their integral bonds to their ancestors and to the land they walk upon, the Uaman Luar.

As noted above, the mass tourism attracted to the valley each year—and, consequently, the misinterpretations of Kamëntšá culture that result—bears uncertain tidings for the future of this festival and its meanings. Even within the community, the meanings of Clestrinÿe remain contested between ancestral and Catholic interpretations. When I attended the Bëtskнатé Mass on February 20, 2023, the cabildo governor ended his customary speech at the pulpit on a defiant note, asking people in Kamëntšá to jeer and make noise if they were dissatisfied or disillusioned with the Church. This was meant to be a form of showing discontent and resistance, but no one made any noise; according to one collaborator, the older generation—those who grew up in the Capuchin Mission—are still too reverential towards the priests and the Church to fathom speaking out against them. This demonstrates contestations of legitimacy and power in this space of interculturality and syncretism, where two very different cosmovisions vie for legitimacy. For now, institutional Catholicism remains dominant. But from outside the Church came the sounds of music and revelry, where thousands—many more people than filled the cathedral—chose to honor the ancestors whose bones lay under their feet instead of paying homage to an ecclesiastical hierarchy that many in the community feel no longer represents them. Now two interpretations of Clestrinÿe exist side-by-side: one, the music and revelry of thousands, venerating their ancestors and defying the Catholic connotations

³⁹ For example, on the Saturday prior to Bëtskнатé, the taitas gather in the park to perform a “harmonization” ritual, involving the burning of incense and the blessing of the wood carvings that stand there.

of the festival; and the somber, pensive prayers of the people within the church, asking for forgiveness of their sins. To many, Clestrinÿe is no longer just “the Carnival of Pardon,” but is undergoing a transformative rearticulation (Figure 32). (Figure 32).

Future possibilities for the political, cultural, and territorial autonomy depend on the cultural vitality of the Kamëntšá community year after year. The importance of the single day which best provides the conditions for that continued vitality cannot be questioned; Clestrinÿe remains central to the Kamëntšá project of cultural reproduction and autonomy.



Figure 32. “It’s not carnival, it’s Clestrinÿe or Bëtsknaté.”

Some people in the Kamëntšá community are beginning to push back against the Catholic co-option and misinterpretation of their most important festival.

8. Conclusions

“The struggle for liberation is above all an act of culture.” —Amílcar Cabral (1973, 16)

“Se van cruzando estos caminos creados por tus abuelos; son para encontrarse y darse la mano. Pon tus huellas hijo, así, seguirán viviendo.”⁴⁰ —Hugo Jamioy Juagibioy, Kamëntšá poet (2010, 83)

In colonial circumstances, what are the prospects for a genuinely Indigenous modernity—one in which subaltern, colonized, and marginalized peoples the world over can find

their place in the world village without sacrificing, but instead celebrating and strengthening, their cultural particularity and uniqueness? How, under these conditions, do subaltern cultures remake and perpetuate themselves? While such questions have been posed by academics and Indigenous peoples alike for decades, the numerous contemporary movements for Indigenous autonomy in Latin America are now providing concrete answers through praxis and the lessons that emerge from it. The case of Kamëntšá cultural reproduction and autonomy is an informative example among these movements, demonstrating how Indigenous communities still marginalized by the legacies of colonialism and dispossession ensure their cultural survival in the face of change.

In the words of Marshall Sahlins (1993), “[e]thnography in the wake of colonialism can only contemplate the sadness of the tropics (*tristes tropiques*). Like the rusting shanty towns in which the people live, here are bits and pieces of cultural structures, old and new, reassembled into corrupt forms of the Western imagination” (6). However, it is no longer self-evident that cultures excluded by this hegemonic mainstream are doomed to annihilation by it. It is now possible to contemplate possibilities of cultural creativity and adaptation, rather than confine ourselves to lamenting the inevitability of cultural destruction. As Sahlins writes:

Cultural continuity thus appears in and as the mode of cultural change. The innovations follow logically—though not spontaneously, and in that sense not necessarily from the people’s own principles of existence. Traditionalism without archaism. [...] Notice that for the people concerned, syncretism is not a contradiction of their culturalism—of the indigenous claims of authenticity and autonomy—but its systematic condition. [...] Rather than the overthrow of the World System, which is now an irreversible fact of their existence, the local peoples’ inventions

and inversions of tradition can be understood as attempts to create a differentiated cultural space within it. And actions that are at once indigenizing and modernizing appear as structural rather than just hypocritical. (19–20).

