

Our Museum of Colonialism: Indigenous Representations of Museography in the Colombian Caribbean

Nuestro museo del colonialismo: representaciones indígenas de museografía en el Caribe colombiano

Wilhelm Londoño Díaz 

Abstract: This article is a philosophical exploration of the logic of colonial object collection by Kogui communities in northern Colombia. As revealed in a recent publication, some elders of the Kogui community of the northern slopes of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta preserved what could be an ax and a sword used in the conquest campaigns of the region, which occurred in the first decades of the sixteenth century. The information collected on this practice of artifact conservation was gathered within the framework of a series of conversations with leaders of this Indigenous community in northern Colombia that took place between 2018 and 2019. In these conversations, the logic of conserving these objects in the framework of the Indigenous social movement's political project was specified. In this case study, we first review the analytical tools that allow us to shift our attention from the classical theories of how museums, archeology, and history are defined. Then, we present the Kogui case, which questions the hegemonic narratives of regional history.

Keywords: archaeology; Caribbean; Indigenous people; heritage; colonialism.

Resumen: Este manuscrito es una exploración filosófica de la lógica de colección de objetos coloniales hecha por grupos koguis del norte de Colombia. Como se ha puesto de manifiesto en una reciente publicación, algunos mayores de la comunidad kogui de la Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta preservan lo que parece ser un hacha y una espada usadas en las campañas de conquista de la región ocurridas a inicios del siglo XVI. La información conseguida sobre las prácticas de colección de artefactos a cargo de indígenas fue recolectada en una serie de conversaciones que se sostuvieron entre 2018 y 2019. En esos diálogos, se especificó que la lógica de conservación de estos artefactos se hacía en el trasfondo del proyecto político del movimiento social indígena. En este estudio de caso, primero haremos una revisión de algunas herramientas de análisis que permitirán reorientar nuestra atención sobre las teorías clásicas sobre cómo se define un museo, la arqueología y la historia. Después, presentaremos el estudio de caso kogui que cuestiona las narrativas hegemónicas de la historia regional.

Palabras clave: Arqueología; Caribe; Pueblos indígenas; Patrimonio; Colonialismo.

Artículo de investigación/ Research article

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Introduction

The Indigenous history of the Colombian Caribbean has had a tendency that we could call Andean-centric. For example, one of the pioneers of Colombian archeology, G. Reichel-Dolmatoff, considered that the pre-Hispanic periods characterized by agriculture and village architecture had been possible due to the people's distance from the coasts when the tremendous economic yields of corn were discovered (Londoño, 2020). From this perspective, the sea would have been undesirable. In the background, his argument aimed to despise the shore village adaptations for lack of monumentality. This image, which excluded pre-Hispanic coastal communities and their possible links to contemporary societies, was inherited from the first archaeological investigations carried out at the beginning of the twentieth century by American scholars such as Jhon Alden Mason and Gregory Mason (Londoño, 2020).

In the specific case of G. Mason, this archaeologist tried to answer the question about the continuity between the Tairona and the current existing tribes of Santa Marta province. As G. Mason had read the Spanish chronicles that spoke of wars between bellicose indigenous people and the Spanish, he imagined that the descendants of these tribes should be tall individuals, some kind of giants (Mason, 1938). As his fieldwork shows, he realized that tall people, such as the Indigenous people of La Guajira, did not declare themselves related to the Tairona archaeological sites. On the other hand, despite being smaller in size, the Kogui he interviewed claimed to be descendants of the Tairona sites that he excavated and from which he took objects. This issue did not matter much to G. Mason. In the end, he established a kind of historical rupture between the Kogui and the Tairona.

Finally, this rupture facilitated the development of two disciplines. On the one hand, archeology claimed the right to research the pre-Hispanic past; on the other, anthropology claimed the obligation to know of ethnographic cultures. This separation was interposed on the Indigenous people's visions that did not see a cultural segmentation in their history, as established by the

imported anthropological model, especially by G. Mason. The work of G. Mason has been considered paradigmatic in Colombian archaeology, hence the importance of knowing this background: it defined the questions that helped shape an archaeological and anthropological agenda in Colombia.

After G. Mason conducted his archaeological research in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, he established a series of questions to determine the course of archeology in the region. In the 1940s, Reichel-Dolmatoff continued the work of G. Mason, raising questions such as the causes of social hierarchy and the role of agriculture in that process¹. A few decades later, Reichel founded the Universidad de los Andes anthropology department. His students would do more robust archaeological research in the 1980s, staying within previous research agendas.

In the 1980s, academics and governmental authorities made concessions to the continuity between pre-Hispanic Tairona and contemporary Kogui. In this case, some anthropologists argued that the Kogui were heirs of eco-friendly environmental management that could be distinguished archaeologically. Despite this, some archaeologists argued that the Kogui resulted from rearrangements of various chiefdoms that had succumbed to the conquest (Londoño, 2021). As we can see in these colonial images, the other is represented by a series of questions positioned as neutral and academic. However, this academic claim was based on a straightforward process of subjugating Indigenous populations to a violent process of miscegenation.

Because of several cultural changes in the 1980s, such as a progressive political vision and the formation of powerful agendas of the Indigenous social movement, some people attempted to claim the aseptic image that archeology had built on the pre-Hispanic past. In the case of northern Colombia, the Gonawindua Tayrona Organization (OGT) was formed to accomplish as its main project the return of some pre-Hispanic villages to natural and archaeological parks. With the political constitution of 1991, this process of repatriating archaeological sites was added to other objectives, such as the fight for land,

¹ To understand in detail the history of regional archeology, see Giraldo (2022).

educational autonomy, and the exercise of Indigenous justice.

