

ARHUACO UNIVERSE



In June 1997, during the VIIth International Poetry Festival in Medellín, Prometeo review edited and released the book Universo Arhuaco, it is the result of gathering some texts from Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta written by Arhuacos themselves. This book here by presented to our Homepage visitors at internet, shows a general view, of an aborigin Colombian community that has struggled for five centuries, -close to their Gods-, civilizations corruption about life and myth.

Who ever, individuals as well as Institutions in the world, might be interested in the contribution to a successful developmentm on the recovering acting of the land at Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in order to protect this culture do not hesitate contacting Jesús Ortiz P.O. Box 478, Manizales, Colombia.

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Avintukua, junio 1995.

Foreword

The contents of the present book have compiled in accordance with several Mamos or traditional authorities of the Ijka, or Arhuaco community of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. They are interested in divulging their ancestral thought, and in calling the Bunachu's and the National Government's attention to the Mamos' main needs, in order that they may go on with the mission of preserving the balance of the world.

The Knowledge and studies on our native peoples are so poor that today we do not even have a record of their cultural legacy. For many communities have either wholly disappeared or been assimilated by "those levellers of the spirit with which the big power threaten us" (G. Reichell Dolmatoff).

In the threshold of a new millenium it is necessary for us to get acquainted with all the elements that constitute our country. We must abandon the cult for all things foreign, and with respect and admiration come to value again the wisdom of our Mamos, much as we do with the classics of the different cultures of the earth. The Mamos' testimonies, messages, interviews and documents constitute a treasure for our country and for the world; for they are the expression of a people whom we might consider as a great and unique source of humanity, "the keepers of a great, deep knowledge, and of light, strength and humbleness ti interpret all things considered difficult by humankind".

The spreading of this traditional thought is of great importance to the future generations, since the extant studies about the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta are practically unknown. And they were carried out mainly by European and North American archeologists, geographers, ethnologists, explorers, and journalists, through the glass of Western science. There are also a few reports by Colombian anthropologists in specialized reviews.

Unlike the extant bibliographic and graphic materials, the contents of the present book are not confined within the bounds of Western scientific parameters, which are restricted to give mere descriptions. In these pages is the living thought of the Mamos and the image they have about this world. THE ARHUACO AND

THE LIFE OF CIVILIZATION,1978,a book written by the Arhuaco Vinicio Torres Márquez,is a work Y would also recommend.

In his Kurina Kankurwa,Mamo Aruvan Zeinenkua(Otoniel Mejia Izquierdo)once said, "I would be ready to truly cooperate with you if you faced the reality we are living in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta".

Sharing this effort - which will serve as a record and would help the communities of the sacred abode to reach an agreement on the subject of the recuperation of the territories within the Black or Scientific Line-,are also the following Mamos: Zareymakú(Juan Marcos Perez),High Mamo of the Kankurwa Mamingeka;Dwinimaku

(Manuel Chaparro,cabildo central,Nabusimake);Zarey Maku (Carmen Perez,Kankurwa,in Moroto);Zeukukuy (Norberto Torres,Kankurwa Manchucua);Bunchanawin (Jesús Izquierdo,Pueblo Bello);Arwa Aviku (Crispin Izquierdo Torres,Santuario de Tigrichama);Francisco Zalabata,La Pradera,Comisión de Ordenamiento Territorial;Avinteira (Juan Bautista Villafaña).

Together with the thought of the above-mentioned Mamos,we are publishing a homage to three of the "reborn"Mamos who were assassinated in 1990.Namely Angel María Torres,Hugues Chaparro,and Bunkua Nabingemwa (Mamo Luis Napoleón Torres),whose previously unpublished interview was generously handed over to us by those peoples of thought.

We are also publishing the document,signed in August 1992,by which the Capuchin mission agreed to quit Nabusimake - the place of the rising sun - ,called San Sebastian de Rábaga by the friars.We also include a document by which the Mamos of the Supreme Council of the Sacred Abode of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta (COSMOS) was created in Avintukua in June ,1995.

By this edition,we want to contribute a little to the recognition of our "elder brothers", while helping us to overcome our ignorance about the wisdom kept there,in the heart of the world;and to use their teachings as guides to preserve the planetary balance;and push forward the search for our roots,as well as to provide an excellent source of information to the scholars.

The charcoal illustrations were drawn by our friend Mario Montoya.For the interpretation and translation we had collaboration of several elder brothers.For the compilation,transcription and definitive redaction of the texts,we thank the áyu and yoburo's force and light.

This is what I think and pass along.

Jesús Ortiz Rodríguez.

Introduction

Magic and traditional medicine

An insight of La Sierra Nevada's communities Arwa-Viku (Mamo Crispín Izquierdo Torres)

Our millenary thought is nothing else than a logical reasoning about life implying the inner respect and reverence towards Mother Earth Seynekan.

We have kept this tradition in oral and practical ways for about 3.600 years. Ever since we settled in this sacred Sierra, considered as the heart of the world, the continent's antenna, the land of the people of Guirkune, Chumdwa Ziku, the wise logic.

The Sierra Nevada is our sacred abode. Her geographical shape, with her water sources, mountain ranges, minerals, and botanical and zoological species, conforms a living body that is the relationship of our logical reasoning with Nature herself.

In a deeper and more sacred concept: the human family originated here. La Sierra is thus humanity's father and mother.

We define the first father as the power or energy of the terrestrial: Ñiankwa and Serankwa. These forces, as high Mamos before thought, allotted as a heritage the virgin lands of the world, or Kagumwa; the sacred seeds for our survival, or Zamukia; the mines, or Änwa-Guiachene; the plants, or Ken Morundwa.

Our sages tell us daily that every assignment was done in accordance with the earth, for everyone of Mother Earth's colors is a manifestation of a human, animal or botanical race, according to their wish to multiply. And here originated the laws, called younger brothers' laws and elder brothers' laws.

Yuga Yina-Zentalu are the minor laws for the younger brothers' self government; namely the laws that presently rule over the dominant or "civilized" society of the planet.

Elder brothers' laws are kept by the Mamos of the Sierra Nevada's four tribes: Wintukwas, Kogis, Wiwas, and Kankuamos.

To us, the Mamos were appointed guardians of the world and humankind.

The solar laws are father laws, day forces, health and life forces: Kaku-Arwa-Viku. The lunar laws are mother laws: vegetational laws, crop laws; of the night, of darkness, of silence; forces of illness and of living death; and they are ruled by father Seykukuy's laws.

The sun is the world's eye. We Mamos follow its laws. We talk to it by means of its reflection: Ywikunuma-Yeykounuma-Mankounuma.

The existence of human beings originates in Cherua and Surivaka. Being present the resemblance and energy of humankind, our father Serankwa dispensed the laws that came to be known as religious laws, to be obeyed and spread by all. And after thousands of millions of years the laws of this planet shall come back to the sacred places called Kakarayibuna (Bakata), and Sramatuna (Santa Marta).

There was something like a coupling of forces between the infinite and the terrestrial. After an explosion in the sky those forces settled here in the Sierra Nevada as Elúmake-Gunlunmake, Gunneka-Mannekan, and Seimekana.

With Gunlunmake's mother force, the sign of all creation was manifested; and its tokens were the colors red, white, and yellow.

The sacred mothers are called:

- a. Gunnaley Juban Gunnabyaka
- b. Alunncy Juban Mannekan
- c. Gonaley Juban Bunnekan
- d. Zaraley Juban Seynekan

The fathers, or sacred forces, are called:

- a. Alunncitana KakuArwa Viku
- b. Mamulunneytana Kaku Seykukuy
- c. Gunnalunneitana Kaku Karyukukuy
- d. Zasaleyntana Kaku Serankua

These deities exist in "spirit" before the formation of the planet, and every name is the sign of a positive and a negative energy. They circle in the atmosphere of the infinite, as they do in the world from left to right: Durigunu-Ganzinu. They circle in every body, be it animal, vegetal, or mineral; in the air, the wind, the tempest; in earthquakes, etc. These fathers are the gauge of the balance of all that exists.

The force of Serankwa rules over the planet earth. The force of Seykukuy rules over darkness and shadows. The force of Arwaviku rules over life and light. The force of Kaku Kariukukuy represents infinity and the spirit of the cosmos.

Younger brothers' laws are meant to back up elder brothers' laws, which are the laws of Nature herself. The Sierra Nevada is the highest coastal peak in the world. Covering a radius of 63 kms. around the snowy peaks, the sacred spectrum demarcates the Line of Life or Black Line, whence springs the safekeeping of the planet and its riches.

To be vigilant of all the events taking place upon the earth was the task assigned to the four tribes. Therefore, our reflections are addressed to keeping the balance of all that exists.

No natural element is evil to us; all is good. What caused everything to become evil were the younger brothers' laws, which strayed from their path and are accelerating their self destruction.

Natural law is a simple law —of humbleness, of messages to take after the natural. It is to keep a richness of balance, spiritual as well as physical.

The draft of this book's message was imparted to us from childhood by the venerable reborn Mamos: Juancho Izquierdo, Mingo Niño, Carlos Torres, Mamo Zäray, Goyo Torres, Pastor Torres, Vicencio Torres, Adalberto Villafaña, Pastor Niño, Sebastián Zalabata, Luis Napoleón Torres, Angel María Torres, Hugues Chaparro, Miguel Suárez, Dionisia Alfaro, María Eufemia Solís, Apolinar Izquierdo (Gun Maku Maney Maku), Liberato Crespo, Florytana, Busintana, Rufinotana, Celestino Chaparro, Bernardino Alfaro, Adalberto Villafaña, Leonardo Andrés Gil, Cabildo Gobernador Kogi.

This message-thought has been practiced and nursied for the sake of our generations here in this sacred abode of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, and to keep the balance of the planet, by the notable Mamos and leaders: Juan Marcos Pérez -Zareymakú-, Otoniel Mejía Izquierdo Aruvan -Seinenkwa-, Jesús Izquierdo -Bunchanawin-, Juan Bautista Villafaña Avinteiru, Zairo Moscote -Mamo Munebar-, Mamo Don-Kimg, Mamo Chundy, Gregorio Pérez, Modesto Izquierdo, Francisco Zalabata, Julio Torres, Mamo Kuncha, Mamo Carlos Manuel, Mamo Antonio Vicente, Manuel Arroyo, Julio Izquierdo, Apolinar Torres, José Emilio Torres, Sebastián Torres, Luis Hipólito Zalabata, Joaquín Antonio Malo, Antonio Vente Arroyo, Apolinar Alvarez, Laureano Izquierdo, Federico Izquierdo, Mamo Abel Alvarado -Abelancho-, Manuel Chaparro, Salvador Torres, Benerexa Márquez, Leonor Zalabata, Luz Elena Izquierdo, Gregorio Pérez, Mamo Isael, Mamo Norey Maku, Mamo Leonardo, Mamo Sixto Bolívar, Rafael Pacheco, Mamo Ziskey, Mamo Zankaza, Mamo Takan, Mamo Zariu, Mamo Arumaku, and others. Tigrichama Sanctuary Marcelo Chama —Younger Brothers' Gate

We live a transitional situation

Francisco Zalabata and Crispín Izquierdo

In the course of my journey I was surprised to see that you are surrounded by many sacred mountains that you and us can make vibrate again. That is what all is about: these mountain ranges are full of wise, sacred vibrations that we have to discover. We must be thankful for having them, and we should make due offerings to them.