For Sahlins, writing in 1993, the task of anthropology in the wake of an earlier phase of “scientific” pessimism had already become the documentation of the “indigenization of modernity” (25). Since then, anthropological scholarship has taken up this call—and a good deal of it has paid close attention to the Indigenous social mobilization and cultural revitalization that began in Latin America in the 1980s in response to the neoliberal turn.

Cultural reproduction—a grounded theoretical model of cultural change and continuity developed through observation of Kamëntšá processes of cultural survival—supports efforts for Indigenous autonomy in three major domains of Kamëntšá culture discussed in this paper: the artisanal tradition, shamanism, and the festival of Clestrinje. While discussing these major domains, I have also touched on numerous others, from street art and music to traditional ecological knowledge and the philosophical and cosmological principles that undergird it all. Given the ambitious scope of this approach, it is important to stress the provisional nature of my findings and interpretations. There are, nonetheless, several important analytical points drawn from this ethnography. First, the identified cultural domains are of an intricately interconnected nature within the Kamëntšá cultural universe; one cannot isolate the artisanal industry from the shamanic tradition, both of which come into play significantly in the Clestrinje festival through which the ancestral contracts undergirding Kamëntšá sociocultural life are annually renewed.

Likewise, the processes of cultural reproduction and autonomy analyzed in each domain touch on political, cultural, and

territorial issues—these being, themselves, arbitrary and mutually interdependent categories, though necessary ones for conceptual and organizational purposes. One of the mainstays of the anthropological perspective is that culture is holistic; the parts are inseparable from, and integral to, the whole. In so deeply a relational culture as that of the Kamëntšá, this truth is self-evident. This fact justifies my high-level analysis of cultural reproduction within the Kamëntšá community: an investigation of the same processes in only one cultural domain would have too limited, ignoring their necessary interdependence. This holistic analytical framework provides the general context that will facilitate future investigations of more particular aspects of Kamëntšá culture and of more specific social processes operating therein.

The Kamëntšá, like all Indigenous peoples of the Americas, continue to suffer the legacies of colonialism in both its historical and contemporary dimensions. What is remarkable, however, is the extent to which this community has survived and reclaimed its cultural autonomy by both heeding the wisdom of the ancestors and adapting creatively to contemporary changes. That the Kamëntšá have reproduced their culture and community so successfully despite 500 years of colonial pressures demonstrates the resilience and adaptation that all so-called marginalized and oppressed peoples are capable of. The Kamëntšá demonstrate that the same processes of cultural reproduction which Indigenous peoples employ as a matter of cultural survival also provide the conditions for autonomous and dignified alternatives to the impositions of what Escobar (2018) terms the one-world world—the assertion that there is only one way of being in the world and that all cultures are fated to be subsumed by it. The Kamëntšá example shows, to the contrary, that other worlds are possible; that the one-world world is not inevitable. The Kamëntšá case illustrates what the “Indigenization of modernity” looks like in the Sibundoy Valley, where an Indigenous community in resistance is recreating

itself under the transculturating pressures of globalization and the legacies of colonialism. In this respect, the story of the Kamëntšá exemplifies that of many other Indigenous peoples worldwide; it demonstrates the processes through which Indigenous communities can reclaim their culture and their autonomy.

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: *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 Clestrinÿe: Si tenemos vida, el próximo año volveremos a encontrarnos. Y si no, hasta aquí nomás.

A todo el pueblo 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 Drago 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.