Within this context, since the 1990s, the OGT has filed several legal actions to recover sacred areas considered by the Colombian State as archaeological sites. At the end of the 2010s, the Colombian State accepted that some specific areas within the Tairona National Natural Park (PNNT) could be restricted to current tourism and allow the visit of Indigenous people exclusively since indigenous interest was compatible with the guiding purpose of conservation (Londoño, 2021).

In the framework of this political context before the COVID-19 pandemic, the OGT announced that in a northern basin of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, an ax and a Spanish sword that came from the conquest battles of the sixteenth century were being guarded. This situation materially proved that the Kogui kept objects from the conquest campaigns, which supported the need to investigate the history of the last five centuries, not only by examining written or archaeological sources but also by listening to Kogui oral sources and now, by collecting archaeological data from the ax and the sword.

Two events generated an ethnographic interest in how the Kogui conceived the history of the Colombian Caribbean conquest. The first is related to the local cartography that emerged after the Colombian state recognized that certain areas could be visited and managed only by Indigenous people. This cartography drew the black line, an imaginary band that joins sacred sites, confirming the existence of detailed territorial knowledge associated with kinship practices and religious rituals. In addition to this recognition, it was clear that the Indigenous Kogui knew and harbored historical material culture that made a critical vision evident, and even contrary, to established anthropological and archaeological narratives. Amid these two situations, it became clear that a museum of colonialism had been built by the Kogui, which merited an investigation that would help illuminate the general meaning of this collection, its purposes, and the problems it solves.

This museum of colonialism is not necessarily a place, a spot where you can move around as in a traditional museum where each movement in space is usually a movement in time. On the contrary, this museum houses

materials that the Kogis consider representative of a history of the region that involves the last five centuries. It is fascinating to understand how these local practices of indigenous people collecting colonial material culture challenge regional narratives, usually represented in local traditional museums.

Given this context, this offers an interpretive framework for an Indigenous museum of colonialism (more as a concept less as a space). To achieve this, we use some anthropological tools offered by the experimental anthropology of M. Taussig, an anthropologist associated with Columbia University who has worked extensively in Colombia. As his work shows, the colonialism that helped build Colombian society has shaped an Indigenous person who is both savage and a possessor of wisdom. For this reason, ethnographic fieldwork in spaces like Colombia implies the construction of representations that level the burdens imposed by colonial images. It is not about doing ethnographic research to discover how the other lives, thinks, or represents, but about how from the shores of otherness, one can observe the savagery and madness that underlies the logic of colonial culture, in this case, the Colombian culture. For this reason, an ethnography of what colonialism looks like from the local point of view assumes ethnographic scenes, ethnographic encounters, that are unpredictable or have developed in unexpected places, like those high basins where some old men have preserved an ax and a sword from the sixteenth-century conquest for more than five centuries. In any case, the collection of ethnographic data in unexpected places lays the foundation for the philosophical reflection that is the purpose of this manuscript.

Since much of the information consigned in this document is considered confidential, belonging to the sphere of expert knowledge of traditional authorities called *Mamos*, the ethnographic contents are taken from some public meetings that took place at the University of Magdalena. These meetings were part of an intercultural agenda established at that university whose primary source of motivation was the establishment of decolonial archeology.

In this sense, we present the results of decolonial ethnographic research that seeks to understand local

perspectives of the Kogui toward the history of colonialism in the region. It is not an alternative history to the hegemonic one, but a revelation of the inconsistencies in that hegemonic history. In this sense, we combine this local perspective with the criticisms from anthropology that point out how national historical narratives are limited and align with colonialism. We should know that in decolonial thought, the space where local criticism finds academic deconstruction is called the borderland. So, the borderland is not a geographical place but an epistemological one. Consequently, we start from the premise of the borderland as a theoretical and methodological opportunity to collect the ethnographic data that supports the philosophical reflection.

Locating the Research

In Santa Marta, an academic space was created a few years ago, configured by the borderland and by the knowledge of things that are unfixed or unclassifiable according to contemporary disciplinary taxonomies but that are part of the mestizo world. This space was formed with the participation of the now-deceased Indigenous leader of the Kogui ethnic group, Santos Sauna, and other collaborators. As recorded by the local press, the agreements between the academics and Indigenous leaders sought to generate knowledge located beyond modernity (El Informador, 2017). At that roundtable, the emerging themes were the transition from the Anthropocene to the Ecozoic (Escobar, 2016) and the societal design of that transition (Fry, 2004). It is evident that the political objective of the Indigenous social movement of northern Colombia is to stop the predatory advance of capitalism into Indigenous territories; likewise, it is clear from the inner workings of the Indigenous social movement that it is necessary to help design the new spaces and times of society beyond the Anthropocene. As was stated by Santo Sauna in that meeting: "The clamor of the Indigenous peoples for the territory is not based on an economic vision of the land; it is based on the premise that the care of life will depend on the territory being managed with ancestral principles and not under the criteria of the modern economy."

Obviously, academic language is a form of translation of statements within this borderland that emerge during

conversations without tension, crisis, or criticism. Methodologically, some meetings were organized during 2017 that allowed for an extended discussion on the campus of the University of Magdalena. One meeting was attended by the president of the university at that time, the engineer Pablo Vera Salazar, and Kogui leader Santos Sauna. This was reported by the university press and the local press (El Informador, 2017). As an anthropologist, I participated in organizing the meeting, allowing the intersection of two leaders of large organizations from the Magdalena region in Colombia. At the beginning of the meeting, I introduced the two figures, who represent various social structures that make up the region's demographics, without ignoring the fact that I am part of the ethnographic staff of the university. Given that the meeting would revolve around an agreement between the Indigenous organization and the university, it included a lecture by Santos Sauna on territorial demands. His speech described the pressure exerted on Indigenous territories, mainly through real estate agents. He also described governance problems, especially the overlapping of jurisdictions, since some Indigenous territories are in protected areas called natural parks and archaeological parks. Santos Sauna did not go into detail, but some voices in the organization pointed out that this pressure had created a need to engage in real estate speculation to generate economic resources. Likewise, in his remarks, the Indigenous leader referred to the health problems in some communities. The lack of their own doctors, teachers, lawyers, and economists made local development infeasible under local principles.