To answer your question about our justice system in Arhuaco society, I would say it does not exist among us, because we walk in harmony with nature. Our judges are the great stones, the tall trees, and the big mountains, even the singing of the birds. They do not harm anyone. The justice system that we at present know is an imposition of the dominant society, carried through entities as the cabildos, sheriffs, police inspectors, etc. Some behaviours coming from the major society were also imposed on us, and they induced members of our community to commit crimes that are alien to us. Concerning them, we have to use a justice system different from the one we have been using for millennia. The idea we have is that some day society wakes up and finds a thought that fits the teachings we receive from Nature.

Now, the interest of the Mamos from La Sierra Nevada is to share with you the experience we have lived since the arrival of the Spaniards and other societies in this Continent. There ought to be a new awakening. In the Sierra Nevada there are four original societies, and though we suffered several attempts to impose cultural knowledge on us, it has been difficult for them to succeed. Therefore, we have there a sort of core, an embryo, which from the heights is constantly watching over human balance all over the world. And due to this caring for the balance of the world, now we see how they are slowly receiving some of our messages. Such is the case with the announcements of the Ministry of the Environment. For millennia have we protected the environment, and only now they begin to talk about it. But we natives do not want to participate in this. This would then be the opportunity for you to begin to worry about the situation we are going through. There must be a radical change in all that concerns human knowledge, for up to now all we have had is self-destruction; that is, of Mother Earth, of our mountains, the poisoning of the sea, of our rivers, of our lakes, and a decrease of the flora and fauna,

which is impoverishing the earth. I ask myself: if we go on destroying the earth at this pace, where are we going to end up?

You, the young, and the children, who are the seeds of the future, should be on the alert now; and so we could together accomplish a great task for the earth. The area of the Sierra from Simon Bolivar Peak is about 60 kilometers in all directions. The population is of some 250.000 inhabitants, of which 45.000 are natives, and the rest are either settlers or mestizos. There are twelve municipalities, distributed in the Guajira, Cesar and Magdalena Departments. Counting the Wayu, the tribes that inhabit the Sierra Nevada would be five. Most of the present settlers in the Sierra come from inland, and they seem to be sympathetic with our proposal of creating a corporation, or Colombia's first ecological department, or an autonomous territory comprising all the reservations. What we do not want is to create just one more bureaucratic organism.

As to the problem between the guerillas and the Government, we have been pushed into a corner. We are hardly able to defend ourselves. And we have not suffered the worst lot in this conflict, but the villages bordering our territories have lived the hardships of it. They defend themselves by further moving into the Sierra. Kidnapper bands operating in Valledupar, Fonseca, Riohacha, and Santa Marta use the Sierra as a hiding place; but we do not get involved in that, since by Nature and by law we do not agree with this kidnapping. And no one of us would belong to any of these groups. That was one of the early agreements we made when the guerillas began to enter into our territories: that no one of us would take part in military practices, for we are not militarists, and we do not like fighting. We have other ways of working: a spiritual work, a human work.

To talk about the violence we live nowadays, we must consider that even before the formation of the planet earth, two kinds of forces manifested themselves: the ones embodying positive thought, and the negative forces. The earth was to suffer great violence. Indeed, since then the earth is being violated. That negative thought took in different directions, different manifestations in the human race... and so, some people want their own thought to be the only one over the earth, as if they possessed the true thought of humankind. Jealousy of thought is then turned into a religious problem, leading them into tremendous rivalry and to the loss of earth's true knowledge. They turn religious thought into prepotency, then into power of riches, and finally into power of war. Those who have more powerful weapons were the ones who conquered in war, and so on.

That kind of thinking gradually degenerated human thought; then they lost control, they lost the thread to the purpose of the creation of mankind, being it the maintenance of the balance of the world. But the dominant society is now living the consequences of those past events. They do not follow the steps of the true Mamos anymore. For indeed they had them in the past, but they have no idea now. They made a mess of all that knowledge, and today you can ask them what they know about a plant, about a tree, about a hill, and we are sure they do not have the slightest idea about their meaning. But they surely have held ideas of destruction. And that is how they are robbing the soul, robbing the blood, as it happens with oil... There, at the bottom of the sea, at the bottom of the earth, are the spirit and the soul of the planet, represented by the water, by the river, by the great sources of riches. But they went mad, as they found the easiest one: gold —the inner force of the earth with which we used to represent the deities and powers of the earth, and make her her offerings. They robbed all that bullion, and not to represent the sacred deities by means of which to thank the earth, but they turned it into a power of riches, of opulence, and they became obscure. That human sense that we should have is turned into competition for power, for knowledge; but that is then a false knowledge, it is not a simple knowledge, it is not a knowledge of unity with our brothers. That is a knowledge of self-destruction among brothers.

To talk about the problems in the Lagoon and Sierra of Santa Marta is a painful thing, and the Mamos are worried about that situation. We have had these great mountains well guarded through millennia, but from the 70s on, an avalanche of younger brothers from the interior has been falling upon us; and they began to make their green gold in this rich lands: first with marihuana, and now with poppies. But that is not our business. Today, only 25% of the ancient forest remains in the Sierra. We know that, and also that it is connected with the serious problems the great Lagoon is going through. Fishermen and landlords around the Sierra are suffering the consequences of the felling of this 75% of the Sierra's sacred forests. They will soon have no water. We have enough water for our subsistence, but the problem arises when we try to explain to the neighbouring settlers, landlords, and banana growers that if the 25% of forest that remains be felled, they would have no water at all. There lies the problem, and we have insisted upon this to the Government: that the point is not to carry on development plans in the Sierra, but rather to repopulate it with natives, and not only for the sake of our tradition, but also because the Mamos assure that every native's plot will be a sanctuary. Instead of spending so much in technical studies and so on,

the Government should buy land from the settlers, and in this way we would recuperate a vast area of the Sierra Nevada.

As to the problem of illness, we have to say that we Mamos are healers, and not only of men, but of Nature also. What we ought to do is a medical exchange. So, among us, the Mamos have to compare diagnosis, which are based on the type of plant that most identifies with the sick person, and the hour and date of birth. With that information it is easy to prescribe a medicine. If the illness is not predominantly biological, the solution must have recourse to the knowledge of Nature's messages. We relate, then, Nature, plant, and man, thus having the precise formula to heal.

However, if the illness is brought by the major society, we have to make a special offering to pay for that penicillin some one is going to be administered. In ancient times, this procedure was not used, and we rather waited for the hour of our blessing. But now we are exchanging both medical knowledges —the traditional and the official. But before we receive the inoculation of any official medicine, we must do a very long spiritual exercise. Only then may we receive it. This attitude is indeed different from the one "evangelized" people have, for they do not accept any kind of medicine or transfusion; they would rather die. And all this as a result of the imposition of the Gospel.

The cause of our mistrust of our younger brothers are the religious onsets we have suffered. Because of them many of our Mamos were assassinated by order of the friars, who also had our temples set in fire. At that time we had to take to the mountains and hide. Some of our ancestors submissively went to the friars, gave themselves up like fish to the missionaries; and once there, they practiced a double religion. While with the priests, they prayed; but when they could escape, they ran back to the Mamos, and sought to be at peace with the Sierra. We lived all that; but the worst part was for those who neither went to the Mamos, nor to the Catholics. After 1982, when the Catholic Church was driven out of the Sierra, the native Catholics were left helpless, and neither continued practicing that religion, nor took refuge in their native tradition. Many of them became "mestizos", as they call themselves, and it is with them we have had the biggest troubles in our internal organization. Many of them assumed this mentality: they became traders and sponsors of illegal plantations... and we know that they are natives.

We are living a similar problem with the Evangelicals: though they are not many, they can cause damage to the rest of our community. Their priests are not natives, they are strangers; they take our people to participate in their practices, and make them become fanatics.

A similar thing happened in 1967 with the gringos and their Instituto Lingüístico de Verano, settled in the Sabana de Jordán region. There they had the seat of their cult, and they launched campaigns to convince the natives to go over to their Church; and, at the same time, used pills that were meant to sterilize our women, aiming so to destroy our community.

Our younger brothers who care for the health of the country and of the earth, should realize that we have a 500-year-old grandpa called the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, where all the wisdom lies that might rekindle a great movement all over the world. And that moment is not far, for now we are living a transitional situation until the year 2000. During this period, governments will have a very hard time, very troublesome social upheavals. From that year on, there will be an awakening of ecological movements all around the world. The Mamos are preparing this moment, when they may give all their wisdom and knowledge to the children, the young, and the women, so that everybody, no matter where he is, may be a soldier of the earth, may carry out his reflections, and take others along that path.

That will then be heard; the principle of balance between man and earth will then be imparted. Very different indeed would it be if the Mamos' claim that the so-called progress do not touch the Sierra is not heeded. Our Mamos, through their knowledge, have taught us that the harm being inflicted to the earth is enormous; that many species have vanished without even leaving us traces of their knowledge, of their teachings, of their healing properties. And that is a great pity. One observes how, in a brutal way, they are ravaging the mountains, causing a great harm to the earth. Therefore, we must appeal to the people to give careful consideration to plants, to their lessons as living beings. If plants are treated as such, other animal species will reappear, because they would find an environment whereupon they can nourish; and we, following the life of that environment, observing which plants animals feed out of, will open the way to their teachings about new foodstuff for us to find. But if we do not find these plants, and, on the contrary, destroy them; if we put our hopes on industrial agriculture, on monocultures; we will be generating new plagues, new diseases, that would be very hard for humans to control. That is why we do not agree to this type of agriculture. We have to undertake again the agricultural practices of our ancestors. In a single orchard they used to have more than 50 varieties of food yielding plants, and they grew them in a very little area, and some plants nourished others, and the insects lived together with them and did not damaged the seeds.

When a plant is grown isolatedly, she does not have the strength she should have, had she been planted in society. And the same would happen to us if we destroy that great society of plants that live upon the earth.

In our rituals we have to engage in reflections in order that the vast number of plants that are on their way to extinction, proliferate again. From childhood they teach us that to procure our nourishment and harmony with Nature, we ought to plant in an associative way, and never in the form of monoculture, for it is noxious to the earth. To maintain the balance in this associative agriculture, we have to make a great "pagamento" -from the verb pagar, to play by means of an offering- before we fell the trees of the land we are going to prepare for planting. We have to make a very special offering in honor of the piece of jungle we are going to sacrifice. We ought to have a number of elements related to the different solar positions. Lunar and environmental conditions, as well as the rain seasons, are also taken into account. Everything must be in balance. If we make our offering in this state of balance, we shall have an endless supply of fruits of the earth, and we shall become conscious that we are receiving a very sacred gift from the earth.

*Caldas University Botanical Garden,
Peace Week, November 10th, 1995.*



The elder brothers call

Mamo Avinteira (Juan Bautista Villafaña)

Our welcome to all the younger brothers who have had the opportunity and patience to listen to us. I would be very pleased if we could have a closer communication, but because of the language, it is difficult. Anyway, through my interpreter, some messages might come out from this chat, which you ought to spread somehow for the sake of the generations living in this great coffee-growing region, and of the future ones.

