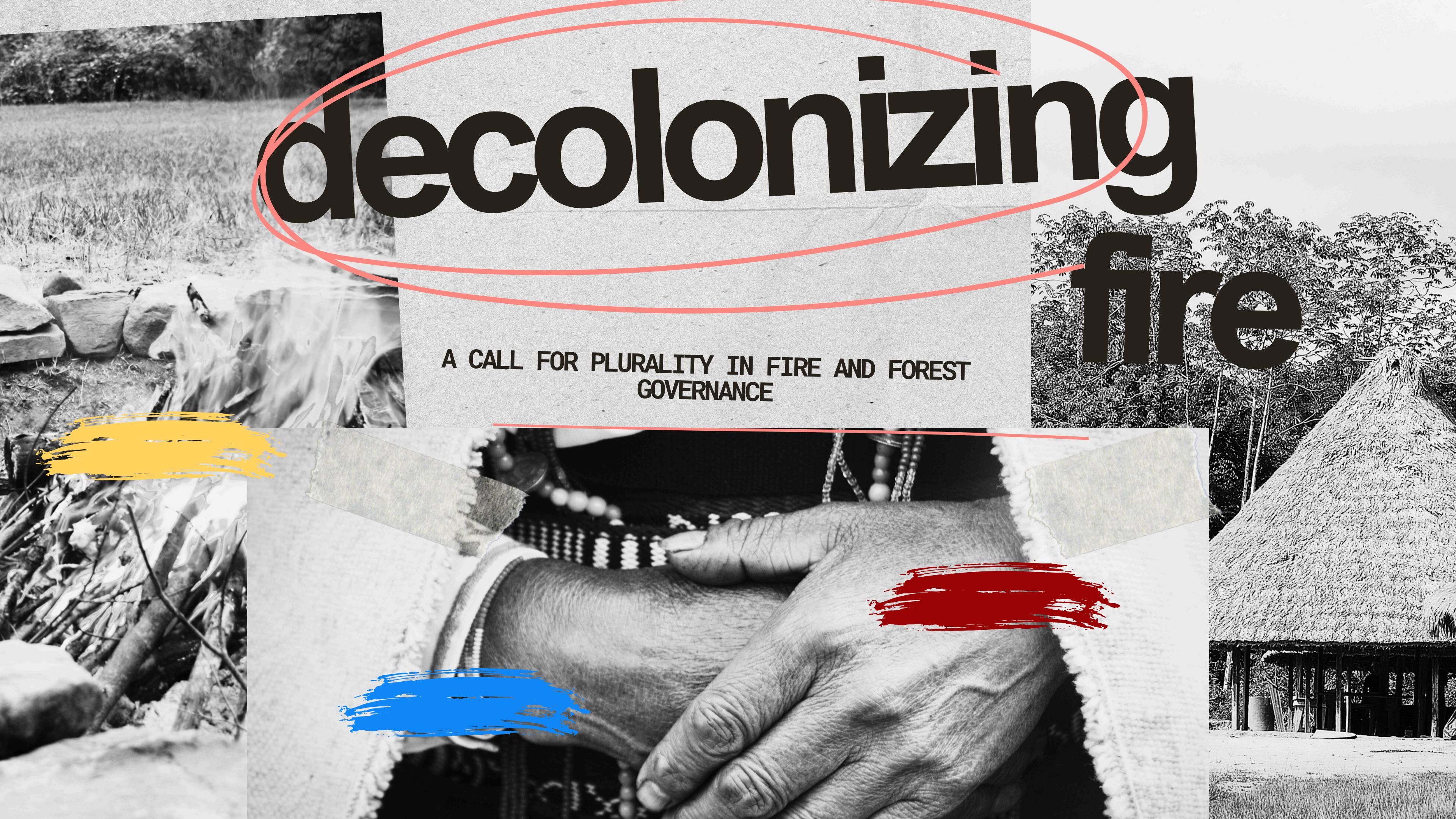


decolonizing fire

A CALL FOR PLURALITY IN FIRE AND FOREST GOVERNANCE



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What does
fire
mean to
you?