After Sauna's comments, the academic staff spoke of the need to review the problems of Indigenous access to university education; in addition, they commented on the need to establish roundtables to analyze the different aspects of Indigenous access to university services. Within the framework of this conversation, one of the first commitments was to review issues concerning archaeological objects housed by the university. This is how the objects that the Kogui had preserved from sixteenth-century battles arose as a subject of discussion. Similarly, an issue that continues to attract attention is the existence of at least one ritual mask in the ethnographic museum in Berlin.

The presence of colonial objects housed at sacred Kogui sites led to a discussion resulting in clarity about several things at that meeting with the highest Kogui authority of that time. The first is that Kogui *Mamos* maintained a chronological memory that recounted the massacres they had suffered, especially during the three years after the port of Santa Marta, the capital city, was founded. A comparison of information from the oral tradition with some ethnohistoric sources shows agreement on events, such as that the first incursions of conquerors occurred in the summer of 1528 (Tovar, 1994). Despite the discussion that may occur about the precision of the dates, what is evident is that the anthropology conducted in Colombia has underestimated the Indigenous perspective of the conquest. It is even more apparent that in this local perspective, the conquest did not imply the dissolution of the tribal communities, which were related through endogamous systems between clans, but only the abandonment of the coastal strips that were usurped in the conquest.

In the scenario described above, a first approach was initiated to discuss specific situations, such as how to handle the archaeological collection housed at the university. There was already a precedent from 2010, a workshop attended by Indigenous people and academics who gave their opinions about the collection and housing of Indigenous material culture (Londoño, 2012). As it became clear in that workshop, housing these material objects represented a sort of imprisonment for the spirits that reside in them. This is because the materials that are considered objects in archeology have a soul in animist or analogist ontologies, according to the categorization popularized by P. Descola (2001).

However, for the Indigenous leaders in attendance, led by veteran leader Ramón Gil, it was not mandatory to generate repatriation processes because many of the objects no longer had souls or were not yet ready to receive these beings anew. The Indigenous people vehemently requested the return of the *tumas*, polished quartz stones necessary to make the offerings in the sacred sites, or *ezuamas*.

As seen throughout these borderland exercises, starting points are challenged, such as the belief that archaeology is a discipline that intermediates with the past and with

inert objects. In contrast, from this borderland perspective, archaeology is a discipline that appropriates objects with spirits that have a function within local ontologies. This is what happened, specifically, with the *tumas*. Previous studies of the *tumas* (Mestre and Rawitscher, 2018; Ríos-Osorio et al., 2012) agree that they are polished quartz stones used to make offerings at sacred sites called *ezuamas*. Each *ezuama* has a function, such as helping with crops, helping to make decisions, and helping to heal animals, so each user should look for the *ezuama* that corresponds to their needs. The *ezuamas* are usually marked with flagstones arranged vertically, so they are straightforward to recognize. Facing this issue, Santos Sauna mentioned: "Something particular is that no archaeological work has taken into account the function of the *ezuamas*. They have been considered mere garbage deposits, but their function in the balance of the Sierra has not been recognized."

Based on this premise, the dialogue, which developed along different paths and in different scenarios, began to shed light on how the construction of archaeological parks and the excavation of archaeological sites generated a process of epistemic violence and territorial appropriation. In a way, one approach to the necessary task of reestablishing the balance broken by colonialism is to "de-archaeologize" the sacred sites.

A final idea that was established at that central meeting was the possibility of accessing the Kogui enclosures where the colonial objects, including the sword and the ax, are located. Some anthropologists and other Kogui allies have had the opportunity to observe these materials. From this perspective, the Museum of Colonialism that the Kogui have is similar to the one in Taussig's study (this will be further developed later). It is not a museum in the traditional sense because it is not intended to tell a sequential story that justifies the present. Nor is it an exhibition museum because, in principle, colonial objects are preserved and can be observed only by the spiritual authorities. His intention is not that the things be conserved for their intrinsic historical value but rather that they allow dismantling of the archaeological accounts of the conquest and its catastrophic consequences.

Within the analytical reflection that the Kogui Museum of Colonialism allows, it is clear that the dualism that privileges the private over the public (since it is a museum only for the *Mamos*) intends to close the past-present gap.

From a certain point of view, the Kogui museum that emerges in the borderland (we know about the museum because some academics have seen it, but we also know it is a private museum) functions to highlight the truth that the conquest implied processes of disintegration, which would make it necessary to ask how integration was possible amid constant colonial tension. This vision is contrary to the dominant archaeological vision, which indicates that the conquest resulted in a demographic collapse and ethnic recomposition. Since the closure of the suture is a priority for this border museum, it is necessary to understand the role archeology played in generating and deepening the colonial wound.