I want to make a strong appeal for reflection, not only in behalf of our own country, but also of the Continent. These live times of great need, and it seems there is a wide opening for the philosophical and religious streams of thought we have in our bosoms. And it hurts us the possibility that this thought may go astray from its true path —the path through which you will have to walk along, and on which we shall meet again around something that is to be built.

You have suffered in your own flesh the injuries that have been inflicted to the earth. These injuries are also embodied in men who are gradually losing their identity. To preserve what we have defended for millenia, these reflections should lead us to an individual, inner communication with you. For it is as if we were making a selection of the best seeds to be sown in the future. I know it is a bit difficult, due to the type of community we are facing here. For there are different thoughts, different interests —some identifying themselves with darkness, others with light. I could not really evaluate you at this moment, but anyway, to be able to regard and appreciate ourselves as true brothers, there is something that we cannot deprive ourselves of. You must rediscover your own Mamos, your own roots; and you have to take good care of those roots, so that they reach deep into the wisdom we want to transmit to you.

We wish you would start making your "pagamentos" again; your offerings to each of your daily activities. We wish you would make your deep reflections on all that you investigate, on what you study, on the sages, on the scientists, on those who read, on all those who in one way or another are interested in the survival of humankind. That would lead us to a true life in communion, and not to what we see at present.

Just now I was listening to the message of the thunder; namely, that at this moment our people in the Sierra need us to achieve true communication with you. So let us start shedding our fears of natural phenomena, for they are part of our integrity. I would be happy to share with you many simple teachings. Not those of the profuse and greedy sages who do not want to teach. To us, humbleness is a sign of wisdom. That is what we want you to pass on to the new generations.

I also want to make a call for us to find our true identity. We are still in time to reach that goal. You, and we the Mamos, must be on the alert.

Every moment of the day, from the highest places in the Sierra, our reflections are directed towards humankind's finding of their true balance. This seems a bit difficult, but if we make an effort we can achieve it. We know there are younger brothers with plenty of good feelings and ideas, but the bad thing we see is, perhaps, that you have not been able to properly lay your foundations. You have too many ranks —there are too many careers, professions, etc. And that divides you, separates you. And so, everyone specializes on one field, and that is not done for the sake of his brothers, but for his own. Everyone wants to profit in the field he knows; and that means going out of balance. And not only thought goes out of balance, but also the idea we have about the riches of the earth.

We see how, for millennia, when the great forests covered these valleys, these mountains, we lived in complete harmony. There were countless water sources, birds, and animals. Birds of prey that were messengers; the thunder could be heard in its full meaning, the wind was pure; everyone of them was the messenger of them all. But if today I sit anywhere on this mountain ranges to engage in my reflections — as we have been doing for over 25 centuries—, what I interpret now may be wrong; for here we cannot meditate anymore.

Therefore I make an appeal, and this appeal should also reach the President of Colombia: The reforestation campaigns, and the environmental education programs, must consider the native varieties of every region; for there lies our future nourishment, and not in the one-species plantations they are establishing nowadays, because the onset of insect plagues will be tremendously destructive.

So we need that, as we have preserved in the Sierra for thousands years a productive community, you too begin to make special plans to rescue the foodstuff that you have lost. A lot of research must be made in that direction. Moreover, you may observe that there used to be many different languages spoken by the communities of this Continent. Ijka, Wayu, and Kamsa languages may still be spoken. In the same way, you may speak the different languages of the world. But it does not suffice to speak them: you need to know the language of Nature, the language of all that surrounds you. To us, all that circles around us is full of experience, full of life; and if you do not understand that in this way, it is because you use those objects that please you. We consider that these elements should be found again; and still in this region there are places that I deem sacred. Let us rescue these great sources again, those great fruits of the earth that seems to have vanished. That is what I understand.

The first and second lightnings and the thunderclap that I heard tell me I am surrounded by huge mountains, and that westward from where we sit now there is a wide variety of jungles that must be defended. It seems that the remnants of great water sources are still there. They could be the breath of this country.

We see that the destruction made by settlers and "guaqueros" —or grave plunderers— is spreading in the Sierra. We also see that the snows show their pain, and that pain you may see in the melting of the great icy summits. And it is an omen that tempests, earthquakes and diseases are reaching a crucial stage in this society. As a Mamo, I would not wish you evil, I would rather wish you good; but it is necessary that you find that great identity: you must go back to your roots. We know that many tribes live here together and that they have lost their languages, but of the plants there are still seeds to be rescued, and those seeds must be an example of the new identity of thought that you will sow from now on.

It is not enough, then, that new ministries be created, or that the President draws policies: we by ourselves must design policies suitable to our own needs. We ourselves are an example of all this: we have more than 25 centuries of existence in this Continent, and instead of being at home here, it seems we are facing extinction.

It would be good if you became aware that we share a common mother, and a common father, the wind, which is part of our breathing; that we have a common eye —the sun— which is our reflection and enables us to observe, to see all things.

In the same way as the variety of languages exists, there also exists a variety of climates, plants, fowl, and animals. We cannot afford to be confused by things that are strange to our planet, to our earth; here is the essence of all that She embodies: us, our bodies, are a fundamental part of our great quest for what you might interpret as God.

Religious differences are pointless here, for we do not have such a concept as religion. The God concept is, to us, unity, is the total living together, is the maximum total identity we might have as human beings: if we achieve that maximum of togetherness, we achieve a deep respect for all things we may observe. In that way, nothing would do us harm, for nothing in this life is evil, all is good. It is you yourselves who have turned it evil; humankind itself has turned it evil. There in the Sierra we have the Elementals: the deities representing all the big cities of the world; the high buildings; the flight of the airplane, which imitates the bird. We understand that. We regard the imitation of the auditory duct as the miracle of communication, but we communicate through reflection. We understand all that. No, that is not strange to us. What we see is that men have taken all those things with such haste that now they are capable of destroying our planet. By looking at the buildings, the cars, the highways, and all that I have observed in my journey, I understand that that acceleration to destroy our Mother Earth is overwhelming. I would ask some of you to go and take a close look at the way we live.

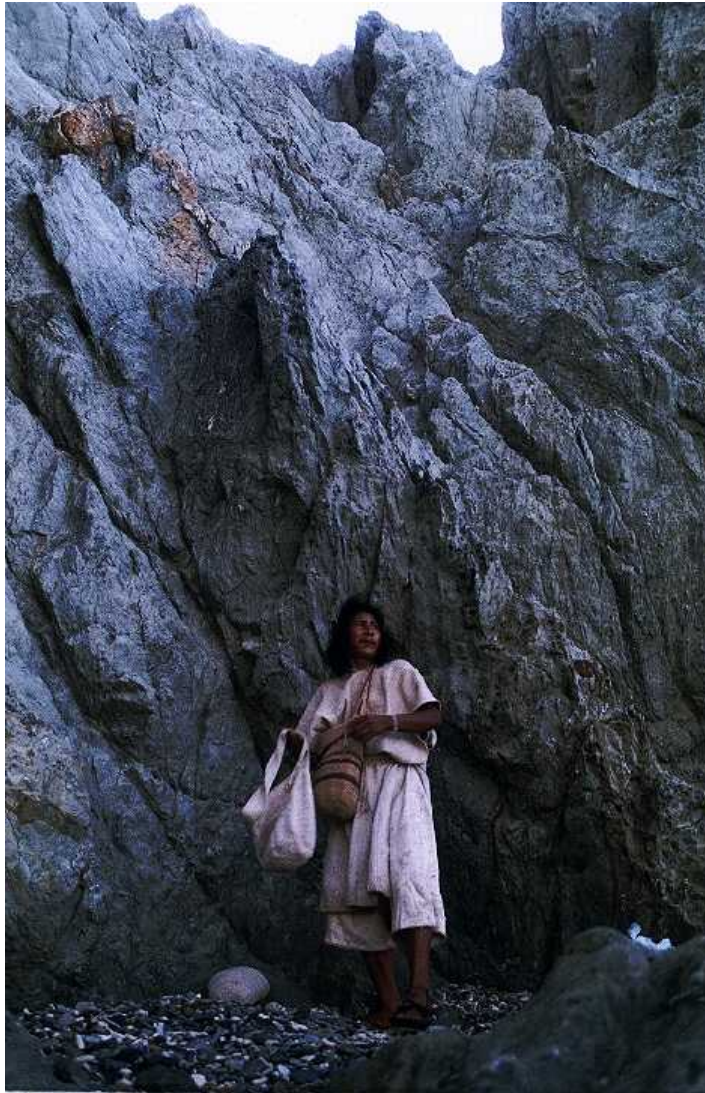
When you reach the capacity to identify yourselves with the day, and a deep understanding of the meaning of all this cosmogony that surrounds us all, then will you begin to interpret the true languages of what we all have in common.

Now, for my part, I simply ask you that this be not our last opportunity to talk together, to find again those places round us. Our wish is to go and rediscover those places. I would be willing to return, to point out the way to reconstruct those mounds, those sacred mountains, those lakes, so that they recover their true breath again.

This is an informal chat, it is just an opening; there in the Sierra we have much to offer you in the fields of philosophy, medicine, and on the interpretation of the phenomena that occur around you and around us.

To go on maturing this idea, I ask you the favor of disseminating the contents of this chat, hopefully through the different media. For it would help us there in the Sierra to offer our "pagamentos", to render our offerings to God; so that our words here do not vanish into the air or get blown by the wind; and you can find a vibration, a happiness, a joy, because this idea is going to spread all over the Earth.

(A talk at the Fondo Cultural Cafetero, June 7th, 1995)
Interpreter: Mamo Arwa-Viku



The Mamo is a great power at the service of all

**Mamo Mayor Zäreymakú (Juan Marcos Pérez)
Kankurwa Mamingueka**

In the beginning of creation the mountain ranges were created: the hills of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, which are sacred. To me, they are gods who face each other like houses in a town. For the first thing to be engendered was the thought of the mountains, and then they came to have form.

The first mountains to be born were the fathers of all —animals, peoples, plants, waters. In them, the universe is embodied. In the mountains, the different races, the different peoples were born. The Mamo began to think, and saw that it was going to be difficult for all of us to live here. For at that times whites were reproducing very rapidly, and there was not going to be place for all in the Sierra. He appealed to Serankwa, Nankwa, and Seukukuy, who are the creative forces of the world and who dwell here. Since we have to share the earth, the world was divided and Serankwa began to create more lands for them to

live beyond the Black Line, and made them heed the advice of the Mamos who in unison directed them to go and settle in places outside our sacred territory.

The animals, birds, waters, Chundwas (snowy peaks), and all what we see, were first born in the Sierra Nevada before they were born in other lands. Here, the food for the daily support was born. Here are the father and mother of the forests, of humankind, etc. Everything is embodied here in the sacred abode of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. The lagoon is the female counterpart of the sacred mountain, and the original sites are four, and they are embodied in the four peoples: Kogi, Arzario, Arhuaco and Kankuamo, who are the pillars of the Sierra Nevada. In order to achieve this balance, the Mamos gathered in council and accorded how they were going to support the Sierra and the rest of the world. For millenia, there were no troubles in the Sierra, for all was harmony and balance. And this ended with the Spanish invasion, and the education they imposed on us, with ideas alien to the thought of the Mamos.

