Ideology And Structure Of Gender Spaces: The Case Of The Kaggaba Indians

Augusto Oyuela-Caycedo

INTRODUCTION

The everyday life and sexual division of labor of the Kaggaba, an indigenous Colombian group, are expressed in their dwellings, ceremonial spaces, and settlement patterns. Activity areas and use of space are explicitly demarcated. For example, in a household a husband lives in a separate dwelling from his wife and children. A female never goes inside the male dwelling, while a man does not enter the female’s. A wife takes care of the children and cooks meals inside her dwelling. When the food is ready, she takes it to her husband, but does not eat with him; she returns to the dwelling.

The objects found inside a female dwelling include the pots that are used for cooking, perishable Cucurbita vessels for carrying and storing water, different types of maguary-fiber sacks hanging on the walls, and a leather skin on the floor where she sleeps with her children. The hearth is near the center of the hut. A male dwelling has some pots inside which are different shapes than the women’s pots and are used to toast coca leaves and to cook Ambil (tobacco essence), and in some cases he has a ceramic container for guaraná (cane beer). The sacks that he has are similar in size and shape to those made of maguary which are used for carrying but he also has some made of cotton. Additionally, a maguary hammock, central hearth and a wooden stool or two complete the inventory.

This pattern (model 1) is of the farm but it also occurs in the villages, where the Kaggaba make periodic visits. A typical Kaggaba family has a minimum of two or three plots or farms located at different altitudes. Throughout the agricultural/astronomical year each family moves from plot to plot (Reichel 1985; Mayr 1987).

Sex roles in traditional families have been supported by the differential use of household space. The separation is sanctioned through pollution beliefs (see Reichel 1976:271, 276; 1978:5 and Rapaport 1979:134-137), focusing on menstruation and sexual activity.

Kaggaba villages are uninhabited except for ceremonial meetings or when a Kaggaba family is in need of confession or consultation with the local priest (Mána), who temporarily moves to the village when needed. When the family visits the village, a man sleeps and pursues many of his interests inside the men’s temple. In contrast, the woman busies herself with domestic activities. As on the farm, there are areas of common activities. The spaces between dwellings are the zones for meeting during festivals. However, the existence of this intermediate space is well-defined and does not overlap with the gender spaces.

Traditionally, there have been two kinds of authority among the Kaggaba. The chief or Maki has almost disappeared as an institution of power. The priest or Mána wields considerable power to this day (Preuss 1967:79; 1931; Reichel 1985:137).

THE STRUCTURE

The common spatial structure found at the farm (model 1), the religious hamlet (model 2), the village (model 3), or the whole valley (model 4, see figures 1a-2b), is the manifestation of group ideology in its material products (see Miller and Tilley 1984:14). The mechanical structure of equilibrium or agreement is the essence of the spatial structure. In other words the opposition of forces (+ and -) occurs at all levels of the structure but has a common intermediate space where they may interact (+ -). This opposition is that of the sacred (+) and profane (-), the pure (+) and polluted (-), male (+) and female (-). In this cognized model, the existence of an intermediate state is considered to be an integration of opposites between the masters and individuals, where the thinker (the Mána) is the balancing force of the universe. In this sense the structure is neither
Figure 1.
Spatial structure on the farm and in the religious hamlet.
MODEL 3

Place of Slaughter

(-)

Female Temple

Divination Place

Male Temple

Model Village

Figure 2a

to the lowlands

Catholic church, Prison, Goverment building

Native buildings

Model Village

to the uplands

MODEL 4

Symbolic and Spatial Organization of a hypothetical single valley system

Frontier
Colombians Diseases Catholic

Lowland

Middle

Religious Hamlet

Village

Upland

Religious Hamlet

The land of health

Health Knowledge Order

The Mother

Figure 2b

Increasing altitude

Figure 2b

Spatial structure in the village and in the valley.
dialectic nor dual; instead it is a regulatory structure of equilibrium (see Rappaport 1971:65; 1979:233) as described in the mythology, in the cosmological vision of the world, and in the rituals practiced by the Mâma. These oppositions are complementary forces which are expressed in an harmonic relationship of equilibrium or "being in harmony," called Yuluka in the Kaggaba (Kogian) language. This ideological regulatory structure is active in the everyday life of the individual and embedded in the structure of space described above. The Mâmas have the function of maintaining the equilibrium of these forces that act in their universe.