Ethnography of Colonialism: Some Analytical Tools

In 2009, Michael Taussig published his provocative and sensitive book, *My Cocaine Museum*. The book, which can be read as a continuation of his work on colonialism based on analysis of his fieldwork in Colombia, argues that the Gold Museum (Gaitán, 2006), renown worldwide for its collections of pre-Columbian gold work, is a colonial entity that celebrates itself through the representation of the metal that made possible the conquest and advance of Western civilization in America. The Gold Museum, in Taussig's vision, is an entity with a double mission. On one level, it represents itself as an entity that safeguards pre-Hispanic materiality; it is thus necessary for the conservation of material culture. On another level, gold is an allegory for the spirit of conquest; in that sense, the museum is an artifact designed to exalt colonialism. If the Gold Museum is a box of objects that are extensions of the riches of the tropics according to sixteenth-century notions of wealth, then Taussig's cocaine museum is a museum of rarities in the configuration of a new

otherness. Taussig is a collector of alterities of the new colonial order that are not inside the Gold Museum. *My Cocaine Museum* makes explicit that it is possible to read the culture and history of Latin America, especially Colombia's, through substances such as gold and cocaine. It should be clear to the reader that the objects from the time of the conquest that the Kogui possess make up their Museum of Colonialism, just as the Colombian elite created its gold museum and Taussig built his museum of cocaine.

In Taussig's cocaine museum, which in the end is a building that houses the oddities of the new colonial order, there is a drug trafficker character from Cali, Valle del Cauca, known by the alias Chupeta. Chupeta modified his face so as not to be detected by the authorities who were pursuing him; he reconstructed it so many times that there was not a single trace of his former image at the time of his capture. In this museum² are also women, middle-class domestic workers in Cali, who save up money to modify their busts and buttocks through plastic surgery (Taussig, 2012). For Taussig, these new forms of beauty are formed by sutures produced over the openings of colonial bodies and spaces. The colonial body and space are, in Taussig's opinion, unfinished spaces, such as the bodies of women that are finally finished in the operating rooms of plastic surgeons. Likewise, the colonial space is the space to build cracks, such as those made in the earth to remove the pre-Hispanic tombs and capture the gold. Therefore, the metaphors that would be used to make an inventory of things of this new order are *hollow*, *wound*, and *opening* (Field and Gnecco, 2013).

The Gold Museum is full of these openings, these slots. Its main room is a hole containing a large amount of pre-Columbian gold, molded in various shapes with large emeralds. These are the riches that the Banco de la República was able to buy from various treasure hunters before the commercialization of pre-Columbian gold was definitively prohibited (Field, 2012). Surprisingly, the Kogui Museum of Colonialism is mainly composed of an

² I must clarify that the notion of museum that underlies this manuscript is a bit anachronistic if compared to contemporary notions that discuss and recategorize the notion of museum as something more critical and local (Monção and Carvalho, 2022). However, this

notion of a museum is maintained given that the state continues to be the entity that invests the most resources in museums that connote a nationalist vision.

ax and a sword—objects built to make fissures, wounds, and pain.

When academics transcend the complacent gaze of museum conservation as something natural that is shielded from criticism and decolonial revision (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018), then museums such as the Gold Museum appear not as institutions that fight for the preservation of materials but as devices that construct and shape specific ways of representing the past; they are machines for constructing historical reference points that are used to legitimize and order the ways of being of the present. This museum works as a guardian of modernity, a soul that needs to fight battles, as some Indigenous leaders established (Londoño, 2020). As Michel Foucault posited (Foucault, 1976), modernity is configured by the rupture with forms of representation such as those of the sixteenth century or with Indigenous people like the Kogui, dominated by forms of similarity (to know is to be able to understand how things, including words, relate to the whole). It is also configured by condemning similarity as a form of knowledge, through which the encyclopedic order appears and where knowledge is compartmentalized and organized alphabetically, making possible the appearance of the encyclopedia. In this way, history will be the subject of archeology, whose first organization of data will be given through evolutionism (Clarke, 2014). In the current order, the material culture that does not correspond to that order will be treated as an indication of the past, conceived as a continuous evolutionary march. Let us be clear and say that modernity as a cosmogony needs for its spread the museum as evidence of the right march of the time.

As James Clifford showed (Clifford, 1997), the museographic representations that tried to go beyond the modern classical representation, where nature and culture are separated (Descola, 2001), experimented with the fusion of objects that are considered in modernity as representations of different times; for instance, natives with radios and drinking Coca-Cola were the representative images that questioned the traditional canon so well described by Renato Rosaldo (1993). Thus, the Kogui Museum of Colonialism inverts the image since it is made up of European objects that are observed by Indigenous people. This challenges the official canon of the modern museum, in which the Indigenous object is

observed through the eye of modernity. Let us remember that Rosaldo pointed out that the hegemonic norm of representation supposed that reality should be like a museum, with its rooms organized in temporal sequences and organized by spatial criteria, as in the case of the National Museum of the American Indian (Londoño, 2021); however, in truth, reality was more like a garage sale than a stratigraphy of objects that fuse various times and cultures. The reference to the National Museum of the American Indian, as illustrated in a recent publication (Londoño, 2021), sells the idea of a cultural mosaic defined by spatial and cultural criteria. The institution's website shows that there are objects from all over the Americas, but what it does not say, and cannot hide, is that many of these collections were obtained during espionage missions when archaeologists spied on the movements of German citizens in Latin America (Bonono and Farro, 2014; Harris et al., 2003; Londoño, 2020). This museum is a sample of American imperialism (Said, [1978]1995) that does not intend to tell how the social sciences, in this case anthropology and archaeology in the United States, emerged. However, it functioned not only as an academic and scientific project but also as a political instrument necessary for the dispersion of American ideology in Latin America (Patterson, 1986).

This scenario shows us that the social and historical contexts of museographic representation are directly tied to processes of colonial expansion, which in turn are related to dynamics of territorial expropriation and structural violence. It is evident, for example, that the history of archaeology in the Caribbean cannot be understood without understanding the role played by the United Fruit Company in determining historical situations throughout the twentieth century. By analyzing the components that allowed the structuring of modern museography, it is possible to conceive of colonialism in its full extension as a civilizing project. In this way, the decolonization of culture implies the decolonization of museums (Hoobler, 2006).

Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2016) rightly explained that the crisis of representation portrayed at the end of the twentieth century by scholars such as J. Clifford and R. Rosaldo (Clifford and Marcus, 1986) assumed that the problem of representation was in the text and not in the colonial order (Gnecco, 2015). In this discordance,

decolonial archaeology appears that does not seek to give the other participation in the construction of the past but instead produces with the other a critical vision of the colonial order (Londoño, 2021). In this way, this archaeology does not seek a better and more collaborative representation of the past or a better historical construction; rather, it seeks to understand the modern processes responsible for ruptures, such as the separation between nature and culture, object and subject, and past and present. As has been shown by various studies, with these separations, it was possible to expropriate native territories to be converted into natural parks (Alonso and Macías, 2014) since the new ecological order is based on the idea of nature without culture.

Space, where it is possible to analyze how colonialism generated the separations between nature and culture and between past and present, would be a border space, a borderland (Aigner-Varoz, 2000), or the geography of the mestizo. In this space, local critiques of the hegemonic forms of representation, of their representation, can converge with academic critiques. This borderland is thus an epistemic place where a critique of modernity is possible, which is one of the dimensions of ethnographic work (Geertz, 1988). Nevertheless, it is also a place of critique of the politics of social movements (Escobar, 2018).

Methodological Design

As stated above, Colombian archeology was built on the idea that the Kogui had nothing to do with the Tairona. At most, as happened in the case of G. Mason, the Kogui would serve to make ethnographic analogies, but nothing more. In the meetings held with Santos Sauna at the University of Magdalena, it was clear that the first task of regional anthropology should be to reject this founding premise. To achieve this goal, Sauna recommended observing what Indigenous people had to say about the various sites that archaeologists called "lost cities" and that biologists and anthropologists called "natural parks." In this sense, it is crucial to understand the meaning given by the Kogui to specific spaces considered archaeological. For this reason, a first component of the methodological

agenda is to tell how the archaeological site called Pueblito Chairama went from being an archaeological park to being a sacred site destined for the education of the Kogui. In this way, exploring the de-archaeologization³ of the landscape is one of the first routes of an ethnography of the Kogui perspective of colonialism. The second component of this agenda is to explore the space for dialogue created in the Indigenous critique of archaeology. This space is a mestizo space, the borderland where there is no pretense of an alternative to modernity, but where modernity is seen through local eyes. That seems to be the methodological route that configures the Kogui Museum of Colonialism.

From archaeological debris to sacred sites

The archaeological agenda in northern Colombia began at the start of the twentieth century with the arrival of explorers who oversaw the expansion of United States agribusiness in Latin America (Londoño, 2020). People interested in the production of coffee, cocoa, and, later and more importantly, bananas, were the first to report archaeological sites and to receive academics who began to document the region (Nicholas, 1901). In these investigations, the primary motivation was to find traces of the ancient Tairona; Spanish chronicles described these tribes as antediluvian warrior giants who opposed the Spanish (Londoño, 2019). In this way, argued early archaeologists such as J. Alden Mason and Gregory Mason, who conducted archaeological research in the Santa Marta region and shed light on the Tairona, it was very likely that the current tribes would create interpretive analogies. When archaeology was institutionalized in Colombia in 1941, questions about the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta revolved around unraveling the Tairona phenomenon (Reichel, 1953).

Against this background, it was clear that anthropology in northern Colombia was not going to pay attention to matters such as the territorial dispossession suffered by Indigenous communities, especially with the modernization of banana production. This process of territorial dispossession, together with union repression, led to the transformation of a peasantry that had owned

³ I designed this concept to name the phenomenon in which local communities, which may be indigenous peoples, recover sites classified by the State as archaeological sites. By retrieving these sites,

removing the nomination of archaeological sites, and giving them another categorization as sacred sites, the phenomenon of de-archaeologization occurs.

communal lands into salaried workers outsourced by companies that provided services to the United Fruit Company (Bucheli, 2005; LeGrand and González, 1983).

Since the agricultural expansion zones included areas along the coastal Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, the Indigenous people began to abandon them and retreated to the middle and upper basins of the rivers that flow toward the coast. When the twentieth century arrived, the Kogui communities had been fragmented between the northern clans, which henceforth inhabited the middle and upper basins of the rivers that flow into the sea, and the southern Kogui, who lived in the river basins in the Ciénaga Grande de Santa Marta (Londoño, 2021). The Indigenous Kogui of the south began to be evangelized by Protestant missionaries who arrived in the region in the 1960s.

As documented in a recent book (Londoño, 2021), when the Colombian state began developing management plans for the pre-Hispanic villages adjacent to the coast of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, especially the villages of the Lost City and Pueblito Chairama, the Kogui organization—the OGT—began to take legal action to prevent these villages from being destroyed, requesting that these areas be returned to management according to local criteria.

A curious fact about this process was that the Kogui Indians related that many of their sanctuaries had been destroyed by archaeologists who considered sites with ceramics and polished quartz rocks, i.e., *tumas*, to be garbage or debris. According to the stories collected in the book mentioned above, the *Mamos* must make offerings at specific sites called *ezuamas*. The *ezuamas* were indicated by marks or signs that reminded human beings, in this case the Kogui, that they must keep the clans and the territory united by making offerings with *tumas* in the *ezuamas*. The spiritual leader makes the offering using the word *zhátekua*, which could be translated as "divination." However, there is no divination of the future, but rather a reading in which the fathers and mothers of life inform the *Mamo* about the actions that the clan must take to resolve either internal issues, such as illnesses or disputes between families, or external conflicts, such as negotiations with multinationals or the government. As Sauna stated in the workshop held at the

University of Magdalena: "One of the first tasks that we must start is the recovery of the *tumas* that are necessary so that the *Mamos* can plant water; with water we can make sure that the birds return and that the weather gets better."