At the time of the origin of all things, all was pure thought. Food was not eaten as we do today, but nourishment derived from the spirit of food. Neither the Yoburu (poporo —the gourd in which chalk is kept) was used, nor the lime and the áyu. For nourishment came from the energy of thought, from the emanation of wisdom. Pure thought, as we now inhale the air.

After thousands of years of being merely thought, the poporo was born, and then the shell to make the chalk, and the food, the plants, the animals. All the time in which we did not feed the way we do today, everything was mist, there was no sun, no moon, and the stars had not been born. Only the morning star existed to tell us the beginning of the day. But it was gloom all over, for there was only thought. It was Tenunne, the speech in those days. Therefore we Mamos still today relate to Nature and talk to her, for we keep the origin in our memory; and that is the heritage we have been given, in order to maintain the balance in the world.

At that time also, all the languages that are spoken in the world were imparted. That is why we all speak differently, because we all were given different speeches.

Nunkutten and Avikun, the morning and evening stars, existed alone before the sun and the moon were born. And, as some did not like their coming into being, there was a great struggle between those who wanted the sun and moon to be, and those who did not. The first ones won —the ones who achieve their goal made a great feast where all traditional instruments were played and the dance lasted for many days.

The masters of illness —known as Maku Yantaná— and the masters of summer, were also born at that time. With the appearance of illnesses, the Mamos gathered to discuss and study a way to control them; and they appointed Bunkwarwa Badillo as the "pagamento" site, so that illnesses would not destroy all peoples.

Leaders were also born, and rulers, and the cabildos, and the sheriffs. They are embodied in the mountains as well, and that is why they still exist. For that is the spirituality that is in the Sierra. And if there were no more Mamos, the world would also vanish.

Thereafter, Mamo Serankwa began to create the other continents. In them, there are more than 150 countries, which were inhabited by people from other places. But all this was done in accordance with the Sierra Nevada, where the fathers and mothers of the continents, countries, and races are. In the Sierra are represented: the sun, Bunkuakukuy; Duia Arukukuy, father of the sun; Duia Aru Aviku, the mother of the sun. Yui Kinchukwa, the site where the sun was born, is represented in a stone, as well as Sey Kinchukwa, the flight taken by the sun to illuminate all and find his place in space.

Timarwa and Timaka, father and mother of the moon, also have their dwelling in our sacred abode. But even before the apparition of the sun and the moon, the Mamo was already offering his "pagamentos" in the mountains that represented them in the Sierra. For there were some who did not want the dawn to be. And the Mamo had been working spiritually for the rising of the sun. And although he gives us light and life, we all have to work spiritually together with the Mamo who makes the "pagamento", in order to deter him from overheating and disrupting the weather and the seasons.

Atankeros and Arhuacos gathered in Avintukwa, Shedukwa, and Surivaka, sites of power, to discuss the way to work together and to put in order the commitments contained in our laws.

The Ijka or Arhuaco, the first born in that place, were strong and great warriors, due to the wisdom they possessed. Mamos like Ñiankwa, and Yankwa —Mamo Serankwa Diwigumuka Kawiku's father, who is like a minister of the interior—, have the power and control over the "spirituals" of the lesser hills. The Mamo who lived in Surivaka has been fading away; but I am folk from that place. There lies my origins, and I am there to deal with the "spirituality" to balance the world and avoid calamities. I am looking after all the inhabitants of the world. I belong to Serankwa's and Ñiankwa's families, and have the thought to continually preserve the balance of the world, and share the knowledge with others. This thought is like a plant that grows for the benefit of us all, for the environment to be better, for the balance to become steadier.

This thought is not for my or my family's private use. What I do now is to interact with Nature, and that is why I dedicate myself to the study of ancient wisdom, and I do my best to preserve Nature. That is why I have the thought: to study a better way to contribute to the balance of the world. Some may think that I am a weak Mamo, but my task is to search, to foretell in order to preserve. My father used to do the same work: to preserve the balance in Nature, to converse with her. That is the way my father was; he dealt with the spirituality of Makutama, site of the power to rule over the forces of Nature. Mamavi, with the power of the Tani —dances, rites, ceremonial costumes and feathers. He committed himself to this kind of works for Mother Earth. This works took place in a particular month, when people began to dance for the birds, the rain, and several kinds of food to be. And for pests not to fall upon the plants that serve us as food, and on all vegetation. That is why it is necessary to revive those Tani.

The Arrival of the Capuchine Mission

With the arrival of the Capuchine mission in Nabusimake, they began to appoint both native and mestizo inspectors. They inculcated in us the need to study, and some of our brothers became frightened, and fled to places like Donachui, Simonorwa, and Palomino, which were uninhabited at that time. Since Nabusimake was the capital of the Sierra, it was the place where our community was concentrated and where gatherings were held. Only the sheriffs and the cabildo that ruled them stayed in the town. The inspector, appointed by the friars, and using different ways to press us, told us to take our children to the mission. That contributed to the dispersion of our community.

From then on, all the wisdom that we treasured began to fade. Such was the case with our brothers the Kankuamo, many of whom forgot their own culture and were nearly lost when the Spaniards arrived.

The missionaries at the orphanage, and the Government thought that we Arhuacos also had to vanish, thus ending with the thought entrusted to the Mamos to preserve the world. This is contained in one law that our father Serankwa bestowed on us, by which the Mamo has to carry out the purpose of maintaining the balance of the world by means of rites of preservation. If all this vanished, calamities and punishments would occur; and not only the Arhuaco, the Kankuamo, the Kogi and the Arzario who live within the Black Line would be the losers, but also the Government and the "cachacos" (or non-natives). The whole world would lose, because the Sierra Nevada is the place of origin of the entire Nature. And the Mamo has got to preserve it. He has to maintain the great power that we keep, in order to comply with the law bestowed on us.

To us, the Mamo is a great power who serves all the inhabitants of the world. Therefore, it would be good that the Government took some measures that would help us to preserve this sacred place, where every nature has its power represented in particular deities or relics which are the mothers. But the pillage by the "guaqueros" (grave plunderers) and other greedy people contributes only to the imbalance. As an example, we have the case of the Guatapuri and Fundación rivers, which have their sources in the Sierra —they had to go down to the sea but lacked the strength to do it, so the Mamo presented their relics before them, and they became stronger and gathered in one basin and reached the sea. This is why the "pagamento" sites exist: to allow the Mamo to speak his words in order to maintain and confer strength.

Some years ago there was a period of crisis that started with a hard drought that was beginning to kill the snowy peaks of the Sierra. I started studying and analyzing why were the glaciers and the waters drying up. I thought that some Kogi brothers had a lot of knowledge to preserve waters, and so I went to talk with them. They also knew how to increase the flow of water. They told me that we had to make a very hard "pagamento" in a region called San Antonio. I asked them to give me the power to revive the waters, and so they did. Today we experience the same situation, and if the "pagamento" is not offered we are in danger of running out of water.

I, as a Mamo, represent all living beings —the entire Colombia, the Government, the ministers, etc. But, unlike some Bunachu -white men- who know about our wisdom and care for nature, the Government underestimates our knowledge. I dedicate myself to the preservation of Nature; and if I died the balance would be affected. I am made out of a very hard kind of wood so I would be able to give support to all living beings within and out of the Sierra. I care for millions and millions.

We Mamos have a very heavy task, and the Government must do something to attend to our claims, us being the traditional authorities. But the Government gives only promises in answer to our requests concerning the healing of our territory.

January, 1996



We suffer the consequences of the wrongly called "civilization"

Mamo Dwinimaku (Manuel Chaparro)

Ever since I can remember, and I was a very little kid, Efraín Pérez, my father, has been promoting the organization of our internal authorities. In my preparation I spent all my childhood and youth, and afterwards I held all the traditional authoritative dignities; ever since I can recall we have been talking about internal organization, but of a kind based on the wisdom of the Mamos.

This is not a fancy of we Mamos. We inherited it; it is imprinted in the ancient lore of the four tribes of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. The kankuamo have their own system of authority; the Kogi have theirs, as well as the Arzario; and we, the vintukua or arhuaco have our own system, based on the wisdom that the Mamos have been impressing upon us for millenia.

As far back as I can recall, no one of us was literate, nor had any acquaintance with universities, schools or any kind of educational center. On the contrary, at that time nobody could read. But our authorities, our organization, walked in harmony. There was more respect for all things; internal rules were obeyed; we offered our "pagamentos" in the proper way; there was more reverence in them, more respect.

That is what we do not see now. Instead of growing strong through the Mamos thought, it seems they are going further and further away from our wisdom; and that is what worries me at this moment.

We, as I see things today, together with our thought and identity, have been castrated since the moment the Spaniards knew of our existence here in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. That is why this Spanish mentality did not bring us natives any good. On the contrary, it brought us the knowledge of disintegration, of our loss of identity, religious sense, and respect for nature. The rules of the game that our ancestors left us were changed. And they were humble, wise, and practical; and the rules of the game were changed for rules of want that distort our wisdom, change our customs, even the way we address our elders was changed. In short, there is a total mutilation of our wisdom.

This is what has been happening until now. That harmful effect was first suffered by the kankuamo, and that harmful effect on the kankuamo affected a part of our territory too. We arhuaco suffered it painfully as well; particularly since 1916, when the Capuchin friars first settled in Nabusimake in what was then called "The Orphanage". The first harms to our community gestated there. Thenceforth, in all places, in all regions, an educational system has been imposed on us, in which our speech is completely left aside, and the thought of the Mamo is wholly disregarded.

In it, none of our functions were taken into account, for they thought that the functions of the Mamo were harmful, heretical, devilish, heathenish.

And I wonder today if it is not more heathenish the educational system they are forcing on us, on our children, paying no attention to us at all, being ashamed of us. Is it not more heathenish, since what they are contriving is the destruction of the Sierra Nevada? That is what I wonder.

However, we —vintukua, arzario, kankuamo, and kogi—, the ones who still remain, and are suffering the consequences of the wrongly called "civilization", know that we still have a part of that wisdom; and we want to summon our community to follow the rules of our ancestors, lest we be destroyed. In the strength of the Mamo's wisdom lies the force of our roots.

Although it is said that the Government has done many things for us, I do not know of any rule for our benefit, and I am getting old now. On the contrary, there has even been strife among us brothers!

For instance, let's remember what happened in Nabusimake Plains: as we considered those plains comunal, they imposed the wire-fence system. Such was the mentality of the Spaniards, who managed to make us fight among ourselves. The wire-fence system is thus a system by which you stab your own mother, so to say; and that brings us, her children, to fight among ourselves. That traditional lore of harmony and brotherhood that the Mamos used to infuse us with is now totally forgotten. It is now a law of the wire fence, a law of the knife; it's a law of rivalry, of opulence, of the strongest. But this law is not a law of ours; it is a completely alien law. What, then, is happening at the present? We Mamos are not recognized; and the few ones who still speak, who keep on insisting on those matters, are being isolated, ignored. And why just now? What they think is that we do not represent the majority of the authorities. We do not know where we will end up. But what I am sure of is that up to now the only thing they have been doing is bringing forth our destruction.