Bibliography

- Agreda España, Nancy Luz Dary. 2016. "La chagra tradicional o jajañ en la comunidad indígena kamëntšá: Una propuesta didáctica para la construcción de conocimiento escolar y conocimiento tradicional." Licentiate thesis. Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas.
- Aldana Barahona, Giovanna María and Alfredo Sánchez Carballo. 2021. "Tejer con la mente: el *chumbe* inga del Alto Putumayo colombiano como artefacto cultural y mental." *Estudios atacameños* 67, no. 7 (June): 1-33.
- Altmann, Philipp. 2017. "*Sumak Kawsay* as an

- Element of Local Decolonization in Ecuador.” *Latin American Research Review* 52, no. 5 (December): 749–759.
- Amigo, Santiago Bastos. 2022. “El Gobierno Ancestral Plurinacional Q’anjob’al En Guatemala: Reconstitución de pueblos indígenas en contextos de despojo.” *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, no. 113 (March): 19–41.
- Anderson, Brian T., Beatriz Caiuby Labate, and Celina M. De Leon. 2014. “Healing with Yagé: An Interview with Taita Juan Bautista Agreda Chindoy.” In *The Therapeutic Use of Ayahuasca*, edited by Beatriz Caiuby Labate and Clancy Cavnar, 197–215. Heidelberg: Springer.
- Baracco, Luciano. “Globalization, Governance, and the Emergence of Indigenous Autonomy Movements in Latin America: The Case of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua.” *Latin American Perspectives* 45, no. 6 (November): 37–52.
- Barrera Jurado, Gloria Stella. 2015. *Autonomía artesanal: Creaciones y resistencias del pueblo kamsá*. Bogotá: Pontificia Universidad Javeriana.
- . 2016. “Consumismo, espectáculo y despojo de creación: Luchas por las autonomías artesanales del pueblo Kamsá.” In *Pueblos originarios en lucha por las autonomías: Experiencias y desafíos en América Latina*, edited by Pavel C. López Flores and Luciana García Guerreiro, 165–190. Buenos Aires: CLACSO.
- Barrera Jurado, Gloria Stella, Ana Cielo Quiñones Aguilar, and Juan Carlos Jacanamijoy Juajibioy. 2018. “El derecho a decir NO: Despojos simbólicos y autonomías del pueblo originario Kamsá.” In *Movimientos indígenas y autonomías en América Latina: Escenarios de disputa y horizontes de posibilidad*, edited by Pavel C. López Flores and Luciana García Guerreiro, 229–258. Buenos Aires: CLACSO.
- Bello Torres, José Vicente. 1987. *El valle de Sibundoy y su transformación agropecuaria: 1966–1986*. Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Hidrología, Meteorología y Adecuación de Tierras.
- Bonilla, Víctor Daniel. 1968. *Siervos de dios y amos de indios: el estado y la misión capuchina en el Putumayo*. Bogotá: Tercer Mundo.
- Briggs, Charles L. 1986. *Learning How to Ask: A Sociolinguistic Appraisal of the Role of the Interview in Social Science Research*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bristol, Melvin L. 1964. “*Philoglossa* — A Cultivar of the Sibundoy of Colombia.” *Botanical Museum Leaflets, Harvard University* 20, no. 10 (December): 325–333.
- . 1965. “Sibundoy Ethnobotany.” Doctoral dissertation, Harvard University.
- . 1966. “The Psychotropic *Banisteriopsis* among the Sibundoy of Colombia.” *Botanical Museum Leaflets, Harvard University* 21, no. 5 (March): 113–140.
- . 1969. “Tree Datura Drugs of the Colombian Sibundoy.” *Botanical Museum Leaflets, Harvard University* 22, no. 5 (June): 165–227.
- Cabral, Amílcar. 1973. “The Role of Culture in the Battle for Independence.” *The UNESCO Courier*, November 1973.
- Castaño, Alen. 2021. “Algunas imágenes del sincretismo simbólico y religioso al interior del Carnaval del Perdón.” *Virajes* 23, no. 2 (July): 270–284.
- Charmaz, Kathy and Richard G. Mitchell. 2001. “Grounded Theory in Ethnography.” In *Handbook of Ethnography*, edited by Paul Atkinson, Amanda Coffey, Sara Delamont, John Lofland, and Lyn Lofland, 160–174. London: SAGE Publications.
- Comunidad Camëntšá. 1989. *Procesos de transformación y alternativas de autogestión indígena*. Bogotá: Editorial ABC.
- Cott, Donna Lee Van. 2001. “Explaining Ethnic Autonomy Regimes in Latin America.” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 35, no. 4 (December): 30–58.
- Davis, Wade. 1997. *One River: Explorations and Discoveries in the Amazon Rain Forest*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