From the perspective of P. Descola (1996; 2001), the ontology of the Kogui could be defined as analogist since humans and nonhumans share interiorities and exteriorities in a network of unifying relationships. Thus, some *ezuamas* honor life principles, such as the separation between water and land, and others make offerings for animals, plants, crops, water, and an infinite number of other things. Therefore, what archaeologists viewed as waste or garbage dumps were *ezuamas* that fulfilled the function of uniting offerings. Some of these *ezuamas* have been abandoned, while others are still in operation; through the Indigenous social movement, the Colombian state came to recognize the importance of the *ezuama* as a cultural right. In this regard, Sauna said: "One of the main tasks for the Indigenous movement is the recovery of sacred sites so that they can be used again according to their functions. We have invested our time in this and achieved some recognition by the state."

With Decree 1500 in 2018, known as the decree of the "black line" (Gómez, 2020), the Indigenous social movement of northern Colombia had tools to make visible their ontology and the way they experience the world. With the consolidation of this arsenal of legal norms, they achieved the closure of three areas of the Tairona National Natural Park to tourism. The main reason for this closure was that these sites, including the village known as Pueblito Chairama, were used for making offerings, i.e., they were *ezuamas*. Almost three hundred other sites located on private land were also recognized; however, the regulation calls only for recognizing the sacred sites, not for a return of the property.

After the decree, Pueblito Chairama citizens identified Teykú, a leader in charge of training the leaders of the surrounding clans. In Kogui mythology, characters such as Teykú helped consolidate a Kogui ethic based on the logic of tributes to the *ezuamas*. Therefore, it is thought that the recovery of Chairama, which was the first case of repatriation of a pre-Hispanic village in South America, would lead to the creation of a school of Indigenous

leaders, in this case of the Kogui. However, the recovery of Teykú allowed reestablishment of the function of the *ezuamas* of that sector, which are fundamental for developing its leadership. About this particular leader, Sauna said: "People have the wrong idea that Teykú is an archaeological site. Teykú is a site for training leaders according to Kogui laws. Our task is that we can educate people about the true history of Teyku."

In the specific case of Teilluna *ezuama*, which is in Teykú, *tumas* are deposited there and collected in other sectors, such as in Palomino to the north or Taganga to the south. By going north or south to look for *tumas*, future leaders establish relationships with the territory, and in each act, they remember and strengthen cultural unity.

Figure 1.

The main avenue in Teykú



Fuente: Wilhelm Londoño Díaz (2018)

The consolidation of Teykú as a training center for Kogui leaders led to the rethinking of the agenda proposed at the beginning of the twentieth century by US academics for the archaeological sites of the coast of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. It became clear through the Indigenous social movement of northern Colombia,

represented by the OGT, that archaeological understandings of these landscapes should be decentered to recognize a network of cultural continuities that the academy had been responsible for denying and dismissing. From this point of view, in 2018, a campaign began to acknowledge that areas such as

Teykú are not archaeological sites but *ezuamas*, sacred sites with a function that must be exercised to maintain balance in the world.

By telling the story of how Teykú stopped being an archaeological site and once again became a pilgrimage site, we satisfied one of the first commitments of the research proposed with Sauna: teaching about why Teykú should stop being an archaeological park and become a kind of Indigenous university.

A tribal museum in the borderland?

In archaeology, it was evident that the collection of artifacts and the excavation of archaeological sites was a parallel process of conservation and exhibition. The English archaeologist David Clarke pointed out several decades ago that archaeology began with the three-age model of the curator of the Royal Museum of Denmark, Christian Jürgensen Thomsen (Clarke, 2014). After decades of accumulating artifacts, Thomsen proposed organizing them according to the temporal criterion given to them. As we can see, the history of archeology is inseparable from the history of museography, and museography is inseparable from colonialism.

In the institutional history of archaeology, it is accepted that museums were institutions designed to house rarities obtained, mainly in the colonies, by the great imperial powers. Thus, the commercialization of Egyptian antiquities in England, Italy and Germany, for example, represented an international competition that took place during a symbolic struggle to exalt imperial power (Barringer and Flynn, 2012). In essence, this exaltation of political power must be made public; thus, the history of museography is the history of access and formation of a public that can understand the materialities exhibited in the museum as proof or a materialization of the evolution of humanity. This thought is present in Indigenous peoples' criticism of museums. Sauna says: "They make us museum objects and stop us in time. We also travel, we also know, and we have a history."

However, for decades now, other types of museums have been taking shape. James Clifford called them tribal or, by a negative definition, nonmetropolitan, places where the narratives of hegemonic history dissolve to give way to chronologies not of modernity (Clifford,

1997). These stagings do not represent a philosophy of history expressed in the supremacy of Europe but expressed in narratives about how colonialism came to interfere with the lives of local communities. These museums speak of fragmentation, resistance, pain, oblivion, and resilience (Gnecco and Hernández, 2010; Onciul, 2015; MacDonald, 2022).

In northern Colombia, the Kogui authorities have been thinking and discussing the need to represent history from a vision that is not centered on the European epic. These processes of self-representation (Whitinui, 2014) involve taking control of anthropological representation. Taking control of the forms of ethnographic representation is necessary since the academy has oscillated in representing the Kogui as remains of the ancient Tairona and eighteenth-century tribes and as ethnographic cultures' evidence of native eco-friendly management of the environment. Some ethnographic importance has been attributed to the Kogui as sources of analogies for interpreting archaeological sites. They have also been represented as ecologists by essence (Ulloa, 2001). In both cases, whether as remnants of historical indigenous people or as evidence of environmentally sustainable cultures, these communities are represented by intermediation in which their contemporary political struggles have no place. Through these political struggles, what is sought is the recovery of territory lost by colonialism to reestablish the logic of tribute in the *ezuamas*. In the southern clans, the situation is different because they are not claiming the recovery of territory to reestablish the logic of *ezuamas*; instead, they are seeking political autonomy, even separate from the interests of the OGT.