We had our own traditional way of managing livestock. And for that traditional system we Mamos were permanently "paying" through sacred offerings. And this traditional way with animals is also vanishing. Tapirs are not to be found anymore, nor wild turkeys, deer, peccaries, capybaras, squirrels, and countless fowl that were common in our natural "livestock". They have been supplanted by another kind of livestock, which, instead of serving us for our support, are ruining us.

No society on earth could ignore our millenary laws. They were bestowed to us from the beginning of Seynekan, our Mother Earth. These rules can not be suddenly changed; they were bestowed to us in order that we live in harmony, in balance with everything. But now, in the succession of the different authorities and governments, they have made up one other thing to keep confusing us, to go on laughing at us.

Now they have made up the tale of the environment, as if it could be a solution for us, the arhuaco of La Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. They ignore that we are the true keepers, the true stays of the balance of all water sources in these high snowy mountains. And that is no fancy of us, that is because we deeply understand the meaning of every one of these sources, and how, through our Mamos, we have to make the "pagamentos"; our offerings to the sea, the rain, the dry seasons, the mountains, the little animals, and every living being.

Then, what they have made up lately, that tale of the environment, is a strange thing to us. It amounts to the creation of more bureaucracy, not for the sake of us natives but for their own. If it were a solution, everything would then have been solved long ago. But we see that it rather confuses us; it teaches us elements under new words, elements under new signs to be written differently just to confuse us. But what they have to understand is that we arhuaco, arzario, kogi, and kankuamo peoples were not the ones who destroyed the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta.

It is to the new settlers you have to address your environmental programs. They were the ones who ravaged the garden we had in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. They were destroyed by them new settlers and not by us natives. When we first settled there, we left those sanctuaries untouched, for we knew that there we had all our riches; the livestock that supported our existence were there, and while we worshipped there, we had no need to chase them because they came up to meet us. But with the destruction of all those mountains, of all those virgin forests by the settlers, everything finished, of course —water sources dried up to the lowest point.

These programs should then be imparted to those who destroy the mountains, the animals, and not to us, because we have our own way to keep the animals; for we are prepared to handle them, to keep the balance, to continue the dialogue with them. So I do not understand why they are setting up new programs now, new ways for us to preserve Nature, since we have been keeping all this for millennia. Ever since I have a notion of the existence of my grandfather, grandmother, and great-grandfather, I remember them telling us about this. This is not unknown to us, and therefore they should direct their programs to the people who are harming us. The Government already has all the information about these persons; it even has the denunciations we have personally made, but we have never been presented with a global solution. We, on our own account, have solved part of the situation: we alone, sometimes with an effort to raise money, making sacrifices, facing each and every one of those problems.

All this goes to show that the Mamos' law, the law of the Mamos' thought —which is a support, the strength for us to have a good self-rule, a true traditional authority endowed to them—, is being more and more neglected.

And this has turned us really thoughtful, restless, because that what is coming is no good. What is the use, then, of talking about other systems being implemented here in the Sierra Nevada?

I think that if things go on like this, as we are observing them, we will be getting closer to very serious events, terrible indeed.

That is not what we ourselves would wish, but as things are, we see them very grim, very difficult; and therefore we have to demand our children and our leaders to express their views about this grave situation; for presently our leaders and the persons who have to deal with our problems are somewhat silent. It seems that everyone is working only for their own interests, but not on behalf of their community and the sacred abode of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. Since the signing of the early documents in the Avintukua's Kankurwa until now, we do not know of any document that denounces the situation as it stands today. Some of the deeds of those days had, it seems, a value, an echo, a force; but now we do not count with any such documents. And this worries us also. There is a leadership crisis, a crisis of authority, a Mamos crisis; there is a crisis in all aspects, even in illnesses themselves, for we do have been deprived of the strength to face all this situations that we are living through. And all this worries me.

We would believe in a public declaration, a decree or a program issued from the state's high authorities, only if it took account of all the Mamos' demands. If the President, with his ministers and officials, were able to present us a document signed by them all and based on the demands that we —the arhuaco, kankuamo, arzario, and kogi Mamos— are putting before them, we would then believe in the Government and all its authorities. Otherwise, we do not accept any kind of solution. We are not in a position to.

That is what I have been thinking, and that is my opinion.

When the "cabildo gobernador" —or ruling council— system was implanted as a means to solve the problems in the Sierra Nevada, we thought it was going to be a solution for all the problems present at that time, due to the way the council and its general secretary were elected, with the advisorship of all different parcialities, "cabildos", and deputies. But we have realized that this did not bring any solution either.

Some things seem positive, but others appear to be negative. Among the negative ones, we have to say that when we had leaders prepared to interpret at least part of the problem, and who through documents communicated our needs to the Government, at that critical moment, leaders like Luis Napoleón Torres, Angel María Torres, and Hugues Chaparro, were taken away from us. In fact, that caused other leaders to lie low, to keep silent, and their voices were never heard again.

At this moment, as I see things, there is a crisis of authority in all aspects; even in traditional authorities. There is a total incoordination among the Mamo authorities. Where will it all end up? How are we going to find a solution to this problem? There is practically no one to trust in. Who is right? For every leader that we listen to claims rightness for himself.

Then, a sort of jealousy takes place, and in the long run what we are doing is to distort our own message, the very wisdom of our internal organization.

Concerning our self-government we are trying to see who can represent the interests, the wisdom, and the true system we need for the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta.

And we are not the only ones undergoing this process, but also the kogi and arzario. The Kankuamo are gradually coming closer to it.

But if we, who supposedly have a little more understanding of our traditions, are not strong enough to face the situation, our internal government will grow weak. And we need strong leaders, very capable leaders who really express our true knowledge and needs. They must have a way to put it down on documents and writings, and to make the National Government pay heed to the Mamos government.

Áyu and Crisis

Mamo Zarey Maku (Karmen Pérez)
Kankurwa Kasigua, Moroto

The Ayu (coca leaf) is a special element granted to us natives. There is Ayu in the whole of nature. And there exist different varieties that have been developed by grafting to obtain bigger-leafed plants, which means bigger amounts for the great business created by the demand of the industrialized white society.

For the Mamo, the Ayu is one of the main sacred plants: it is the thought, the spirit, it is the axis, it is all; it is the essence of Nature herself, and enables us to talk, to enter into communication with beings of other dimensions; it enables us to address the whole world, the Universe. We can communicate "telephonically" with, say, Spain, by means of the resulting Ayu's ether.

It is like the thought, the spirit, like the essence through which it conveys itself to other dimensions. This is the function that Ayu performs for us natives. But the Bunachu has turned our sacred plant into business; they extract cocaine and crack, and this is the end for the white men. Having violated the sacred nature of Ayu, they will poison the whole world. And behind this money, great crimes occur; rulers will be killed, as well as all the people.

This is why we, Mamos, worry and seek to find the way to regenerate white men through the awakening of their consciousness: they must acknowledge the Sacred.

But while they go on thinking that this extracted substance is to be "high", to be merry; even though they keep to this idea, it will destroy the world and ourselves. For the essence, the spirit of the Ayu that serves as a transport, as a vehicle, for weddings, rites, baptisms, and Eyza rites, has been betrayed. In all rituals the essence is Ayu; Ayu Natuñanga is the spirit. In all rituals Ayu is needed: for the water, for every

Mamo's practice, Ayu is needed. Anyone who wants to eat Ayu needs the Mamo's permission; otherwise he would be in violation. The same applies to the eating of Yua.

Our Sierra Nevada is the Heart of the World; it is the center of the Universe, put in charge of the Mamos. But whites do not want to acknowledge this. That is all right; but, by this denial, believe it or not, great events against all of us will take place; just because of this denial.

There also used to be the Tani: those sacred plumages that we natives used in times past. But one mamo changed for a bell the Tani relic we had for food production, which travelled as far as Europe. These relics, like the sacred territory of the Sierra Nevada, were bestowed to our four communities. And there were plains, and there were cliffs for the preservation of the Chunduas —the highest snowy peaks under the care of the Mamos. For inside these Chunduas are the Masters, they who will guide the whites to reach the end. So is it, believe it or not.

They are still there: the father and mother of whites, of natives, are inside the Chunduas, kept in earthen jars and in golden Umükuy. Up to now they have not been desecrated, but whites want to, just to weaken us. Therefore, we want them to see that the violation of the Sacred Peaks of the Sierra would mean a great calamity for the world. For this reason we do not agree with the Government and other people who want to come and violate our Chunduas that shelter the Masters for the protection of us all, of food, of coffee.

From the beginning, all is law. But this seems to have changed nowadays. But it is still the same law, and every created thing has its law. Like the spindle, that goes spinning and threading. That is the same thing, and those laws must be obeyed, and they are not being obeyed.

We must go back to the Tani Kansamaria, Yósa, Yueru, Punkiri, Chare, Kungwy Yasa —feathers from all birds, of all colors, from the low and the highlands, to make the feather crown.

All laws are written on staffs, on stones. That is what should be sought and is not being done.

It is all right that the different sciences be studied, but we should do the same with our hidden part, or black matter. But neither the science and scientists, nor the modern Mamos have found the black matter.

Space, time and matter should also be investigated to hit upon the black matter; but whites and the common Mamos are not doing this. And while we do not do that, we will be in error. We must go on, because this is coming to an end. And further on we shall realize where the error lied, what the mistake was that did not let us seek and find the black matter. This is a big challenge.

The spraying of pesticides by the Government on the so-called "illegal" plantations —obeying the gringos' orders— have caused great damage to our orchards; and therewith to the spirit of the Ayu, to food, to water. They have contaminated everything. To use the Ayu, we Mamos are specially authorized to grow it. Then, why is it grown today without that authorization, and cooked in pots made by whites or gringos, when that must be done in very special clay pots?

This is now being breached, and thence the fevers, malaria, aids, and cancer we are suffering. All due to the roasting of the Ayu leaves in those pots and to the processing of cocaine. The spirit of the Ayu is manifesting itself in the destruction of so many people, and in the contamination of the rivers. And all this because the spirit of our sacred plant has been defiled. And this whites do not take into account in their analysis of the crisis.

We, the Mamos of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, do not grow poppy, marihuana or datura plantations, nor allow our peoples to do so. For they are plants that could harm the community when not properly used. Also, the Ayu should be consumed only with the Mamo's consent.

The production of Ayu by whites is meant to be traded nearly all over the world, and that is causing great harm; and still greater harm will it cause, for the Ayu is only for special rites. And they have violated that, going over the limit in its use; not asking for permission, not making the "pagamento". Their aim is to make dust for a profit, to make a capital, to become rich. But the results are the crimes and the crisis in so many states. And where will it all end?

We have a universal thought and not just confined to the Sierra Nevada. And we see how, in spite of scientific advances, our younger brothers are mistaken. And therefore, we the Mamos send our

messages to help them. But we want a serious reflection to be done about the great harm that has been caused by contamination, the violation of the sacred mountains, and the cutting down of trees—who are sacred too—on the banks of our rivers and creeks.

What they should have studied are the laws given to us, which reside in stones and hieroglyphs. But they don't do this, and in this way one does not come unto the knowledge of the black matter.