**for Indigenous People
fire is not merely**

a physical or ecological phenomenon

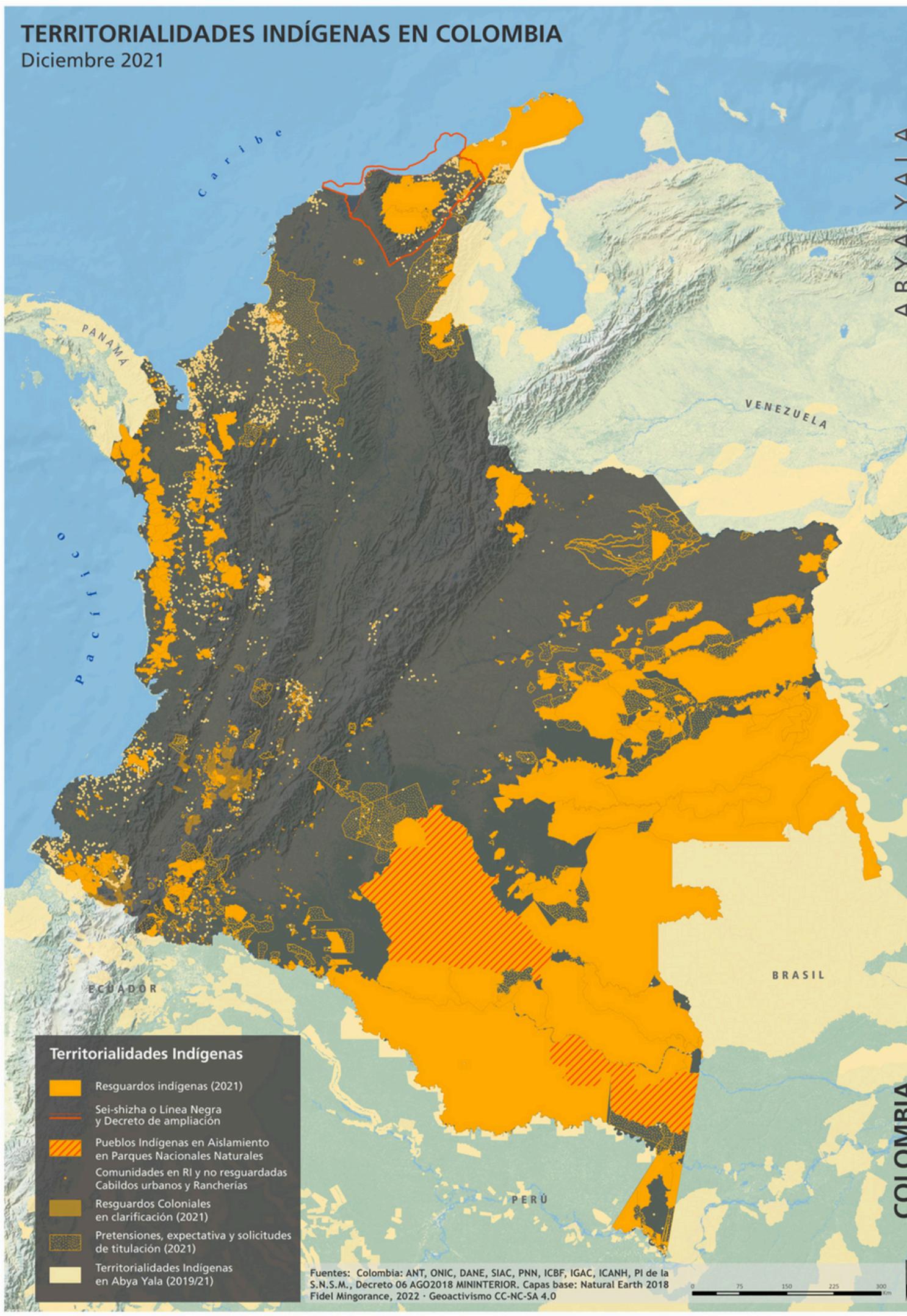
**but a sacred, transformative
force**

**404 million ha are
Indigenous
Territories in Latin
America**



TERRITORIALIDADES INDÍGENAS EN COLOMBIA

Diciembre 2021



52% of Colombian territory is covered by native forests

In Colombia, wildfires have always been managed from a **fire-suppression perspective.**

PL557/2025 represents an opportunity.