For Kogui political cadres, a process of citizenship education is necessary, so there needs to be space for the exchange of knowledge to understand the logic of the *ezuama* and its importance. The issue is not that the Indigenous people have more territory, but that they have the territory that is being destroyed.

Once the Colombian state accepted the existence of the *ezuama* logic, under presidential Decree 1500 of 2018, which stopped tourism to the main square of the Pueblito Chairama village, the Kogui opened a site for tourists called Teykú, which is next to Pueblito Chairama and

connects to the paradisiacal beach of Cabo San Juan. Sauna says about it: "The closure of Teykú should not be understood as a closure to tourists; it is an enclosure so

that the necessary rituals that allow internal harmony and the reestablishment of nature can be carried out."

Figure 2.

Teykú



Fuente: Wilhelm Londoño Díaz (2018)

Despite this, the Kogui have built a Teykú that is accessible to tourists. It is a kind of small Teykú with *ezuamas* and *bohios*. This Teykú functions as a sort of pilgrimage site where tourists can share with Kogui families some of the logic of the *ezuamas* and the role of the Kogui in the contemporary world. Although there is no preestablished script, a visit to Teykú is supposed to allow people to reestablish connections with the

principles of life that are placed on the slabs or monoliths that mark the existence of the *ezuamas*. It could be said that Teykú works like a museum in reverse. People are exhorted to touch the objects, to hear from the *Mamos* the importance of each object for the present, and to maintain balance. This is one of the characteristics of borderland museums, which are willing to produce an encounter with continuity rather than rupture.

Figure 3.
Ancient *ezuamas*



Fuente: Wilhelm Londoño Díaz (2018)

Since the Fathers and Mothers of creation, locally called *Jabas* and *Jates*, left marks for humans to recognize their duties to life, the cultural continuity of the Kogui must be guaranteed through the celebration of tributes with *tumas*. Many of these *ezuamas* also have more general functions, such as serving as a place to consult with deities about how to make decisions and conduct resistance. Thus, when the Kogui and other ethnic groups of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta sought recognition of the *ezuama* as a fundamental part of their ontology, they began to travel through the territory to consult *ezuamas* related to knowledge and tradition; the process was oriented to working with the spiritual authorities of the

northern basins of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, where traditional authority is recognized (Prado, 2018).

When one can attend the *tumas* offerings made at *ezuamas*, one can observe what P. Descola calls "analogism" as a form of ontology (Descola, 2001). According to this ontology, humans and nonhumans are connected by a web of relationships left by *Jates* and *Jabas*. There are signals that the spiritual leaders can read to understand the logic of creation and the tools necessary to maintain the balance of life. In this way, the divination rituals involve great journeys through the territory, offering *tumas*. Since these rituals are public, the logic of tribute generates a series of interclan responsibilities that strengthen the community. In this

way, the tribute of *tumas* nourishes the strength of the social structure and, along with the conservation of *ezuamas*, guarantees the continuity of the culture. About the *tumas* and the *ezuamas*, Sauna said: "If people like you have the opportunity to walk through the territory, they will be able to know the importance of preserving each site. Each site has a function, and maintaining the order of the sites allows us to maintain the order of nature."

It is evident that the *tumas* do not circulate like the bracelets of the Trobriand Islands (Malinowski, 1922), so they are not objects to be exhibited. In contrast, the *tumas* have short cycles that go from their manufacture to their deposition in an *ezuama*. The *ezuamas* are more representative of the alliances and of the contact with the principles of life. Under this logic, the visit to *ezuamas* for divination is also a form of exchange with the clans where the *ezuamas* reside, which generates reciprocity networks. That is why paying tribute in *ezuamas* is the beginning of Kogui life. From a particular perspective, the sword and ax that the *Mamos* have preserved are being treated as *tumas* that have been deposited in *ezuamas*, especially those located in the northern basins of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. In this case, these objects are not there as the result of an offering for a vital principle but are preserved to reestablish a continuity broken by colonialism and perpetuated in museography, such as that of the Gold Museum.

Since the 2010s, several activities developed in northern Colombia have brought together archaeologists attached to critical currents of archaeology in South America (Shepherd, 2016) and Indigenous leaders seeking to decolonize their *ezuamas* so that they are no longer cataloged as archaeological sites. In these meetings, Kogui religious and political authorities, academics, and citizens interested in heritage issues have come together in workshops and meetings to think about the decolonization of *ezuamas*, which means avoiding considering them as archaeological sites. This has implied a de-archaeologization of the mountain sites to address their resacralization. Some of these workshops have been led by the academic staff at the cultural headquarters of the Banco de la República in Santa Marta and have been reviewed by the local journalist Juan José Martínez, who

has a website dedicated to the subject (<http://www.agendasamaria.org/wp/tag/kaggaba/>).

In these workshops, it is becoming clear that *ezuamas* are not archaeological sites but rather sacred sites to make tributes with *tumas*. In this way, the evolutionary logic immersed in the archaeological narratives, which assumes most abandoned villages in the massif are archaeological, is questioned. Contrary to the vision of archaeology, the Kogui believe that the origin of life, of society, came from the separation of the land from the water, and not from the abandonment of the sea as archaeologists who studied the region proposed. Despite this, archaeologists insist that the abandoned villages are Tairona although the Kogui have claimed them as their own territory.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, which took the life of Kogui leader Santos Sauna, several explorers from the National Geographic Society (NatGeo; Georgiou, 2019) traveled the massif using drones to detect lost villages. These nineteenth-century images of archaeological exploration clash directly with local processes that seek to dilute the image of fragmented times proposed by archaeology. As seen in all the publicity generated by NatGeo's explorations, archaeology once again appealed to fragmentations that denied the fact that the Kogui are coeval. Although Kogui guided explorers to these villages and knew their names, the headlines continued to call the sites lost villages in the remote mountains of Colombia.