- Dinerstein, Ana C. 2014. *The Politics of Autonomy in Latin America: The Art of Organising Hope*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. 2011. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Escalante-Moreno, Helios. 2022. "From IIRSA-COSIPLAN to the Belt and Road Initiative: Infrastructure for Extractivism in Latin America." In *East Asia, Latin America, and the Decolonization of Transpacific Studies*, edited by Chiara Olivieri and Jordi Serrano-Muñoz, 89–114. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Escallón, Maria Fernanda. 2019. "Entre Promesas y Problemas: Diversidad, Patrimonio Cultural y las Políticas de Reconocimiento en Colombia y Brasil." In *Arqueología de contacto en Latinoamérica*, edited by Alexandre Guida Navarro, Pedro Paulo A. Funari, and Lourdes S. Domínguez, 97–122. São Paulo: Paco Editorial.
- Escandón, Joaquín. 1913. *Misiones católicas del Putumayo: Documentos oficiales relativos a esta comisaría*. Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional.
- Escobar, Arturo. 2008. *Territories of Difference: Place, Movements, Life, Redes*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- . 2018. *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- . 2020. *Pluriversal Politics: The Real and the Possible*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Fabre, Alain. 2001. "Kamsá, A Poorly Documented Language Isolate Spoken in South-Western Colombia." Paper presented at the *Linguistic Perspectives on Endangered Languages Symposium, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, August 29–September 1, 2001*.
- Gaitán-Barrera, Alejandra and Govand Khalid Azeez. 2015a. "Epistemological Blindness or Violence: Liberal Multiculturalism and the Indigenous Quest for Autonomy." *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 36, no. 2 (March): 184–201.
- . 2015b. "Regaining Pre-Colonial Sovereignty: The Case of Miskitu Resistance." *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research* 21, no. 3 (March): 360–373.
- Glass, Rowan. 2022. "Colombian Counterpoint: Transculturation in Sibundoy Valley Ethnohistory." *Oregon Undergraduate Research Journal* 20, no. 2 (Summer): 1–32.
- Gómez Montañez, Pablo Felipe, Sarai Andrea Gómez-Cáceres, and Fredy Leonardo Reyes Albarracín, eds. 2020. *De conflictos, perdones y justicias: Iniciativas étnicas de paz en la Colombia transicional*. Bogotá: Universidad Santo Tomás.
- Gonzales, Tirso and Miguel González. 2015. "Introduction: Indigenous peoples and autonomy in Latin America." *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 10, no. 1 (July): 1–9.
- González, Miguel. 2015. "Indigenous Territorial Autonomy in Latin America: An Overview." *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 10, no. 1 (July): 10–36.
- Hale, Charles R. 2011. "Resistencia para Qué? Territory, Autonomy and Neoliberal Entanglements in the 'Empty Spaces' of Central America." *Economy and Society* 40, no. 2 (May): 184–210.
- Hamill, Jonathan, Jaime Hallak, Serdar M. Dursun, and Glen Baker. 2019. "Ayahuasca: Psychological and Physiologic Effects, Pharmacology and Potential Uses in Addiction and Mental Illness." *Current Neuropharmacology* 17, no. 2 (February): 108–28.
- Harris, Paul. 2022. "Judge orders Libero to stop Mocoa exploration." *Mining Journal*. April 21, 2022. <https://www.mining-journal.com/copper-news/news/1430706/judge-orders-libero-to-stop-mocoa-exploraiton>.
- Harvey, David. 2005. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Harvey, Neil. 2016. "Practicing Autonomy: Zapatismo and Decolonial Liberation." *Latin*