📍 Caribbean

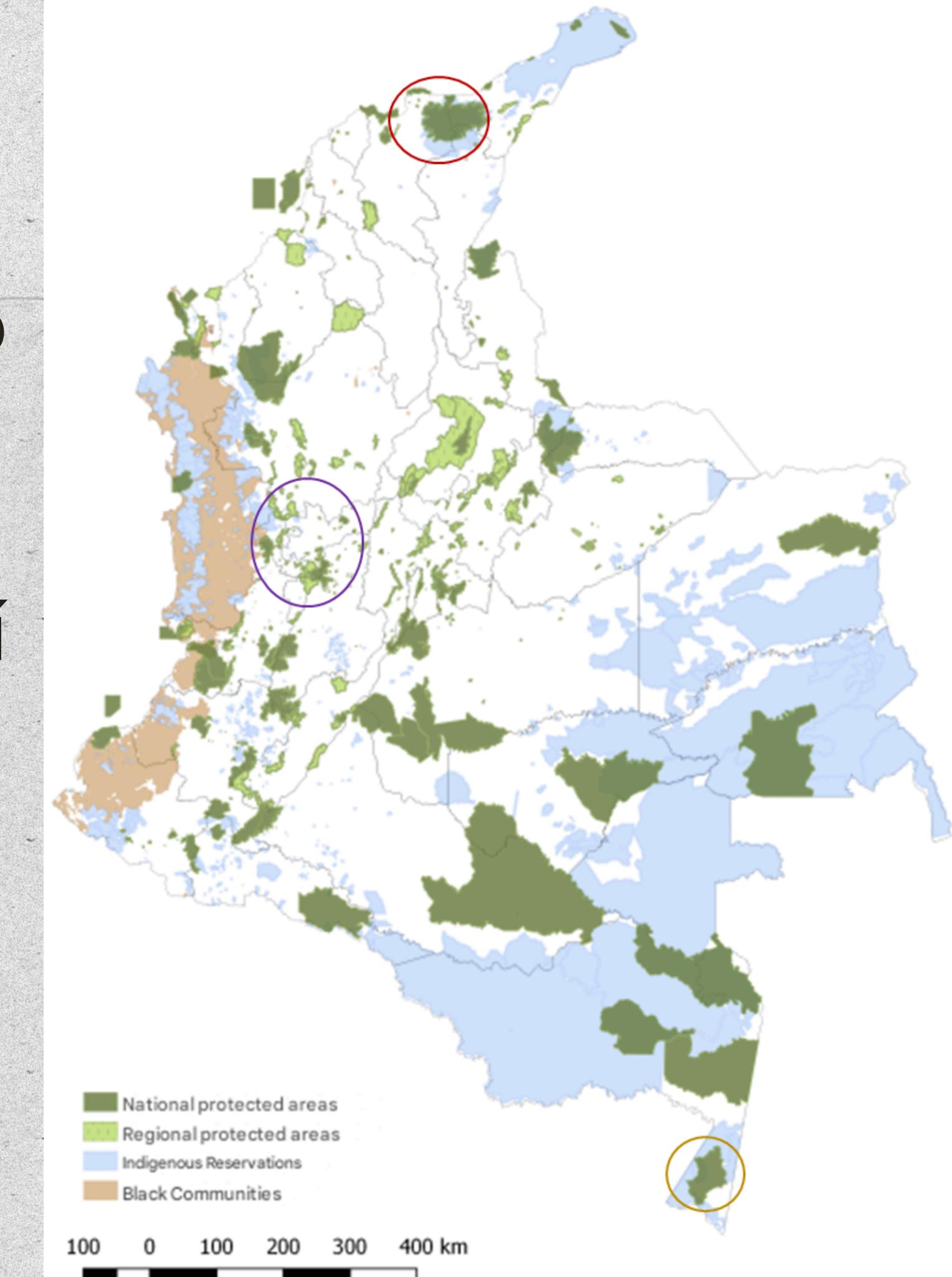
Arhuaco

📍 Andes

Pijao, Embera Chamí

📍 Amazon

Tikuna, Uitoto

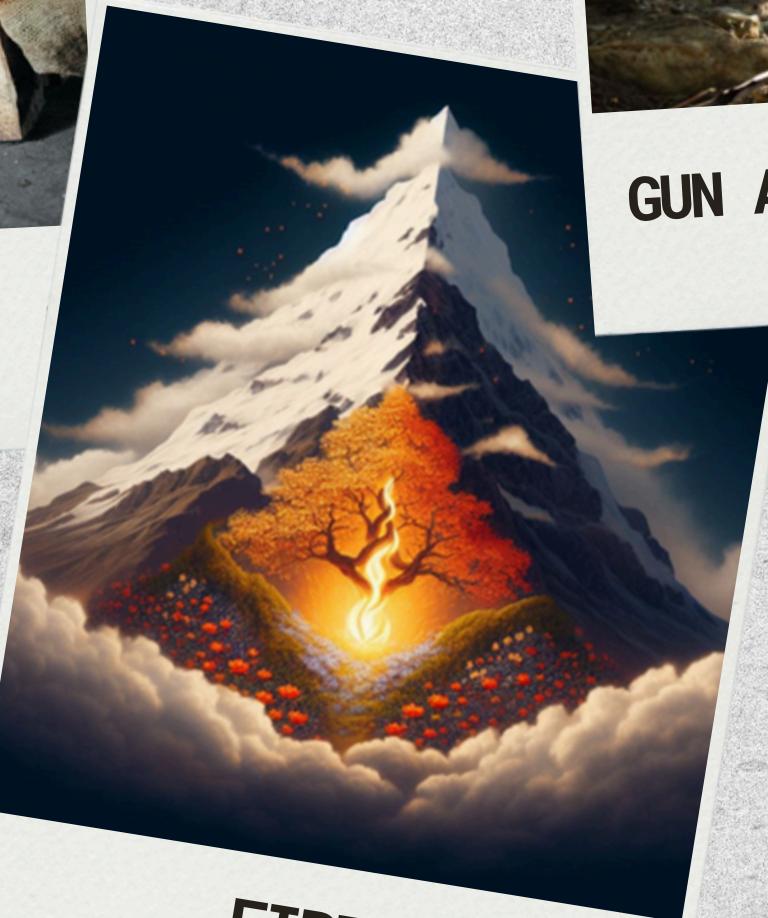
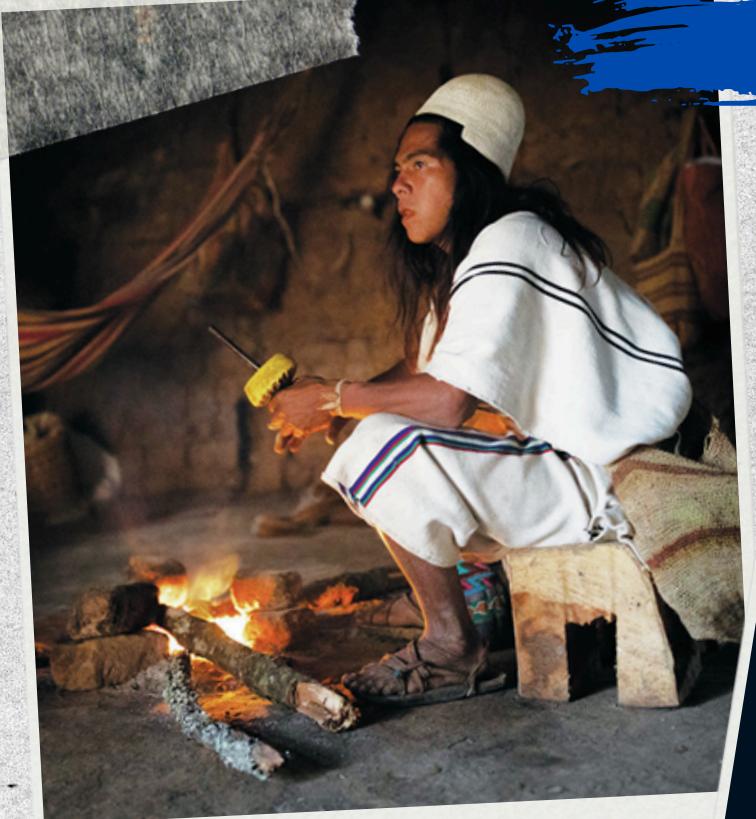


methodology

This study centers Indigenous voices through narrative interviews with traditional knowledge holders from five communities. A three-phase process to ensure co-authorship, respect, and epistemic plurality.

Three phases:

1. Literature review and context (life plans, legal frameworks, literature review)
2. Narrative interviews: Conducted with five traditional knowledge holders (Mamo - Arhuaco, Jaibaná - Embera Chami, Mohano - Pijao, Sabedor - Tikuna, Uitoto.)
3. Validation and synthesis (knowledge review and co-authorship)- an intercultural approach respecting oral tradition and spiritual authority.



Arhuaco

Guided by the Mamos, every interaction with fire or forest must be compensated spiritually to preserve cosmic balance.

- Fire (Gey) has spiritual essence (ánuwe) and origins (Seyrérigun).
- Different types of fire in nature (tree, stone, coal) each regulate climate and life.
- Rituals and offerings maintain balance; failure brings natural disasters.
- Fire is a being—"mamo fire," guiding through ceremonies and healing.
- Forests and elements have spiritual parents; everything must be done in alignment with the Law of Origin.