THE IDEOLOGICAL PURPOSE OF YULUKA AND OF THE STRUCTURE: THE MÂMA SANCTIFICATION.

The forthcoming is an explanation for the cultural reasons for the development and maintenance of an ideological principle (Yuluka) and concrete spatial structure expressed in the sexual division of space.

The relationship of the religious hamlets (+) of the uplands versus the profane villages (-) of the lowlands and the intermediate villages, which have both a sacred hamlet (+) and a profane village (-), is illustrated in model 4 (Figure 2b). In this model the regulatory mechanisms are active to isolate spatially the individual from the pollution of the lowlands. From this perspective, the existence of different dwellings for each gender is part of the religious effort to preserve the upland as a sacred place or to sanctify it as such. The upland is the place where the centers of learning and transmission of the "Mother Laws" occur, for in the uplands near the snow and sacred lakes is where the ancestors and the masers live. In addition, the uplands are where the most prestigious Mâmas live.

The function of the Mâma is to preserve the equilibrium between the different forces of the universe through offerings and rituals associated with each of the masters of the forest, streams and rains, animals, and others. The Mâma has to resolve the conflicts between individuals and discover the cause of diseases, putting chaos in order. After a confession and regular offerings, which depend upon the offense, the Mâma is then able to re-establish equilibrium for the penitent.

The Kaggaba priest is the transmitter of knowledge, and he is the only one who can learn the "Mother Laws" (the ultimate sacred propositions, Rappaport 1971b); he is thinker and philosopher.

In this hierarchical altitudinal environment a differential control of knowledge exists which is the basis of the subordination of women to men, and at the same time of low ranked men to the Mâma (see Rappaport 1979:135). Knowledge is the main factor in the prestige and rank given to a male or kin group. Sacred knowledge can be acquired in two ways. The first is through descent from a priest. In this case the oldest son of the priest's sister is the most likely candidate (see Reichel 1976). The other way to acquire knowledge for an individual without a kinship connection to the priest is, at present, through payments of goods, work, or cash to the Mâma. These individuals are ranked below those with kinship ties to the priest. It is not obligatory that the individual train for the priesthood; however, if an individual wishes to be competent in knowledge, he must study throughout his life with different priests. Each Mâma is a specialist in some aspect of the knowledge, astronomy, mortuary practice, cosmology, or the practical world (flora, fauna, dances, music), but no one masters the total domain of knowledge. This differential comprehension of the knowledge accounts for the competitions and ranking between the priests.

Sacred knowledge has important links to kinship which was probably more strongly emphasized in the past. Descent is traced independently through a gender classificatory system. The general classificatory system for males is called Tuxe and for females is Dake. The Tuxe and Dake have a territorial definition which is related to the birthplaces of the sons and grandsons of the Universal Mother. The status differences of the lineages are determined by how closely the individual is related to lines of important mythical fathers. The high ranking lineages have relationships to the religious hamlets or to family temples (Reichel 1985:155-201).

Inequality of knowledge is the basis for the perpetuation of power around some families, and is what sanctifies them. In this context the Yuluka concept is seen to operate with an altitudinal component. For instance the perpetuation of power as demonstrated in the separation of gender spaces is less marked in the lowlands but strongly sustained in the highlands where maintaining such differences is more important. Beside justifying the role of
Mána and consequently certain families, the altitude-nally increasing gender separation has other purposes in parts of the system which regulate the adaptability of the group.

THE DEMOGRAPHIC PURPOSE OF THE SPATIAL STRUCTURE

As a cultural strategy, the strong separation of spaces appears to stop population growth. The purpose of the structure as a regulatory mechanism was developed through its sanctification by the ideological principle of Yuiuka. In that way the physical separation by gender functions as an adaptive strategy (see Rappaport 1976).

The environment which the Kaggaba occupy is agriculturally poor. For instance the lands where the Kaggaba live are classified as having soils which are not appropriate for agriculture (Instituto Geográfico “Agustín Codazzi” 1973; see also Van der Hammen and Ruiz 1986). Today nearly 6,000 individuals are distributed over an area where approximately 90 percent of the land has slopes with angles up to 45 degrees. During the sixteenth century the population density was greater, as indicated by ethnohistorical and regional archaeological studies (Bischof 1971; Reichel 1953; Herrera 1985; Oyauela 1989). In the past the carrying capacity of the land was increased through the use of technologies such as terracing of slopes and through regional specialization, practices which no longer occur.