- American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 11, no. 1 (October): 1–24.
- Heyl, Barbara Sherman. 2001. "Ethnographic Interviewing." In *Handbook of Ethnography*, edited by Paul Atkinson, Amanda Coffey, Sara Delamont, John Lofland, and Lyn Lofland, 369–383. London: SAGE Publications.
- Homan, Joshua. 2016. "Disentangling the Ayahuasca Boom: Local Impacts in Western Peruvian Amazonia." In *The World Ayahuasca Diaspora: Reinventions and Controversies*, edited by Beatriz Caiuby Labate, Clancy Cavnar, and Alex K. Gearin, 165–181. London: Routledge.
- Hope, Jessica. 2021. "Conservation in the Pluriverse: Anti-Capitalist Struggle, Knowledge from Resistance and the 'Repoliticisation of Nature' in the TIPNIS, Bolivia." *Geoforum* 124 (August): 217–225.
- Jacanamijoy Juajibioy, Doris. 2019. *La cocina tradicional desde la mirada del turismo consciente y la cosmogonía de la comunidad kamëntšá*. Bogotá: Universidad Externado de Colombia.
- Jamioy Juajibioy. 2010. *Bínýbe oboyejuayëng = Danzantes del viento*. Bogotá: Ministerio de Cultura.
- Juajibioy Chindoy, Alberto. 1987. *Relatos y leyendas orales*. Bogotá: Servicio Colombiano de Comunicación Social.
- . 1989. *Relatos ancestrales del folclor camëntšá*. Bogotá: Fundación Interamericana.
- . 2008. *Lenguaje ceremonial y narraciones tradicionales de la cultura Kamëntšá*. Bogotá: Fondo de Cultura Económica.
- Killeen, Timothy J. 2007. *A Perfect Storm in the Amazon Wilderness: Development and Conservation in the Context of the Initiative for the Integration of the Regional Infrastructure of South America (IIRSA)*. Arlington: Conservation International.
- Konopinski, Natalie. 2013. *Doing Anthropological Research: A Practical Guide*. London: Routledge.
- Labate, Beatriz Caiuby and Clancy Cavnar, eds. 2014. *Ayahuasca Shamanism in the Amazon and Beyond*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Laing, Anna F. 2020. "Re-Producing Territory: Between Resource Nationalism and Indigenous Self-Determination in Bolivia." *Geoforum* 108 (January): 28–38.
- Lang, Miriam. 2022. "Buen Vivir as a Territorial Practice. Building a More Just and Sustainable Life through Interculturality." *Sustainability Science* 17, no. 4 (May): 1287–1299.
- Larson, Anne M., Fernanda Soto, Dennis Mairena, Edda Moreno, Eileen Mairena, and Jadder Mendoza-Lewis. 2016. "The Challenge of 'Territory': Weaving the Social Fabric of Indigenous Communities in Nicaragua's Northern Caribbean Autonomous Region." *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 35, no. 3 (June): 322–337.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1962. *La Pensée sauvage*. Paris: Plon.
- Libero Copper. 2022. "Libero Copper Enters Mutual Benefit Agreement with the Local Community for the Exploration of the Mocoa Copper Project in Colombia." *Cision*. November 29, 2022. <https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/libero-copper-enters-mutual-benefit-agreement-with-the-local-community-for-the-exploration-of-the-mocoa-copper-project-in-colombia-856810202.html>.
- . 2023. "Libero Copper Continues to Expand the Potential of the Mocoa Porphyry Copper Molybdenum Project." *Cision*. February 7, 2023. <https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/libero-copper-continues-to-expand-the-potential-of-the-mocoa-porphry-copper-molybdenum-project-853021758.html>.
- Lizcano, María Fernanda. 2020a. "La carretera que quiere entrar a una reserva forestal y a territorios indígenas." *Mongabay*. June 9, 2020. <https://es.mongabay.com/2020/06/carretera-en-putumayo-colombia-sobrecostos-y-falta-de-planeacion/>.