I am a Mamo who has been constantly delving together with other high Mamos into different sites of the Sierra like: Donachuy, Takina, Makutama, Cherwa, and San José. In these places I have several Kogi, Arzario, Kakachuacua, and Ijka masters, meaning four forces that delve and study into the Sierra. For in the entire Sierra there are peoples with great ancient wisdom concerning rites and "pagamentos" which we should continue offering to the earth for all the harms done to her: for committing fornications and adulteries, for not cleansing a girl's first menstrual blood, for not celebrating baptisms, for not cleansing the Eyzas, for not blessing food before taking it, for not preparing the seeds, and the places where we shall cut shrubs and trees before planting.

Because of these violations of the law all illnesses befall upon us and our animals. Because our tradition has been forgotten.

We should pay tribute to the Zícuri—a kind of masters who are in several high places of the Sierra Nevada and are pervaded with all the elements, and who are the mothers and fathers of us all. To them we should pay tribute and make the particular "pagamentos", so that their energy be irradiated and we may help the whites, the Gringos, the Germans, the British, who so much like the impusi (cocaine) that is ruining them.

In the same way as users pay for their water and electricity, we should pay Nature. For we are not paying for the water we are drinking, nor for the sun that shines on us. And we have to pay for that light, for the air we breathe, for the earth we stand upon (as tolls for the bunachu), for the soil where we plant, which is not ours. All them have their masters to make "pagamentos" to, contributing with something from our bodies, our flesh and our blood (Gueiru).

All this has a very deep scientific meaning, a very big one which is worthier than any money one may pay. For here the flesh and the blood are given to pay for everything, and not only for ourselves, but also for our brothers who violate the law. Does anyone remember the sun? Nobody. Does anyone remember the air? Nobody. Do not contaminate it, would be said at the most; but no "pagamento" would be made to the air. For the air has a father, and a tribute must be paid to him; and that is the scientific part that we know and execute.

We use different elements in our "pagamentos" according to the occasion; they might either be plants, stones or animals; this is the sacred part that is well known and respected by the Mamos.

January, 1996.

"Pagamentos" and Balance

Mamo Zeukukuy (Norberto Torres)

Every existing being today originated in our sacred abode of La Sierra Nevada; and here are the fathers and mothers, embodied in hills, lakes, and sacred relics. This is no secret, and is a part of our ancient thought, which is universal and is maintained by the Mamos through generations.

The world is ruled by nine masters, and it is them who make the balance of the Universe possible. These nine masters keep to the Black Line territories, and from here they irradiate for all our younger brothers: for whites, for all our native brothers who look after La Sierra Nevada with us: for the motilon, and wayu or guajiro, whom we should not forget, for we ought to share in harmony our territories.

Some years ago, in one of our sacred peaks —the Inarwa Tana (called "alguacil" by the whites)—, the Government installed, like a stab, a series of antennas and a permanent military station. They also plundered the relics lying there, and took them to a museum. That is what the soldiers told me some years ago.

This peak is a very important one for all the Mamos of the four castes that dwell in the Sierra Nevada. It was put under our care, and we should offer it the due "pagamentos"; but we cannot, because of the militarization of our peak. This situation has brought violence to Colombia. And this is not all: the Government has always been trying to destroy our thought, our own ideology. But we still exist to keep watch over the last remains.

Tourism is another evil to us, for it is destroying our lakes and Chunduas or snowy peaks, which are very important to us. Because if the father and mother who dwell here are destroyed, the same will happen to Colombia and the whole planet. But we still guard Nature in the Sierra, because everything was born here, here is everything, and the Mamos are the keepers of Nature. And that is why the world still exists. But the world is going out of balance because only a few Mamos are left; but we feel the need to rescue it, and have enough energy to do it.

I want to insist upon this matter of Inarwa Peak, for long ago the government promised a solution, but up to now nothing has been done.

Our thought is universal, for it encompasses all that exists; that is, the visible and the invisible; the great mysteries hidden in Nature, and which until the present most of humankind have been unable to know, since they turn everything into chemistry and science, ignoring that everything, plants and stones included, has its spirit. And all this composes a thought that pervades the Universe; all is united like a breath.

This is a thought that has not been made up by me; it is thousands of years old.

If the Government does not help us to recuperate the nine sacred relics of Inarwa Peak, and if we are not permitted access to it to offer the "pagamentos", annihilation will soon befall. For violence and catastrophe is what we see in the world today. Therefore it is necessary that whites become aware of the importance of making the "pagamentos", which have been neglected, and in this way see how we can find a solution for all this.

The sacred relics that have been pillaged from us have various colors, since every stone embodies its own mystery, and they are nine masters who are the spirits of every sacred stone, each one with its own symbolism. These nine sanctities represent the mother of all foods and plants that nourish us, giving rise to the existence of all kinds of corn and beans and foodstuff. And they are all represented in the nine sanctities; but without them, how will the Mamo have powers? How is he going to offer the "pagamentos"? How is he going to take care of Nature and crops?

Diseases will strike the food. The plants already have many plagues, and they are extinguishing. Because we cannot relinquish our "pagamentos", since the House is empty and we do not have whom to offer our pagamentos to, and in this way there can not be balance.

It is necessary that the Government take appropriate measures, for Mother Nature owns all plants that nourish us, and therefore if our sanctities are given back to us, there will always be food. But if they are not given back to us, crisis will soon befall, food would fail, there will be no production, plant diseases will strike; and we mamos will not know what to do, for we have no fathers.

January 4th, 1996

We head towards self-destruction

Mamo Seinenkwa (Otoniel Mejía Izquierdo)
Kankurwa Kurina

I want to begin with a self-criticism concerning the traditional authorities of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. We should start by inwardly cleansing the Sierra Nevada, including the traditional authorities composed by the councilmen and deputies, the ruling council and others. Because they are more of a bridge for the National Government, since our internal authorities are being led in a way that suits better the civil authorities than the native ones. We see the same picture at schools, in our children, who should just be the buttress, the power of our internal organization. Instead, they are being brought up with methods more suitable to the civilized than to us natives.

I ask myself, are really these traditional authorities and the so-called traditional teachers prepared to instruct, to transmit our bilingual, bicultural teachings? Do they know in depth the Mamos' thought? Do they have a real awareness of what loss of identity means? As a Mamo, I consider they do not. These persons are not prepared for that task. So, I think a horrible harm is being done to our community. And therefore, in my opinion, I do not agree with the rules being issued by the cabildos, by the deputies, and by the so-called Mamos who serve as advisors to the schools. For they do not have the deep knowledge needed to rule. Had they it, then our trees should be more, our rivers should be plenty, there should be more snow in our Chunduas and a wider variety of plants, and there should be a greater projection of balance. But what I see is the opposite: they are running schools for our destruction. I see they are opening lands for more and more haciendas, and they are using agricultural methods that are harmful to our traditional crops, introducing educational procedures, like the famous family orchards they are now promoting among us, that suit the Bunachu, the civilized. They are also introducing medical practices like injections, which are right for the Bunachu but not for us.

I think they are attempting against tradition, and though they may think I am narrowminded and alienated from the other Mamos, what I see is that what is being promoted is the destruction of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta.

I can not, then, agree with that sort of methods, nor would I be ready to back any type of program leading to the destruction of the Sierra Nevada. I shall be a parenthesis, I shall be here, wrapped in my conviction of what I think I can do for the Sierra. But I shall not agree with such ways, which I consider noxious.

The same applies to those religious sects, such as the Evangelicals, who also practice these noxious teaching methods. For this education is another injurious element, since we are not using a methodology dependant on the deep wisdom of the Mamos.

They say they summon us for every decision. They say they need the Mamos' opinion to take decisions on education as well as on any other matter, but that is only a saying, because they treat us like clowns. They call upon us just to approve their plans, but in fact that does not have anything to do with our spiritual practices, the spiritual reflections we are constantly engaged into.

Where are, then, those original forces, those traditional forces which have been giving us our methods? Where are our ancestors, our great-great-grandfathers, our great-grandfathers?

A Sierra for the whites is being prepared. They are now promoting commercial systems good only for the Bunachu. And now, even among women, they are promoting the opening of shops. Our bag knitting, which in olden days was a traditional system to enrich a woman's husband, is now being exploited as a handcrafts business.

Therefore, we must take all these matters in a realistic way: is it truly injurious, self-destructive, or just the opposite? I do not agree with all that, and I want to be heard, because if we go on with these systems and methodologies, I think we head towards self-destruction, and to the total disregard of our Mamos.

However, I would be ready to truly collaborate with you, for I think you are an important commission, interested in gathering some part of the Mamos' experiences. But you have to face it yourselves —that reality we are living in the Sierra Nevada—, because I do not believe in the cabildos and the deputies, nor in any kind of authority under which we are now living in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta.

We have been appointed to different commissions. We take part in all sorts of commissions for everything. I hear about governmental land-reform and aboriginal affairs commissions. And what is the use of all these commissions, when our livelihood is getting worse instead of better? To us, those commissions are not needed. What we need is for us Mamos to unite all in our strength, in our works and our Gunamu. That our Mamos be the true authorities in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, for that is how it has been for thousands of years.

The day I see, as an actual reality, the practice by the Mamos —through their Gunamus— of authority, healing and education that will give our children what they really need, then shall I begin to believe that something is being made in favor of the Sierra Nevada. Otherwise, I shall go on thinking that what is being done is self-destructive.

Therefore I will be on my guard as to this situation.

January 17th, 1996

We speak the way our forefathers taught us.

Mamo Bunchanawin (Jesús Izquierdo)

With my experience, my studies, and research, we want to say that not all Mamos are equal; they all have their own specialty: Some specialize in Eyza; others, in baptisms; some in calling forth the water; others, in fertilizing the soil; others, in making "pagamentos"; some others, in searching for harmony in the Universe, with Nature. Everything has its own specialty.

We may also say that the Mamos are seers, clairvoyants, telepathists, clairaudients; they can foretell the time, and have in their own memory all that has happened through the centuries. It is as if someone talked to them.

Among our traditional rites, we have the Eyza: the "pagamento" to the dead. It is meant to help the dead to detach from their families —their wives and children— in order for the spirit to be freed. Its like the novena practiced by the Catholics.

All what dies is Eyza. If a leaf falls from a tree and decays, or even the trunk of that tree decays, that is Eysa as well. It does not apply only to humans who die and are buried. No, it does not; it is a wrong interpretation.

Eyza is all what falls and is transformed by the earth, being purified and thus following the process of new seeds and new trees for the benefit of the whole community; of all living beings. We, as Mamos, understand that the Yukunumas are spirits. And there are different apparitions in particular places like pits or hills. In any place may the Yuikunuma appear, and they have a particular meaning which is only known to the Mamo.

That spirit may be announcing the dry season, an earthquake or disaster; it might tell the Mamo about the death of another Mamo. Anyway, I mean that the Yucukumas have their mystery, and that it is the Mamo who knows and interprets that mystery.

What we are saying now we have not made up —we are teaching what we have been taught, so that the light may come some day. Therefore we speak the way our forefathers taught us.

Purvieju (Pueblo Bello), January, 1996.



