

FRENCH TWIST

THE GENTLE WAYS OF
THE KOGI ARE USED
TO ENLIGHTEN PARIS
SOPHISTICATES



BATTLEGROUND

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CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL
LEGACY OF KILLDEER
MOUNTAIN



Indian Country

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The Kogis are guided by their spiritual leaders, the Mamos.

THE LIGHT FROM DARKNESS

The Kogi are fighting to preserve their ancient wisdom, and are eager to share it

BY DOMINIQUE GODRÈCHE

ERIC JULIEN



awaited help from below. “Five Mamos [spiritual leaders] applied *cataplasms*, [a medical dressing,] and bathed me in the icy river, which was what had to be done—it contracts the tissues. They have an incredible knowledge of healing.”

The Kogi consider themselves the “elder brothers” of humanity—which is not that farfetched since they are known to be the last surviving civilization from the world of the Inca and Aztec peoples. Their spiritual leaders—the Mamos—go through an extraordinary

social world of the Kogis, to take on his responsibility as a Mamo. He says the “young Mamos are incredibly gentle, and well-adapted: sociable, aware of others needs, and do not show any sign of isolation or strangeness.” Once they are done with their training, Mamos lead a normal life with a companion—they have children, and move around the valley searching for plants to use in rituals, and to solve conflicts.

Mamos women, called *sagas*, follow the same training, but in the company of women. They are not officially

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tutelage: They live in complete darkness for the first 18 years of their lives—some even wear masks at night to shield themselves from the moon’s reflected light. Living in total darkness for 18 years—never seeing sunlight, even for a few moments—the apprentice lives in total symbiosis with his teacher, never meeting any one else for 18 years.

Future Mamos are trained from about 6 months old until 18 years old, with the same teacher and a helper, who brings them food. They sleep by day, and study by night. Until they are 6 years old, disciples merely live with their teachers, with no specific teaching. From the ages of 6 to 9, they learn general topics; and from 9 on, they “discover the animals, the trees, the clouds....” During this time they are taught to communicate with *Aluma*—the governing force of the world.

Julien says the disciples come out of this state of “virginity” directly into the

Mamos, and they do not introduce themselves as such, though every one in the communities knows who they are. Working as the village doctors and judges, they regulate conflicts, and see that every one has a role in the community, and gets what he or she needs. Because they help the community, their food is taken care of.

For obvious reasons, Julien has felt indebted to the Kogi for the past 25 years and hasn’t stopped repaying them. In 1997, he started Tchendukua, a foundation that searches the globe for stolen Kogi ritual objects, which he purchases and returns to the indigenous community. He also repurchases the tribe’s ancestral land whenever he can—around 9,000 acres to date. Julien does this so that the Kogis may continue to farm, preserve their traditions and worship in their sacred places.

Twenty-five years ago, French climber and geographer Eric Julien was rescued by the Kogis while trekking in the heart of the Sierra Nevada of Santa Marta, Colombia—the highest coastal mountain range in the world. He had a pulmonary edema, an abnormal buildup of fluid in the lung’s air sacs that causes shortness of breath.

“They found me in pain and brought me to a village, where they kept me for nine days,” Julien says, while they



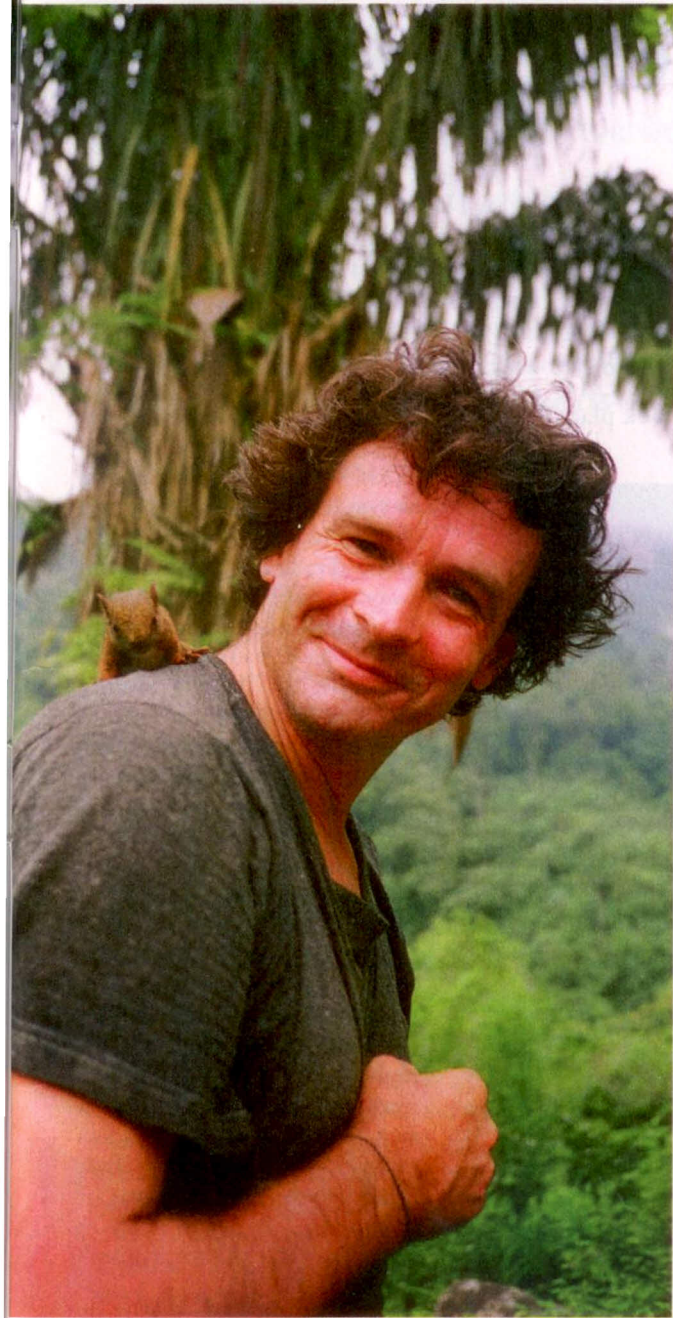
Mamo Gabriel, left and Juan, brought some of their ancient wisdom to Paris last year.