- . 2020b. “Deforestación y minería podrían llegar con una vía en el piedemonte amazónico.” *Mongabay*. June 9, 2020. <https://es.mongabay.com/2020/06/amenazas-ambientales-amazonia-colombiana-deforestacion-carretera-mineria/>.
- Melón, Daiana. 2022. “The Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South America (IIRSA): Territorial Coloniality at the Service of Extractivism.” *Alternautas* 9, no. 2 (December): 201–221.
- McDowell, John H. Colombian Languages Collection of John McDowell. Archive of the Indigenous Languages of Latin America, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX. <https://ailla.utexas.org/islandora/object/ailla%3A124423>.
- . 1983. “The Semiotic Constitution of Kamsá Ritual Language.” *Language in Society* 12, no. 1 (March): 23–46.
- . 1989. *Sayings of the Ancestors: The Spiritual Life of Sibundoy Indians*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.
- . 1990. “The Community-Building Mission of Kamsá Ritual Language.” *Journal of Folklore Research* 27, no. 1/2 (January–August): 67–84.
- . 1992. “Exemplary Ancestors and Pernicious Spirits: Sibundoy Concepts of Culture Evolution. In *Andean Cosmologies through Time: Persistence and Emergence*, edited by Robert V.H. Dover, Katharine E. Seibold, and John Holmes McDowell, 95–114. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- . 1994. “So Wise Were Our Elders”: *Mythic Narratives from the Kamsá*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.
- . 1995. “Discourse Authority in the Sibundoy Valley.” *Opción* 11, no. 16 (April): 35–64.
- . 2000. “Collaborative Ethnopoetics: The View from the Sibundoy Valley.” In *Translating Native American Verbal Art: Ethnopoetics and Ethnography of Speaking*, edited by Marta de Gerdes, Kay Sammons, and Joel Sherzer, 211–232. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- . 2007. “Paradise Forestalled: Animal Suitors in Sibundoy Myth.” *Midwestern Folklore* 33 (Spring): 3–36.
- . 2008. “On Committing Kamsá to Writing: Improvisations and Collaborations.” In *Proceedings of the First Symposium on Teaching Indigenous Languages of Latin America, Bloomington, 2008*, 10–24. Bloomington: Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies, Indiana University Bloomington.
- . 2021. “Ecoperformativity: Expressive Culture as Spiritual, Pedagogical, and Activist Resource.” In *Performing Environmentalisms: Expressive Culture and Ecological Change*, edited by John Holmes McDowell, Katherine Borland, Rebecca Dirksen, and Sue Tuohy, 21–45. Champaign: University of Illinois Press.
- . 2022. “The Apotheosis of Carlos Tamoabioy: Social Memory and Cultural Survival.” Unpublished manuscript, January 2022.
- Ministerio del Interior and Cabildo Indígena Camëntšá de Sibundoy. 2012. *Diagnóstico plan salvaguarda Camëntšá*. Bogotá: Ministerio del Interior.
- Morales-García, Jose A., Mario de la Fuente Revenga, Sandra Alonso-Gil, María Isabel Rodríguez-Franco, Amanda Feilding, Ana Perez-Castillo, and Jordi Riba. 2017. “The alkaloids of *Banisteriopsis caapi*, the plant source of the Amazonian hallucinogen Ayahuasca, stimulate adult neurogenesis *in vitro*.” *Scientific Reports* 7, no. 1 (March): 5309.
- Mujuy Ajeda, Edison Alexander. 2019. “Caracterización de los sistemas de producción animal en la Chagra o Jajañ de las comunidades indígenas Inga y Kamëntšá del Alto Putumayo.” Master’s thesis. Universidad Nacional de Colombia.
- Oberholtzer, Cath. 2017. *Dream Catchers: Legend, Lore and Artifacts*. Richmond Hill: Firefly Books.
- Palacios Bucheli, Vandreé Julián, and Wolfgang Bokelmann. 2017. “Agroforestry Systems for

- Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services: The Case of the Sibundoy Valley in the Colombian Province of Putumayo.” *International Journal of Biodiversity Science, Ecosystems Services & Management* 13, no. 1 (November): 380–397.
- Patiño, Diógenes. 1995. “Investigaciones de arqueología de rescate: el Altiplano Nariñense, el Valle de Sibundoy y la ceja de montaña andina en el Putumayo.” *Cespedesia* 20, no. 66 (December): 115–179.
- Postero, Nancy and Jason Tockman. 2020. “Self-Governance in Bolivia’s First Indigenous Autonomy: Charagua.” *Latin American Research Review* 55, no. 1 (March): 1–15.
- “Pueblos Kamëntšá e Inga Celebran Titulación de sus Territorios.” December 27, 2016. *Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca*. <https://www.cric-colombia.org/portal/pueblos-kamentsa-e-inga-celebran-titulacion-de-sus-territorios/>.
- Quiñones Triana, Yago. 2019. “Betsknate, el carnaval del perdón del pueblo kamsá. Interpretaciones sobre el contacto y la transformación cultural entre historia y mito.” *Maguaré* 33 no. 1 (January): 109–138.
- Radcliffe-Brown, Alfred. 1952. *Structure and Function in Primitive Society, Essays and Addresses*. Glencoe: The Free Press.
- Radio Nacional de Colombia. 2019. “Lenguas indígenas: Kamentsá (Valle de Sibundoy, Putumayo).” YouTube. December 19, 2019. Documentary, 10:00. <https://youtu.be/hQig2H6Zkcl>.
- Ramírez de Jara, María Clemencia and Carlos Ernesto Pinzón Castaño. 1992. “Sibundoy Shamanism and Popular Culture in Colombia.” In *Portals of power: Shamanism in South America*, edited by, 287–303. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Ramos Cortez, Carola and Timothy MacNeill. 2021. “Indigenous Autonomy and Territorial Practices: Constructing Indigenous-State Relations in the Peruvian Amazon.” *Journal of Latin American Geography* 20, no. 3 (November): 70–102.
- Recalde, José Antonio, ed. 2002. *Misioneros capuchinos ecuatorianos: relatos de las misiones de Caquetá, Sibundoy, y Putumayo*. Cuenca: Editorial Cuenca.
- Reichel-Dolmatoff, Gerardo. 1975. *The Shaman and the Jaguar: A Study of Narcotic Drugs Among the Indians of Colombia*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Restrepo, Nicolás. 2006. “La iglesia católica y el estado colombiano, construcción conjunta de una nacionalidad en el sur del país.” *Tabula Rasa* 5 (July–December): 151–165.
- Rodríguez-Echeverry, John James. 2010. “Uso y manejo tradicional de plantas medicinales y mágicas en el Valle de Sibundoy, Alto Putumayo, y su relación con procesos locales de construcción ambiental.” *Revista de la Academia Colombiana de Ciencias Exactas, Físicas y Naturales* 34, no. 132 (): 309–326.
- Romm, Norma Ruth Arlene. 2014. “Conducting Focus Groups in Terms of an Appreciation of Indigenous Ways of Knowing: Some Examples from South Africa”. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 16, no. 1 (November): 1–23.
- Rosset, Peter M. and Lia Pinheiro Barbosa. 2021. “Peasant Autonomy: The Necessary Debate in Latin America.” *Interface* 13, no. 1 (July): 46–80.
- Rowland, Michael, Robert Sim, and Bruce Davis. 2021. “Mocoa Copper-Molybdenum Project, Colombia: NI 43-101 Technical Report.” Vancouver: Libero Copper & Gold Corporation.
- Saldana, Johnny. 2016. *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, 3rd ed. London: SAGE Publications.
- Sandoval Zapata, Karina and Hugo Lasso Otaña. 2014. “Evangelización, encubrimiento y resistencia indígena en el Valle de Sibundoy Putumayo.” *Historia y Espacio* 10, no. 43: 33–57.
- Sanjek, Roger, ed. 1990. *Fieldnotes: The Makings of Anthropology*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