Regaining the lands within the Black Line

Mamo Gregorio Pérez
Kankurwa Mamingeka

When I began my training as a Mamo, I remember the struggles we held: I had started to work with some governmental agencies, whose task was to attend to the priorities manifested by the Mamos. We used to talk about regaining the territories inside the Black or Scientific Line, and on that base we natives started moving towards regaining our own ideology as well; since in olden days there existed many powers that we might share with our younger brothers now.

During the last years the natives from La Sierra Nevada have been asking the Government for solutions to our problems, even asking about their concept on some other matters, but up to now we have not seen any positive results.

I am tired of asking, because the Government does not keep promises. Therefore, the Mamos have to study other ways of fulfilling the unanswered claims we have addressed to so many governmental agencies. Our main request is to regain our territories within the Black Line. Otherwise, what can we do for the coming generations and for the preservation of the environment? If the Government does not want to answer the requests of the Mamos, it might as well finish us, annihilating also the whole world through wars, catastrophes, the drying up of water sources, and so on.

But, as an answer to our claim for the Black Line territories, the Government has imposed on us health programs that disregard our ancestral medicine; educational programs alien to the Mamos thought; priests to preach the Christian gospel to split our brothers from traditional authority.

The measures the Government should take to fulfill the requests of the four communities that for millennia have dwelt in our sacred abode of La Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, should include the official acknowledgment that this land is a Mamo's heritage; and the recognition of the organic law which appoints the natives of La Sierra as its authorities.

This is the main priority that we Mamos hold.

January 1996

The Thought of our Reborn Mamos

Mamo Bunkua Nabingumwa (Luis Napoleon Torres) An interview, November the 8th, 1984

What are your origins?

Well, our origins spring from two directions: one is Tairona, and the other is Chibcha. We regard them as the two family lines of our tribe; from them stem the several branches. Some other Mamo might explain it better than me, because I have understood only a little about genealogy.

Where did the Tairona come from?

I think they came from the Santa Marta region, where all Tairona cities are located, or at least their remnants. Though many people say that indigenes come from India, in the real concept of our tribe, in the Mamos' concept, we have not been transplanted. Our origins lie here in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. All the knowledge is thus based on the particular nature of the Sierra, whence all knowledge of science, the culture and customs, are spread for all the rest of humankind, and for ourselves, who have our origins here in this very place.

What is the history of your struggles?

Our history has been rather hard; after the Bunachu history, it is known that since America's discovery by Christopher Columbus, the natives, though always subdued, have always struggled for their defense. But history here, concerning the Arhuaco community, began around 1870, when the invaders first came to our borders. They stopped there, because it was rather difficult to go deeper into the Sierra. Between 1908 and 1916 things got worse with the establishment of the Capuchin Mission Orphanage. As our elders tell us, there was a need at that time to set up relations, communications with, and to receive the benefits from Bunachu by way of Santa Marta and Valledupar. But never was the native regarded as a human being, a citizen, or a "Christian", as they say. Ever since those days the educators regarded us as savages; as proved by the 89th Decree of 1880. It was then when the clergy assigned the Capuchin Mission the task of "domesticating" the natives.

And whenever the natives tried to solve their problems in the traditional way, they were not allowed to do so. They never acknowledged any value in the natives, whether cultural, ideological, political, or social. The native was not a "social being" to them; he was instead a person who did not have a soul, had no beliefs, and his practices were devilish. And therefore had to be converted to Christianity. So they began to introduce images of their Saints. That was the way it began, and there were many high Mamos who opposed this; they did not surrender to what the Mission intended... and those people were persecuted. From 1928 to 1930 the strongest persecution took place. To live in accord with their own political and religious ideology, the natives had to leave the land where they lived in Nabusimake Valley. In other words, they had to run away from that pressure. That is what the elders say.

It was then that they became disgregated, because before this they were ruled from Nabusimake, the center of government. There was no other village, no partialities spread over the territory. But due to the pressure exerted, people began to move to Donachuy, Serankwa, Yeurwa, Windiwameina, Isrwa, Jugaka, Gámaka, Birwa, Simonorwa, Yeivin, Maranchwa, Yéchikin, Búzin, etc. Some went to de Kogi region: to Mautama, Cherua, San Miguel, and many of them continued their pilgrimage in the land of the Kogi. Of course, they were not wasting their time, but they began to establish a relationship with the Kogi, and to teach them the tradition, and how to defend themselves. They received the teachings over there, and then they came over here. And the struggle went on, but mainly making use of traditional science.

With all kind of devices they captured and tortured our people... then they went away again... and in this way many people had to surrender to the will of the Mission.

I am 46 years old now, and as far as I can remember, this land was already colonized. And it was then that our power, all what we call communal autonomy, crumbled down. And, like a machine, they deployed all their police system and civil laws. Many had to keep silent, the only way to appease the missionaries.

As the educators realized how difficult it was to convince and control the adults, they soon developed other methods: they gathered our children and shut them off in the orphanage; as a sort of arrest, as a sort of kidnapping.

In order that the children were not taken from them, many people had to flee. This has been the struggle; what one has gathered from the elders. This escape resulted in our being still authentic Arhuacos, still bearing our typical ornaments, having our own language and culture, and our lore. All because the natives ran away from their territories.

They had to go to Palomino, to La Guajira, to the lands of the Kogi, to the jungle; and this has been a long and painful journey, which since 1962 has directly involved the Government. One of the points in this involvement was the discussion of whether there was a law signed by Simon Bolivar granting these territories to the exclusive possession of the natives. The search for the titles belonging to the Arhuaco, Kogi, and Arzario communities started then; but in no historical archives were they to be found. At that point we began to demand from the Government the creation of a new reservation, for the conclusion was that there existed no previous reservations in the Caribbean Coast. That was the main factor to prevent us from claiming ownership of these territories. Just because there did not exist a tangible document.

That the Mamos kept their titles, was for the Government merely symbolic, and not a real fact, as it would be, were they included somewhere in the royal letters patents. Only one title was found in the said patents, and, however, these lands of la Sierra Nevada were colonized, became the private property of one family: the Castro family, which was then the richest family in Valledupar.

All this has had an influence on our community: since the beginning, natives were used as laborers. At the same time, the clergy took over the religious rule; and the so-called traditional political parties — Liberals and Conservatives— took over political affairs. This situation lasted a long time, from 1920 to 1950. They were the masters of the natives. The Eastern side of the Sierra that comprised Isrwa, Donachuy, Sey Arwamake, Jugaka, and Gamake, was ruled by the Castros; and that comprising Yewrwa, Simonorwa, Birwa, and other sites, was ruled by the Mestres.

The traditional community, and specially the Mamos, have of course never forgotten; they never surrendered in religious matters, for they have kept their religion in a sort of hidden manner. But, though we suffered much and were abused, in 1964 we started to send direct commissions, headed by the high Mamos, to the Central Government. And the Capuchins tried to hinder our direct communication with the Government, for they were the "keepers", the "owners", they were the "voice" of the Arhuaco community. And they used all possible means of control, even the military ones, to stop our envoys from getting out. But the latter did they due, with sacrifice, leaving by night, taking roundabout courses...

In 1963 the first commission of Indian Affairs arrived in the Sierra. It was subordinate to the Ministry of the Interior, and it was headed by Mr. Marco Tulio Hernández.

Education is the cultural basis for the freedom of the community, for its peace. Only in the absence of worries and disturbances can the community dedicate themselves to their work. There must be a respect for the territories; but every year we have more divisions and less land; and therefore, the Mamos can have no rest. There is always a worry... where will it all end up?

And in the meantime, racism propagates, the earth is being dishonored.
When was this Arhuaco territory decreed a reservation?

It was recently, on March 14th, 1984. The number of the resolution was 038.

In the cultural aspect, how would you put forth the problem?

The penetration of other religions such as the Evangelic and the Catholic, which dominated over here for such a long time. The law allows so much to these Evangelics... it speaks about freedom of conscience, freedom of worship. The Mamos can not stop them, because they are free. And at this point, autonomy

and the Mamos' authority begin to fade. Every one behaves after his own will: I do as I want. The Mamo ought to consider this not as a voluntary thing but as an obligation rooted in the beginning of time; in no way as a law written by humans, for these laws often violate primeval laws. The Mamo always worries about this: how are we going to do, if we have no authority at all? We can not act, or control or prevent our own community from doing things against Nature; for we would be thus breaking the law.

In what sense are the Mamos the keepers of science?

In practical life. They are not like the priests, they have got to do it in practical life. Because all religious people preach nice, beautiful sermons: love one another... But nevertheless, spoil everything. Tradition, on the contrary, prevents against all this, and to come to an effective salvation plan, the Mamos are the first who have to comply with it, and, on a secondary level, the rest of the community has to do it too. That is the way knowledge is transmitted in practical life: with deeds.

How many Mamos are there in the Arhuaco community?

There are many, but on different levels. Sciences are kept in every one according to his caste. In one caste there may be up to three; in another one, there could be five or more. They all work for the defense. They all have their particular fields of study: some perform general tasks and work for the whole community; others work for the families.

Science is a matter of learning, and it is not structured like the white men organizations. Everyone learns what he feels like learning; it's like going to primary and secondary schools, then to the university, and to post-graduate studies. So is the Mamo's learning.

Are they also healers?

Sure, the Mamo performs three roles: as a healer, as a priest, and as the officer who appoints the sheriff, the cabildo, etc.

What is the Arhuaco religion?

In religion there is nothing definite. All that is open to inquiry. For we are investigating into bilingualism. Here, we also search after the origins of every expression of the spoken language. Both in Castilian and in "speech" we look for the origins of everything. We do not say that science is... Others say that Witina is a family, as well as it may be another family because the caste is divided into: Serankwa, Bunchy, Gueptwa, Gumwke, Busin, Niamkwa, and Forytana. Serankwa is divided into nine castes. Of course, the nine are distributed as powers; we might say that as the pilots of all what exists. And how are Queykwa?

They are the main mothers and fathers of the caste. Of course, the caste is divided into nine families... and so on. I mean, the confusion of science originates here too. Somewhere, something has been learned. One learns something from Busin; others learn something from Serankwa. In this respect, disagreements have occurred sometimes.

We think that if day after day the community's development arises from its cultural basis, we may recover, we may discover many things that we have forgotten.

And how is the struggle for cultural recovery?

Getting people busy. If the more capable people speak with the elders who have had little contact with ordinary people... many who are still attached to their own criteria... Talking with them, we think we might...

A Visit to the Capuchine Mission

When Mr. Marco Tulio Hernández came to visit the Capuchine mission, they ignored the fact that he was a functionary of the Ministry of the Interior. And here they spoiled the whole thing, because they considered them communists and said they had no right to enter the native territories, the mission's territories—in this matters they always mention the Vicariate. They presented themselves as the owners, and by this the Government knew about their contempt towards natives; about the process they were

leading towards the extermination of the natives. From then on, their abuses became less and less, and people began to nurture again the hope that the Government would defend their rights, cultural lore, and all the rest.