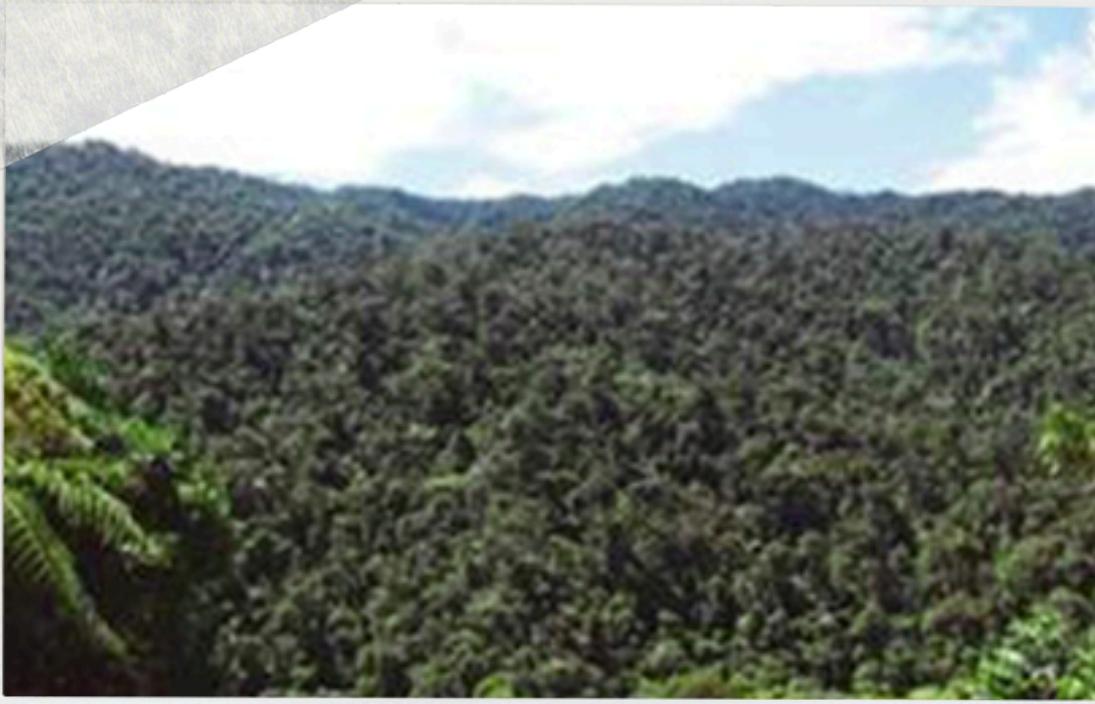
Pijao

"We are made of fire. Tobacco is our sacred fire plant, the tulpa our ancestral hearth. Fire cures, cleanses, and connects us to spirits, volcanoes, and ancestral legends. It is both guardian and guide".

- Cosmology tells of fire stolen by Chimbilá the bat and gifted to humans.
- Fire is used for cleansing seeds, curing sickness, and maintaining balance.
- Ceremonies and offerings acknowledge the spiritual guardians of the land.
- Ritual burning practices enhance biodiversity and soil health, rooted in reciprocity and spiritual protection.

TOTARCO TAMARINDO
RESGUARDO

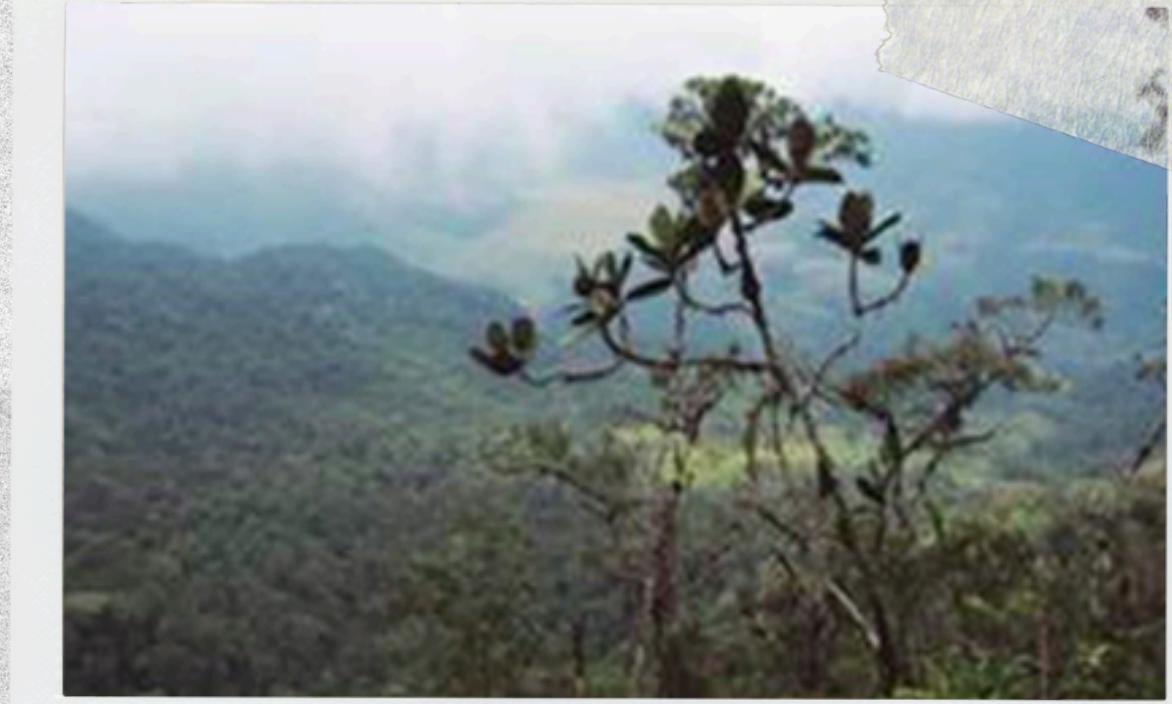
THE BAT CHIMBILÁ
(PIJAO MYTHOLOGY)