Archaeological research (Herrera de Turbay 1985; Van der Hammen 1986) conducted in the last few years shows that the villages of the Upper Buritaca Valley (above an altitude of 500 metres) were products of a late colonization that began around the eighth or ninth century. At the time of the conquest all of the valleys were densely populated with terrace agriculture in evidence. The reason for this colonization of lands not exploited before can be understood in terms of circumcision, as explained by Carniero (1970). The restriction of the chieftdoms in the lowlands was due to geographic barriers and hostile neighboring groups. The only available unpopulated areas were the upper lands of the Sierra. After the fifth century, a rapid population growth, the cause of which is not clear, resulted in the colonization of the forest lands and the development of a terracing technology as well as the formation of complex chieftdoms.

In theory the increasing pressure of demographic growth could have resulted in the development of various controlling mechanisms, one of which was the sexual separation of houses. This separation could have been implemented through a process of sanctification of pollution, where sex or any contact of males with females is not compatible with knowledge or the process of learning the sacred knowledge. Even today the Kaggaba state this as a fact.

The stabilization of demographic growth is successful today. The restriction of Kaggaba existence is not the same now as in the sixteenth century. Today their territory is surrounded by the pressure of “occidental culture.” The Kaggaba’s political organization is religious in nature and does not have the interest in technologies which would increase the carrying capacity of the territory because in the process it would reduce the power of the priests. As Rappaport (1979:165) put it: “What is highly sanctified is resistant to change and to oversanctify the specific and material is to reduce adaptive flexibility.”

In synthesis, during the sixteenth century the organization of labor and the political structure was more secular than religious (Bischof 1971), the latter functioning as a justification of power. Since then, the political change has been from complex chieftdoms to a kind of theocratic regional organization. This theocratic organization is in a process of restructuralization where the gender separation of space is still useful in maintaining the population below the carrying capacity of the environment and in preserving the priestly organization.

ORIGIN OF THE STRUCTURE

Archaeology has found evidence of a high density of settlements in different valleys of the northern slope of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta (Sere 1984, Cadavid and Herrera 1985). Two examples of urban sites are Puebloito and Ciudad Perdida. In general the urban sites are surrounded by towns and small villages that were connected to the urban center of a valley by stone roads (Oyauela 1986, 1987a, 1987b). The urban center functioned as an economic focus for the distribution and redistribution of different products. Furthermore, this primary center exchanged products with other regions. The settlement pattern of a village shows clusters of
terraces where, at one time, two or more houses were grouped to form a compound. Normally, each circle had been interpreted as a single one-family household. This interpretation, in fact, contrasts with both the ethnographic and ethnohistorical evidence which suggests that one family may have occupied at least two such circles, as male and female dwelling spaces (cf. Reichel 1951, 1954; Serje 1984).

At the time of the Spanish conquest, the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta was known as a rich area. The Spaniards (Simon 1981; Restrepo 1975) describe three principal cities: Taironaca, Posigueca, and Bondia. Each of these cities had districts or suburbs with a sub-chief that depended on the principal Cacique. One chronicle, written in 1625 by Father Pedro Simón (1981), gives interesting information about a village that was different from all of the others. This was a religious center located in a cold highland valley. The name of this village was “Pueblo del Mohan” or “Nueva Roma” (Sorcerer’s Village or New Rome). This village was regularly visited by the Indians and each group had its own temple there.

The political organization that the Spanish found reflects tiers of complex chiefdoms, each one having relative freedom in making decisions. Sometimes they made temporary alliances with neighboring chiefdoms. The information given by the chroniclers about social structure is sparse. They mention merchants, craftsmen, and a large working population dedicated to agriculture. Concerning the upper rank levels, they mention captains, secondary chiefs, and principal chiefs, and, in some zones, they make reference to a superior authority called Naoma. The ethnohistorical studies suggest that the Naoma was a priest. However, it is not clear how this social structure functioned (see Reichel 1951:88-89; Bischof 1971:301-504).

The effect of Spanish domination was the partial destruction of Indian organization at social, political, economic, and demographic levels. However, the ethnohistorical study made by Henning Bischof (1971) demonstrates that the process of domination was never complete.