Through Tchendukua the Kogis have been able to grow the cotton to weave their clothes and to grow the plants the Mamos use for their medicine.

Toward the end of 2012, Juan, a Kogi leader and Jose Gabriel a Mamo, were brought to Paris by a French ecological movement, Nature Paris, and Julien's foundation to meet politicians, business leaders and everyday Parisians. They

participated in a series of discussions in an effort to share some of their ancient knowledge with the French, offering them new perspectives on ecology, social interactions and nonviolent ways of dealing with conflicts. The Kogis approach to conflict is based on collective meditation sessions and discussions under the guidance of their Mamos. Struck by this unique approach, Julien decided

to teach the basic principles of their wisdom in France, at its most prominent business school, and give examples of conflict-resolutions inspired by the Kogis concepts. "Kogis, when they meet, express their feelings, emotions and anger through verbalization, with an in-depth and global approach," he explains. "If two Kogis disagree, they are put aside to work on their conflict, and they stay



Julien is helping the Kogis buy back ancestral lands.

visions," Julien says.

"These traditional societies, the so-called 'invisible,' are seen only when we launch enterprises on their lands," explains Julien about the French perception of the indigenous communities in South America. "That is why I wanted to bring them to Paris; they are so in tune with the world that their message can benefit our modern so-

crowded by drug dealers, deforestation policies and tourism projects.

The 20,000 Kogis scattered throughout the Sierra Madre claim to be descendants of the Tairona, an indigenous civilization that thrived before the Spanish conquest. Today they live 200 residents per village with each one constantly threatened. "There is a lot of violence.... We have lost many people, and it goes on," Juan says. "We live in the middle of a conflict. But we resist with our spiritual work. Despite the government's pressure we have maintained our leadership."

The government wants the Kogi to

"They are so in tune with the world that their message can benefit our modern societies."

cieties. They helped me to not be totally stupid. Their vision saved my life; I created a school, inspired by the Kogis, where we teach permaculture, an agricultural approach associating different vegetables, according to various altitudes, and the way they match."

Kogis will always grow beans first, as that fixes phosphate in the soil and feeds the earth; then they will plant yucca, bananas, etc. They respect the earth's health, and

abandon their culture and to build schools. They are also besieged by the evangelists, trying to "save" them.

Juan considers the reacquisition of the Kogi's original lands—with Julien's help—as their most important mission. "The earth, the defense of our territory, is essential," he explains. "Without it we cannot live. The multinationals want [our land], and we have to defend it so that the woods, the animals and the health remain, because all human beings depend on mother nature. Getting back our land is the major issue. Eric understands the importance of the Sierra, not only for us, but for everybody."

To the Kogi, the land is a living organism—much like the human body—and they believe that harming the earth is hurting humans. "They believe that we are part of the living—like trees or birds—not more important," Julien explains. "And if we do not respect the land we put ourselves in danger. That is why they do not understand why we hurt nature." 🌿

together until they solve it—digging up the roots of their problem.

"The Kogi have a unique ability to communicate, to share, and they have a respect for life, which is the only way to survive. And that can be applied to big enterprises: When there is no space to share, no dialogue, it creates suffering. The participants of those workshops expressed a real recognition for the Kogi's

have a global perspective on agriculture, trying to optimize the process."

The Kogis attracted a large audience in Paris, and while touring France, Juan and Jose shared their visions on the future of the Earth, emphasizing their own challenge of surviving in a hostile environment—armed leftist guerrillas hide nearby to escape army helicopters. The Kogis are also being