NUESTRA SEÑORA CANDELARIA DE LA
MONTAÑA RESGUARDO



TULPA



NUESTRA SEÑORA CANDELARIA DE LA
MONTAÑA RESGUARDO



Emberá Chamí

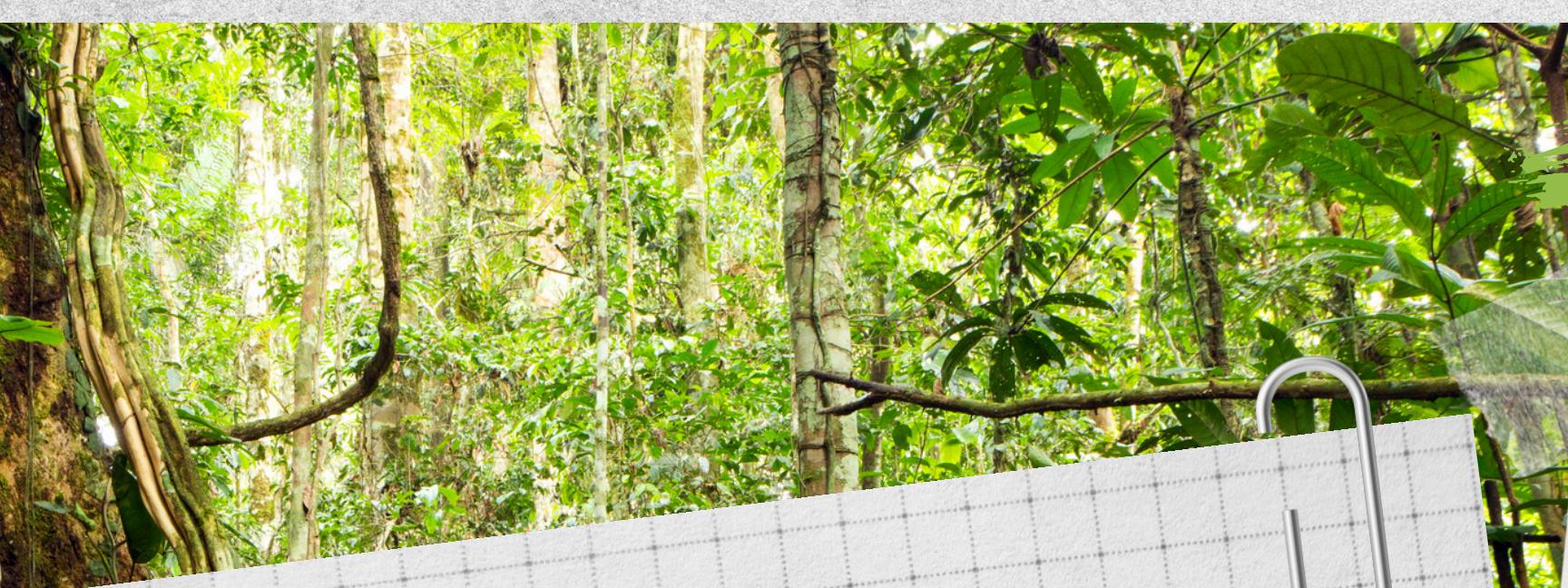
"Fire transforms and speaks. It protects and purifies. Women keep it alive, and its smoke carries stories and intentions. Jai spirits in every tree, stone, and flame guide our healing and renewal."

