

## Chapter 3: Children of water

### **El agua, madre creadora**

Para los guambianos:

*"Primero era la tierra y las lagunas... grandes lagunas. La mayor de todas era la de Piendamú, en el centro de la sabana, del páramo; como una matriz, como un corazón. El agua es vida. Primero era la tierra y el agua. El agua no es buena ni es mala; de ella resultan cosas buenas y cosas malas. El agua es vida, nace en las cabeceras y baja en los ríos hasta el mar y se devuelve, pero no por los mismos ríos, sino por el aire por la nube. Allá arriba con la tierra y el agua, estaba él-ella. Era el pishimisak, que también ha existido desde siempre: todo blanco, todo bueno, todo fresco. Del agua nació el arco iris que alumbraba todo con su luz; allí brillaba, el pishimisak lo veía alumbrar. Dieron mucho fruto, dieron mucha vida. El agua estaba arriba, en el páramo. Abajo se secaban las plantas, se caían las flores, morían los animales. Cuando bajó el agua todo creció y floreció; retoñó toda la hierba y hubo alimentos aquí. Era el agua buena. Antes en las sabanas del páramo, el pishimisak tenía todas las comidas, todos los alimentos, él-ella, es el dueño de todo. Ya estaba allí cuando se produjeron los derrumbes que, arrastrando gigantescas piedras, formaron las guaicadas ...*

*Pero hubo otros derrumbes. A veces el agua no nacía en las lagunas, para correr hacia el mar, sino que se filtraba en la tierra, la removía, la aflojaba y entonces caían los derrumbes. Estos se produjeron desde muchos siglos adelante, dejando grandes heridas en las montañas. De ellos salieron los humanos que eran la raíz de los nativos. Al derrumbe le decían pikuk, es decir, parir el agua. A los humanos que allí nacieron los nombraron los pishau. Los pishau vinieron de los derrumbes. Llegaron en las crecientes de los ríos. Por debajo del agua venían arrastrándose y golpeando las grandes piedras. Por encima de ellas, venían el barro, la tierra; luego el agua sucia. En la superficie venía la palizada: ramas, las hojas, los árboles arrancados y, encima de todo, venían los niños, chumbados. Los anteriores nacieron del agua, venían en los restos de vegetación (shau) que arrastra la creciente. Son nativos de aquí, de siglos y siglos. En donde salía el derrumbe, en la gran herida de la tierra, quedaba olor a sangre. Es la sangre regada por la naturaleza, así como una mujer riega su sangre al dar luz a un niño. Los pishau no eran otra gente, eran los mismos guambianos, gigantes muy sabios, que comían sal de aquí, de nuestros propios salados y no eran bautizados. Ellos ocuparon todo nuestro territorio, ellos construyeron nuestro nupirrapu, antes de llegar los españoles. Era grande nuestra tierra y muy rica. En ellas teníamos minas de minerales muy valiosos, como el oro que se encontraba en Chisquío, en San José y en Corrales. También maderas finas, peces, animales del monte y muchos otros recursos, que sabíamos utilizar con nuestro trabajo para vivir bien. Grande, hermosos y rico era nuestro territorio. Los españoles lo fueron quitando, recortando nuestro derecho, hasta arrinconarnos en este corral de hoy: el resguardo" (Cabildo del Pueblo Guambiano 1994:17-19.*

*Excerpt from Dangers of Menstruation (Lucie Vinsova)*

...As you know, I come from the settlement behind this high mountain range scattered with fraylejones fields. My husband, who used to be a respected musician from this commune, met me at one of the celebrations, and since then I have lived here with his family. And the thing I'm going to tell you about I saw with my own eyes when I was young! In the house of my older cousin it was. His sister, who was very young at that time, didn't say that her days had come and went to páramos. When she was looking after her family's herd of cattle, a few young bulls wandered off to places where the girl had never been before, and when she went to look for them, she appeared by a beautiful lake. Strange tiredness overcame on her, and she lay down to rest for a while by the melodiously splashing ripples. When she woke up, it was already late, so she herded the cattle hastily towards home. But the worst thing was that she didn't say a word about her experience or about her menstruation to anyone. How foolish and irresponsible she was! And unnoticed, the days grew into months.

After a couple of months, she started experiencing strange and intense pains in her belly. And her belly started growing as if she was pregnant! The sharp looks of her neighbours were cutting though her child-like innocence, but she was persistently declaring that she hadn't even looked at any boy. About five or six months after that happened, her brother, my cousin, came running into our house in alarm screaming for help, saying that his sister was in labour! Evening was already falling. I was immediately sent to fetch the shaman.

When we came into my cousin's house, the girl was already unconscious. Her mother was crying, preparing the shaman's jigra: "How many measures of herbs do you need? How much money? I'll give you everything to save my daughter!" She exclaimed. "I think that my daughter could have been impregnated by a páramo spirit, duende!" And she told him the story. And the shaman stood in the door, the news obviously shocked him, and after a while he bellowed: "How is it possible that you didn't call for me earlier? Yes, it must be a duende! This contamination is so great that it can affect the whole community. We are all in danger! Call also the midwife!" And he quickly ran to see the girl who was just at that point giving birth.

She was screaming, lying on the floor in a dark room. She regained consciousness and was in much pain. We all were scared standing there in the darkness, not knowing what to do. Luckily the shaman started his work. And then we suddenly heard strange, disgusting noises. Like croaking, squeaking and hissing. And the shaman lit a candle, and we were staring in horror at the scene in front of us. In the puddle of blood, there were five or six things writhing and crawling frantically. One of them looked like a lizard, other like a bloated toad and another one like a hairless, blistered mouse... and the other things that were there looked more like formless cocoons of limbs and hairs. They were all moving and making sounds, and when they saw the light of the candle, it apparently startled them, and they started crawling back towards the poor girl's vagina. At this point, the girl was just silently crying, saying her goodbyes to the world.

And then our shaman saved us all! He ordered us to make fire in the corner of the room and immediately burn all those things in it. We started

chasing them and looking for them around the room, for each of them headed for some dark place to hide. But we caught them all and threw them into the fire. I'll never forget how they screeched and hissed while their flesh was burning in the flames. Then also the midwife arrived and took care of the poor girl.

The next day, when we inspected the ashes, we didn't find anything unusual. The creatures all burnt without a trace. All the duende's children left our world and became spirits again. But there were many a cleansing ritual needed before all the contamination was eradicated from the house and all its inhabitants. Then nobody thought of how much this or that would cost, everybody was happy to save their own skin! So don't take these things too lightly! This is not a legend or a story... this is reality, something that really happened in our community...