- Schavelzon, Salvador and Thea Pitman. 2019. "Buen Vivir and Autonomy in Latin American Indigenous Territories." *Periferias* 3, no. 1 (July).
<https://revistaperiferias.org/en/materia/buen-vivir-and-autonomy-in-latin-american-indigenous-territories/>.
- Schultes, Richard Evans. 1988. *Where the Gods Reign: Plants and Peoples of the Colombian Amazon*. Santa Fe: Synergetic Press.
- Schultes, Richard Evans and Albert Hoffman. 1992. *Plants of the Gods: Their Sacred, Healing, and Hallucinogenic Powers*. Rochester: Healing Arts Press.
- Schultes, Richard Evans and Robert F. Raffauf. 1992. *Vine of the Soul: Medicine Men, their Plants and Rituals in the Colombian Amazonia*. Santa Fe: Synergetic Press.
- Seijas, Haydée. 1969. "The Medical System of the Sibundoy Indians of Colombia." Doctoral dissertation, Tulane University.
- Sieder, Rachel and Anna Barrera Vivero. 2017. "Legalizing Indigenous Self-Determination: Autonomy and Buen Vivir in Latin America." *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 22, no. 1 (March): 9–26.
- Sigindioy Chindoy, Indi Iaku. 2013. "Análisis del reconocimiento jurídico a la desagregación territorial. Estudio de caso: la construcción de la variante San Francisco-Mocoa en territorio ancestral de los pueblos Camëntsá e Inga del departamento del Putumayo (1996-2011)." Licentiate thesis. Universidad Colegio Mayor de Nuestra Señora del Rosario.
- Stephen, Lynn. 2005. "Women's Weaving Cooperatives in Oaxaca: An Indigenous Response to Neoliberalism." *Critique of Anthropology* 25, no. 3 (September): 253–278.
- Taussig, Michael. 1987. *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- "Termina una disputa de tierras de 316 años en Putumayo." *El Espectador*. December 17, 2016. <https://www.elespectador.com/politica/termina-una-disputa-de-tierras-de-316-anos-en-putumayo-article-670899/>.
- Thalji, Nadia Khalil and Oksana Yakushko. 2018. "Indigenous Women of the Amazon Forest: The Woman Shaman of the Yawanawa Tribe." *Women & Therapy* 41, no. 1–2 (July): 131–148.
- "The Indigenous Guard and the Defense of Human Rights: An Experience from Colombia." Interview with Juan Carlos Chindicué. *Sur: International Journal on Human Rights* 17, no. 30 (August): 27–33.
- Tobar, Javier and Herinaldy Gómez. 2004. *Perdón, violencia y disidencia*. Popayán: Universidad del Cauca.
- Uribe, Simón. 2011. "The Winding Ways of Development: A Historical Journey of a Road in the Putumayo Region of Colombia." *Consilience* 5 (February): 201–216.
- . 2019. "Caminos de frontera: espacio y poder en la historia del piedemonte amazónico colombiano." *Historia Crítica* 72 (April): 69–92.
- . 2020. *Suspensión*. Icarus Films. 1 hr., 15 min. <https://docuseek2-com.libproxy.uoregon.edu/v/a/A564/1/0/0>.
- . 2021. "Suspensión: espacio, tiempo y política en la historia interminable de un proyecto de infraestructura en el piedemonte Andino-Amazónico colombiano." *Antípoda: revista de antropología y arqueología* 42 (January): 205–229.
- Valderrama, Jorge Ronderos. 2003. "Chamanismos, neochamanismos y la medicina tradicional del yagé en el Eje Cafetero." *Cultura y Droga* 8, no. 10 (December): 83–117.
- "Variante San Francisco – Mocoa: la riesgosa e interminable carretera en la selva de Colombia." 2020. *Mongabay*. June 7, 2020. <https://es.mongabay.com/2020/06/colombia-variante-san-francisco-mocoaputumayo-adelanto-video/>.
- Velasco, Marcela. 2011. "Confining Ethnic Territorial Autonomy in Colombia: The Case of the Naya River Basin." *The Journal of*

Environment & Development 20, no. 4 (December): 405–427.

Villegas, Liliana and Benjamin Villegas. 2000. *Artefactos: Colombian Crafts from the Andes to the Amazon*. Bogotá: Villegas Editores.

Appendix

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

Bëtsknaté 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 / Clestrinje 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 of 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.