- Fire is always present in homes and rituals; it purifies, protects, and heals.
- The tulpa connects people to the spiritual realm; smoke cleans body and home.
- Women are the wind that keeps fire alive; fire "dances" or "sighs" depending on its mood.
- Spirits (Jai) live in natural elements; disrespect brings illness or imbalance.
- Loss of forest and disconnection from tradition are seen as signs of a world out of balance.

Tikuna

U'uema—fire—was born from lightning. It warms, cooks, and protects. Linked to sacred trees and cosmology, fire is used with care in chagras and ceremonies, supported by spiritual guardians and ecological stewards.

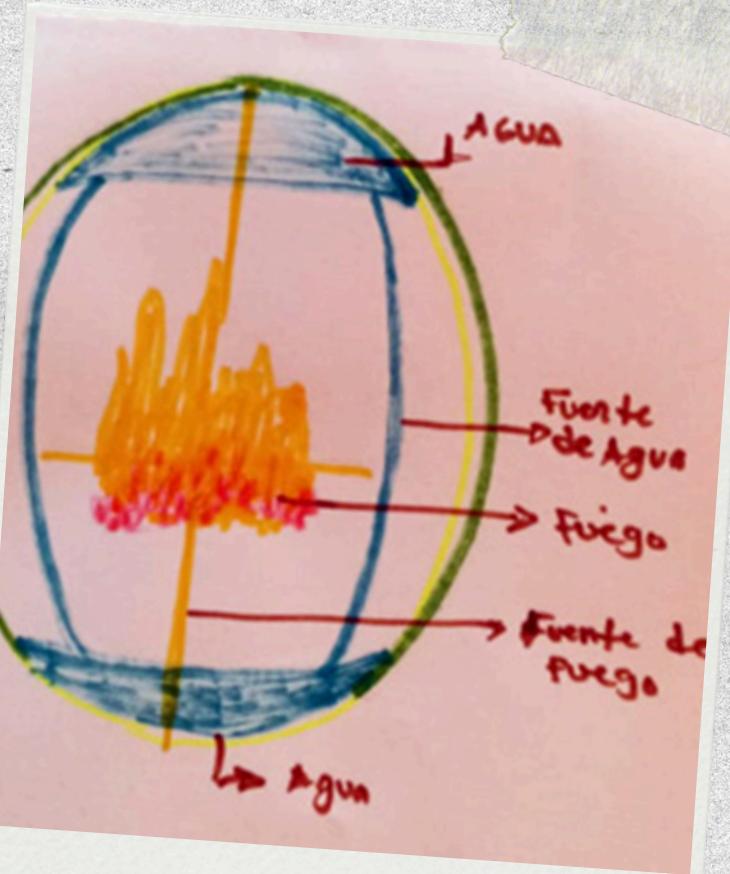
- Fire (U'uema) is born from lightning and linked to sacred trees.
- Used in food, ceremony, and chagras through controlled burns and ecological knowledge.
- Fire trees (e.g., aguaje) contrast with water trees (e.g., ceiba); forests mediate fire's impact.
- Spirituality is expressed through feeling, not words—balance is felt, not explained.
- Deforestation increases fire risk; Tikuna Environmental Guard plays a key role in protecting territory.