Spanish control was limited to the lowlands, especially near the port of Santa Marta and La Nueva Salamanca de la Ramada. With control of the coast and lowlands, the conquistadors interrupted the vertical circulation of products like salt, fish, and cotton. Furthermore, the state of war and new diseases reduced the population of the area. All of the cultural systems collapsed. In less than a hundred years, cities, villages, and hamlets lost their economic, political, and social unity. After the sixteenth century, the Spanish port of Santa Marta lost economic importance and came to be a poor city isolated from the main trade routes (Restrepo 1975:291). The Indian population that survived was enslaved and labored in the small Spanish farms around Santa Marta and La Ramada (Dibulla). Only a small population composed of members of different chiefdoms found refuge in the isolated uplands of the Sierra Nevada, far away from the conquest, but not far enough; one century later Catholic proselytization continued the process of domination.

In 1745 a chronicle written by Nicolás de la Rosa (1975) gives the first information about the use of space among the Indians of the uplands. The description concerning farms is very poor. However, he does make reference to the sexual division of space. He indicates that an individual never goes inside a house belonging to a member of the opposite sex; food is served in a place between the houses, where often there is a rock which may be used as a table. De la Rosa gives an interesting explanation of this sexual division of houses. He states that the Indians believe if they have sexual relations inside a house, the children will be born blind. Following de la Rosa’s publication, almost every traveler who visited the Sierra mentions the gender division of houses (see Siavers [1886] 1986:6-7; Caledon 1886; Nicholas 1901:638-639; Bretteis 1903; Mason 1926:35). However, it is interesting that this pattern existed until a few years ago among the Ijka neighbors of the Kaggaba (see Bolinder [1925] 1966; Knowlton 1944:264-265). This could mean that the pattern was common to many of the different Sierra Indians groups.

The Catholic Church, under the direction of Father Romero (1955) at the end of the seventeenth century, began a program of conversion and founded a number of villages. Traditional Indian temples were destroyed (Bischof 1972). Gradually, the village space was transformed following the spatial structure described before (model 3). Kaggaba temples were constructed opposite to the Catholic Church. It was again the balancing of the profane and the
sacred, the sacred places being the circular temples and the site for ceremonial divination and the profane being the Catholic Church.

As Reichel indicates (1975), different temples exist for each gender. Female temples are small in comparison to male temples. Another space that has sacred connotation is the zone for divination. This is a male space and is near the temples but outside the village and is formed by a group of natural rocks. None of these settlements have permanent populations and are only used for short periods, mainly for meetings or confessions.

In synthesis, the spatial structure re-established in the Catholic founded villages is a response to what the Kaggaba consider an imposition. Where secular rituals (-) were practised, the construction of an opposing section of the village consisting of Kaggaba temples and circular houses was formed. These areas for religious rituals (+) were developed to balance the negative forces of the Catholic secular rituals as perceived by the rituals Kaggaba. The distinction between secular and religious rituals is meaningful in that the semantic content of the Catholic ritual has no meaning to the Kaggaba except for that of submission. On the other hand, the Kaggaba ritual contents do have meaning (see Rappaport 1971a:66-73, 1971b).

In contrast to Catholic villages, smaller Kaggaba hamlets, with names in Kogian, function as religious centers today and their foundations are clearly linked to specific highly ranked lineages. Romero in 1693 and de la Rosa in 1745 mention that isolated temples (canzamarías) existed in the uplands. De la Rosa (1975) states that each rich man has his own canzamaría. These religious, sacred hamlets are the intellectual centers of the Kaggaba world. They are very important in the celebration of religious rituals involving participation by virtually all of the residents of a valley. People from all altitudes bring their crop surplus to give to the Míná or his assistants. Each hamlet has developed its ritual activities in honor of specific lord(s), using specific paraphernalia. However, the ritual calendar of the pilgrimage is not well known, nor is it clear which lords or masters are being celebrated; this uncertainty is due to the sacred nature of these activities which makes outsider participation almost impossible.

CONCLUSION

The spatial structure described above has different transformations in its material expression (figure 1a-2b) depending on place and altitude. The gender separation of houses (model 1) may be a result of demographic pressure either before or after the conquest (cf. Gelber 1986:93-175). Because ethnohistorical and ethnographic sources have only recently been considered for this kind of research problem, these issues have not been tested archaeologically. Ethnohistorically, the structure of cultural division of labor (male house-female house) has existed at least since the early eighteenth century (see de la Rosa 1975).