What makes these images invisible is precisely the process of resistance to colonialism that has been developing since the sixteenth century. Although the *Mamos* do not yet wish to show the weapons they preserved from the conquest campaigns, there is a frontier zone where a critique of traditional archaeology and its forms of fragmentation of time is being developed. From this perspective, this frontier museum does not wish to show a chronological? sequence; in contrast, what it seeks is a kind of restitution of local communities within history, a type of closure of the sutures that are fundamental to colonialism, especially the fragmentation of past and present. About the role of the university in teaching the Kogui cosmogony, Sauna said: "The university has several objectives, but one of them must be to educate about the true function of the *tumas* and the

ezuamas. They can no longer be considered archaeological sites."

These intercultural experiences exhort their participants to generate a rupture with the evolutionary time of modernity; it is not the nation-state that is the pinnacle of civilization, but the nation-state represents the indelible mark of colonialism elevated to an institutional category. Thus, the future implies a return to the past (Fry, 2009) since it is clear that the present, governed by modernity, is based on a race to destroy

ecosystems that are discouraging. Therefore, to go forward, it is necessary to go backward.

Museums in colonial areas, created by local communities that seek to decolonize their representation by hegemonic discourses, do not seek a return to pristine or pre-state conditions. In contrast, what they seek is to heal the wounds left by colonialism, especially concerning the environmental disasters that have been generated since the sixteenth century. In this way, these museums are contemporary and forward-looking insofar as their primary motivation is to heal life.

Figure 4.

Mama Rumualdo, lecturing some students



Fuente: Wilhelm Londoño Díaz (2018)

In the borderland, these museums appear without objects, without walls, and without windows (like Teykú), where there is a teaching that revolves around the critique of modernity; questioning as a metanarrative gives order to the time in which we find ourselves. In a more profound sense, these artifacts that emerge from these frontier contexts are perhaps not museums, or perhaps they are one of Taussig's type; in this case, not a museum of cocaine, but a museum of colonialism where archeology is exhibited as antiquity.

Discussion

For decades, there has been a call for the existence of the borderland as a space for political and epistemological construction. In the borderland, the traditional categories, or their nature, are diluted. In this sense, the hegemonic narratives of the past are discussed and put into crisis to give way to local epistemological formations. In relation to the Colombian Caribbean, the colonial regime meant not only the conquest of territory but also the implantation of a cultural and historical logic. For this reason, the historical narrative about the Colombian Caribbean, built from the hegemony of the Andean academy, is unsustainable. In the colonial world that was founded, local epistemologies began to be judged and persecuted in such a way that a first breach was generated in the social constitution. As Taussig outlined, the Gold Museum in Colombia functioned as an artifact that represents the appreciation of the colonial regime through the gold of the Indians, not as Indigenous art, but for the richness of the colonial relationship in which subjection is the condition of wealth generation. Therefore, colonial culture is based on that separation, which is both a judgment and a temporal and cultural position at the same time. The other, the one who is not situated in the eye of the colonial vision, which is also represented as white and civilized, is situated in the past and is the reason for underdevelopment; this population is the object of intervention. Thus, the other is something of the past, which is why it must be kept in a museum of buried rarities, in the suture that Taussig identifies. In contrast to this schematization that subsumes the other in a slot that distances him or her temporarily and culturally, local museums, which are closed, exist in sacred landscapes that seek a closure of that suture and

that even call for a sensible description of history. For example, from the Kogui perspective, the arrival of the Spanish cannot be perceived as an indisputable act of rupture. The arrival of the Spanish ships in the Bay of Gaira was the beginning of the process of linking their territory to the demands of metropolises located beyond the sea. However, this did not mean the end of the clans even though it did mean the suffering of humiliation, such as the theft of coastal lands and the pressure to migrate to higher altitudes. As Sauna mentioned: "The story should be told in another way. The Kogui did not end in the eighteenth century as archaeologists say. The Kogui began to resist in the sixteenth century, which is different."

It must be understood that these ideas are described by the Kogui themselves in their publications, and they were reiterated in the meetings I held with Kogui leaders when conducting this research, mainly with Santos Sauna. The panorama described by the Kogui seems to indicate that in the face of the massacres of the third decade of the sixteenth century, which led to the extermination of villages at the base of the mountains, and later in the campaigns throughout the sixteenth century that led to colonial control over the fertile lands of the coast, the communities established protection mechanisms such as settling in the middle and upper basins and ceding territorial control of the coast. While it is true that there is internal diversity among the Kogui, which is expressed in the political tensions between the organizations of the north and the south, it is more than evident that there is an oral tradition of the conquest that has simply been ignored. This oral tradition even involves the preservation of sixteenth-century colonial artifacts, which must be acknowledged in a sensible historical review. Until now, official Colombian history has indicated that the Taironas were the chiefdoms that the Spanish encountered and that they were defeated during the initial phases of the conquest. Similarly, it is accepted that the Kogui preserved some traditions of these groups, but that they are essentially different communities. This rupture is a function of hegemonic history that is exalted in institutions such as the Gold Museum. Thus, the borderland museum of the sword and ax challenges that hegemonic narrative and renews the representation of

history with a devastating critique of traditional archeology and its historical misinterpretation.

Author contributions

Wilhelm Londoño Díaz: Information collection, article writing and pictures.

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