SAN MARTÍN DE
AMACAYACU
RESPARDO



SAN MARTÍN DE
AMACAYACU
RESPARDO



REPRESENTATION OF FIRE





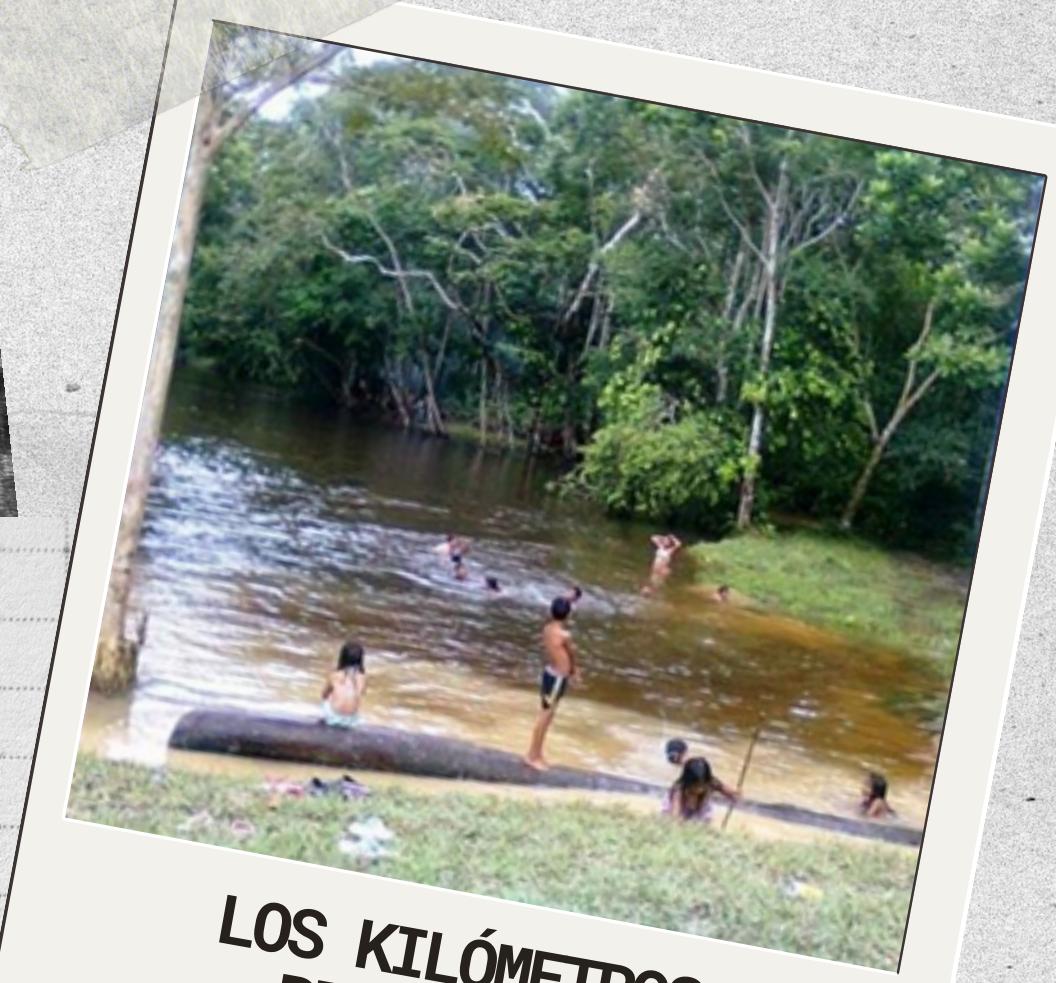
Utoto



HUMMINGBIRD
STEALS THE FIRE

Fire was gifted by the sun god and carried to us by a hummingbird. It lives in the maloca, teaches sufficiency, and is passed down to each new generation. Fire misuse is not tradition—it is disconnection.

- Fire was stolen from the sun god by a hummingbird; a sacred gift.
- Fire use is guided by "only what is necessary"—a philosophy of sufficiency.
- Intergenerational teaching ensures chagra management and fire safety.
- The maloca is the heart of ritual life; fire is central in collective well-being.
- Recent fires are linked to deforestation and external landholders, not tradition.



LOS KILÓMETROS
RESGUARDO





Indigenous fire stewardship offers holistic frameworks that integrate ecological, cultural, and spiritual dimensions.





An experimental burn initiated by indigenous Pemón members of PCIV brigades. Photo: Bibiana Bilbao

Not all fires are wildfires Gran Sabana in Canaima National Park, Venezuela

- Pemon People have sophisticated fire knowledge for livelihoods and forest protection
- Collaborative burning at savanna-forest edges prevents catastrophic wildfires
- Fire exclusion increases fuel loads, intensifying risks under warmer, drier climates
- Field research with Indigenous peoples, firefighters, officials, and scientists fostered a paradigm shift
- Led to participatory fire management principles adopted by INPARQUES
- Strengthened trust and engagement of Indigenous communities

Under a business-as-usual scenario, there is an increased likelihood of more frequent and severe wildfires, due to higher temperatures and droughts associated with climate change, altered fire regimes with accumulating combustible material under “zero fire” policies changes (...), and changes in land use from local practices to agro-industrial exploitation. (Bilbao, 2022)

“We have come to the conclusion that our Peoples are not opposed to development—rather, development must be adjusted; it cannot stand above our rights and lead to the disappearance of cultures. On the contrary, it must build and guarantee the continuity of cultures.”

– Elver Zapata, Arhuaco Indigenous leader.

**Fire management planning
and implementation must
consider the benefits and
learn from the indigenous
use of controlled fire.**



Integrated Fire Management (IFM) represents a valuable shift in theory, aiming to move from fire exclusion to a more holistic, landscape-based, and participatory approach, with the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge.



**Thanks
moeechí
buturu
kidibai
duni**



Let's connect