The origin of the religious hamlet (model 2) is probably prehispanic as indicated by the case of the Village of the Sorcerers (see Romero 1955; Bishop 1972). However, until now no archaeological or evidence of settlements of that kind in the uplands of the Sierra has been found. The process of formation of these sacred hamlets may have been based on the increasing need for the ritual sanctification of certain persons and institutions (Rappaport 1971b:38-39; Drennan 1976). Seventeenth century chronicles (de la Rosa 1975) note their historical existence, while mythical origins (Preuss 1967) suggest that the religious hamlets are the result of a migration from the Palomino River to isolated areas of the uplands.

The villages of Catholic foundation have had fluctuating roles since their founding. This has occurred because the Catholic presence in the area has not been historically constant. The spatial structure (model 3) was not consolidated until the beginning of this century as a result of the process of cultural revitalization that characterizes the Kaggaba today.

The valley model (model 4) may not have any relation to the chiefdoms that existed in the Sierra before the conquest. The origin of this spatial model seems to be very closely related with model 3 in that it appears to be a mechanism of adaptation to changing external pressures.

The transformation of the spatial structure shows evolutionary flexibility due to a non-material ideology, which in this case is religion. The ideology has permitted the survival of a population and its theocratic power through almost 500 hundred years of foreign pressure. The existence of gender structures as described above seems to be useful in un-
understanding the base of power in theocratic chiefdoms and its relation to populations. In this way the evolutionary study of gender roles and religion is important for an understanding of the process of cultural change in the archaeological past and of the present condition of societies.

Acknowledgments. The presentation of this paper during the 22nd Annual Chacmool Conference was supported by the Latin American Center of the University of Pittsburgh. Hopefully, the data and final results of the settlement pattern study of the Kaggaba will be published in the near future after another season of field work. Thanks to my friends and research colleagues of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta: Juan Mayr for introducing me to the Kaggaba community, Katherina Bernhard for sharing her data on the forbidden female space, Manuela Fischer for her constant rich discussions, and Carlos Uribe Tobon for his differing view of what the Kaggaba are. None of these colleagues and friends are responsible for the mistakes of my reductionistic explanations of the Kaggaba world as seen as an archaeologist. The preparation of the manuscript was possible with the invaluable assistance of Dr. James Rost, Dr. Andrew J. Strathern, Dr. Carlos Uribe, Jack A. Wolford, Gabrielle Sturzenhofer and Renee Bonzani.

REFERENCES

Bischof, Henning

Bolinder, Gustaf.

Breth, Joseph de.

Cadavid, Gilberto and Herrera de Turbay, Luisa F.
1985 Manifestaciones culturales en el area tairona. Informes Antropologicos 1:5-34.

Carneiro, Robert L.

Celedon, Rafael

de la Rosa, Nicolas

Drennan, R. D.

Gelber, Marilyn G.

Herrera de Turbay, Luisa F.
1985 Fisicultura Aborigen: Cambios de Vegetacion en la Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. Banco de la Republica, Bogotá.

Instituto Geográfico "Agustín Codazzi".

Knowlton, E.

Mason, Alden J.
1926 Coast and Crest in Colombia. Natural History 26(1):31-43.

Mayr, Juan

Miller D. and C. Tilley

Nicholas, Francis C.
Oyuela Caycedo, Augusto


1989 Investigaciones Arqueológicas en la Región Baja del Río Gaira, Departamento del Magdalena. Fundación de Investigaciones Arqueológicas del Banco de la República, Bogotá, in press.

Preuss, K. T.


Rappaport, Roy A.


Reichel-Dolmatoff, G.

1951 Datos Históricos Culturales Sobre las Tribus de la Antigua Gobernación de Santa Marta. Banco de la República, Bogotá.


Restrepo Tirado, Ernesto

1975 Historia de la Provincia de Santa Marta. Colcultura, Bogotá.

Romero, Fray Francisco.


Sereje da Ossa, Margarita.


Sievers, Wilhelm


Simon, Fray Pedro.


Van der Hammen, T. Ruiz, Pedro.

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF GENDER

Proceedings of the Twenty-Second Annual Conference of the Archaeological Association of the University of Calgary

Edited by Dale Walde and Noreen D. Willows

The University of Calgary
Archaeological Association, 1991
ISBN 0-88953-140-4