Now, in the Mamo's view, it was held that the borders of the reservation were the Black line. On that basis, we applied for a demarcation of the territory, for otherwise we could never control the invasion of the settlers... We had to demarcate the borderline of the reservation. This took, however, a long time — from 1962 to 1974. In these twelve years, the reservation was constituted, and now, through our organization, the community has been recovering its autonomy. Sure, we have had the help of several trade unions, as CICOLAC's... Yes, mostly this kind of workers organizations have helped us, sometimes even financially. We need money for the travels we have to embark upon; because most of the community were convinced that there were no property anymore, no true authority; that the autentic religion did not exist anymore. That all that was a thing of the past, which had been superseded. But step by step and with the help we were getting from the Government, it was spreading again. It was then when we more seriously spoke out our knowledge. In other words, the values that the Arhuaco, Kogi, and Arzario peoples held. And this is a mighty struggle, for it is an outward and inward struggle. And the inner struggle has been very hard; there still are Arhuacos who are displeased with the removal of the Capuchine mission. Of course, the community now accepts the organization which was their enemy in the past. But it is even harder now, since we have got to make it by ourselves. And for that we need instruction and the elements to work. Now, we receive some private help, but a conscious help, lest the old capuchine system be established again. This help must be approved by the whole community, for in the future it must be the community who decides on land and health matters, as well as on its social and political organization.

That is what we are promoting nowadays; and our task is that from now on no one mediates between us and the Government. The community itself will directly deal with the Government. And here we are: in education and health, things are being done directly, and not through middlemen, who always try to impose themselves as the defenders of our community. The community are now able to expound their problems. In a few words, this is what we are living at present.

What is Mother Earth to the Arhuaco?

To the Arhuaco, the Earth is our mother, or it is where life exists. We could never share the white's ideology. For them, the earth is to live on, but also to exploit, to make money and all the rest. To us, Arhuacos, the Earth is like a mother whom we should cherish and respect. We may take from her, but in the right way. Forests and mountains should be preserved. They are not just to be exploited. They must be protected. So, to the Arhuaco, the Earth is the mother where all philosophical and scientific knowledge lies. And we get it through her. The Earth is not to make commerce out of it, nor to be emptied out, nor to develop capitalism over it. She is there for all us to live on, but as long as we comply with the originally established laws. And this is what the Mamo interprets. He interprets all religious knowledge with an eye to the future. This is paramount: the Earth is not just to be exploited.

How has your struggle been against the settlers invasion?

The settlers invasion has always been a very difficult matter. We have fought it through our organization, and we have also spoken with them. Their incursion has been checked a bit, but we have not devised other means of control. Other communities such as the Guambiano in Cauca, and some others in Antioquia, have had to fight by means of counter-invasions. But it is not the case here in the Sierra, where altitudes are a main hindrance to invaders. This fact has helped keep the settlers at a slow pace in their penetration of the Sierra. Their colonization progresses at the rate of their population growth.

What is the sacred meaning of the áyu (coca leaf)?

This is a Mamo's knowledge. They grow the áyu, they sow it. And it is not done as with other plants. The Mamo must authorize it, and only the authorized person may grow it. To the natives, the coca is a sacred plant from which lore originates. I mean, the development of the community's own lore depends on áyu. Among us, it is forbidden to commercialize it. It may only be bartered. So if someone has not any áyu, he must barter it for salt, meat, or brown sugar lumps (panela). But he may never sell it for cash. It shows how sacred it is to us.

Moreover, áyu must be roasted only in a particular clay pot exclusively set aside for this purpose. Also the fire used for this is a special one. We light it by rubbing stones together, and no one but the person appointed by the Mamo may do it.

Every little leaf is like a telephone number... every number is like a step... the same happens with this little leaf. It is a means of communication: either within the Sierra, and with the continents beyond. Therefore, we keep the áyu with respect. It is also a way to sustain mutual equality —as we barter it, we are showing equality to each other. People would wonder what the use of all this is: you have áyu and give me some, and then I give some of mine. But it is by this that communal and family friendship is maintained.

Is the barter of áyu leaves a sort of greeting?

It is like as to reassert trust. It is like a greeting, but at the same time it is trust... well, friendship is reaffirmed by this.

How may the Mamo decide when a person may be authorized the use of áyu?

A: It depends on his age. Ayu is also a means of moral control. Well, the Mamo gives a boy the áyu... for him to use the "poporo" (the gourd in which the chalk is kept)... to keep him virgin until the coming of age for marriage. But he may receive the áyu at the age of eight; it depends on his moral and mental development. There is then no particular age, it depends on the person.

How are the Mamos appointed? And how do you know that a child is destined to be a mamo?

It depends on his parents' interest also. Every human generation depends on its own and its parents work. It is marked in the navel. From birth, they know if a girl is going to be a Mamo's wife; or, if it is a boy, the mark in the navel will indicate whether he is going to be able to learn and become a Mamo. The baby is then baptized in accordance to this; and at that moment they realize what kind of Mamo it is going to become. The caste is taken also into account. Because the natives are divided into several castes... The sciences also correspond to particular castes. That is the way Mamos are chosen.

What kind of education is given to the child who will become a Mamo?

When the boy is about six or eight years old, they begin to give him certain objects. And they reveal to him the spots in the sacred sites. In other words, they show him the gate to the knowledge written on stones, in the forests, in some lakes, and also in some mountains, where the stones are, on which all knowledge is written. The boy is handed over to the care of a high Mamo, and he takes him as his companion, and begins to teach him the activities to be carried out in every site. That is the way knowledge begins.

What would be the main problem for the Arhuaco today?

I think the most important... what worries people most is religious belief. Because we do not feel any love for this matters anymore. And also how to educate the boys to become Mamos in schools run by the high Mamos in all the kankurwas. For if the community loses its religious identity the persons will be useless; they will not have a cultural basis for their own spiritual development. The children and we all would be like empty bags to be filled with anything, even with rubbish, because we would not be filled, we would be empty. We think that if the elders who still possess the real wisdom do not care for the education of the children, we shall gradually decline. That is our most important worry.

Besides cultural recovery, what would be the second problem for you Arhuaco?

There are three important aspects at present. Firstly, the land question; and, secondly, education... that education be based on our culture. But in order that the community may dedicate itself to work without worries... calmly and in freedom, they must respect our territory... for our territories are shrinking. Therefore, the Mamos get no rest and quietness. They always have this worry: where are we going to end up?

Documents of agreement signed by the arhuaco community and the Capuchin Mission.

In Nabusimake —San Sebastián de Rábaga—, on August the 12th, 1982, Mr. José Agustín Valbuena and the Fathers Ricardo Pineda and Antonio Nacher, representing the Diocesan Mission of Valledupar; and Luis Napoleón Torres (Ruling Council), Manuel Chaparro (Chief Deputy), José Camilo Niño (Central Council), Angel María Torres (General Secretary), Amiro Mestre (Treasurer), Bernardino Alfaro (Ruling Council), Efraín Torres Villafaña (General Inspector), Julio Izquierdo (leader), Alvaro Torres (police officer), High Mamo Zareymaku, and Kunchanavinguke (Mamo), representing the Arhuaco community, met and came to the following agreement:

1. In legal form, the Diocesan Mission will hand over to the Arhuaco community all the buildings that they are presently occupying, and which are located within the Arhuaco reservation.
2. The Diocesan Mission will give back to the Departmental Health Office all the implements that the Office had put under its trust.
3. It will also revert to the National Government all the educational activities in the Arhuaco reservation.
4. These reversions will be carried out with the consent of the National and Departmental governments and the Arhuaco community, on dates to be agreed upon during the course of this process.
5. The Arhuaco community and the Diocesan Mission will effect these reversions in an amicable way. Both parties will strive to keep an atmosphere of trust and peace during the process. This procedure will be completed, if possible, before December 31, 1982.

Signed in Nabusimake, August 12, 1982, by all those present.

(28 signatures follow)

Conformation of the Supreme Council of Mamos of the Sacred abode of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta -COSMOS-

Avintukua, June, 1995

We, the elder brothers of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, headed by the Mamos of the four original points; settled here for millenia, and sustained in unity of thought by the áyu; left in charge here by our fathers Nankwa, Serankwa, Arwa-Viku, Awinkungumu, Dwiawikungumu, and Kingumo; guided by the force of our generations Chundwa, Sokakurwa, Busin-Bunbana, Gunkutu l'narwa, Serankwa, Tikenserwa, Ywichucho, Tenogúngurwa, Niwalunban, Aromatigo, Kurkutu, Bunywageka, Simonurwa, Ywisingeka, Kúrina, Makogeka, Karwa, Santa Rosa, Birwa, Chukwisima, Dun'kurwa, Pawseñora, and Eysamaku Government; and protected by our sacred mothers Sewkumuke, Zerecha, Goreta, Marey-Naka, and Chasiwana; as elder brothers, have the purpose to open the numerous inner doors leading to the knowledge of the Temple of Life.

During the infancy of the human races (some 3.600 years ago), all the basic teachings of our knowledge were imparted —everywhere on earth, indeed. These teachings have been kept unmarred and pure by our Mamos throughout time, in order that they germinate in every generation —Serankwa Tana, Nunkwa Tana, Gumuke Tana, Busin Tana, and Gurwkwa Tana.

To take care of the thought of the earth we have always existed. Our message is to search for the true love that identifies us with all beings of different natures: sky and earth, day and night, life and living-death, health and illness, warmth and cold, red and white...

Our call is intended to sow the great truth that has evolved itself, that has sprouted in so many and marvelous forms; to enact a conversation with Nature, who looms large over the world's thought.

Today, we wish to use our major torches to light the lesser ones: today, when the true light of our mother Seinekan (Mother Earth), overshadowed by inhuman, proud and opulent men, is beginning to fade out, we have agreed to:

1. Conform the Supreme Council of Mamos of the Sacred Abode of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta - COSMOS-, constituted by a group of Mamos of the Four Castes, and aimed at promoting activities among the four communities, in accord and unity of thought.
2. To reaffirm ourselves in the unity of our sacred territory, after Serankwa's sacred plan and demarcated by the Black Line (or Scientific Line). This is the necessary expression of autonomy to conform "the native territorial entity of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta".
3. To reconstruct the Tani-Kansamaria in every one of our sanctuaries.
4. To activate all the Yuikunumas, so that every Mamo may keep all water sources, brooks, rivers, lakes and seas alive.
5. To present our sacred offerings, in order that every Bunamu may contribute to the biogenetic balance of the Sierra —the Heart of the World.
6. To promote the growing of the Zamuyunakia (native sacred food plants); the practice of rituals such as baptisms, weddings, burials, inner reflections; the administration of justice, "pagamentos", etc., according to our tradition.
7. To foment the preservation of all water basins as an expression of our ancient way of life —called 'ecology' nowadays—, revitalizing them with our own sacred seeds.
8. All alien, noxious, contaminating thoughts shall be denounced before COSMOS —the Four Sacred Castes, the kogi, perbu, sanja, arzario, wiwa, kankuama, gunkutu, iku, and arhuaco—, in order to reestablish the sacred order and the principle of traditional authority.
9. COSMOS will evaluate every development project presented either by internal or foreign authorities, and its accordance with our laws and traditions will be analyzed. In case they are in harmony with them, they will be spiritually 'paid for' by COSMOS for its approval and execution.

The present nine points are signed and approved by the Supreme Council of Mamos of the Sacred Abode of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta.

Fotography by Mauricio Sanchez - mauritsi@lycos.com