



ALUNA

Press Pack

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Short Synopsis

In 1990, a BBC1 documentary film brought global attention to a remote South American people, the Kogi of Colombia, who were determined to caution us about environmental damage to the earth. Now, two decades later and convinced that their message has gone unheeded, the next generation of Kogi are reaching out to the world once more with a much more specific warning about the future of the planet.

Full Synopsis

Twenty years ago Alan Ereira's influential television film *From The Heart of the World: The Elder Brothers' Warning*, brought global attention to the Kogi people of Colombia - a remote and ancient South American civilization - who were determined to caution us about environmental damage to the earth. A true 'lost civilization', who regard themselves as the guardians of the earth, the Kogi once traded with the Mayans and Aztecs. They survived the Spanish conquests by retreating into their isolated mountain massif, the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta.

Having remained hidden for centuries, the Kogi surfaced in Ereira's 1990 film with an environmental message that was ahead of its time, a warning about how we, their 'younger brother', were destroying the ecosystem by plunder. But the Kogi have continued to see frightening changes to their homeland as highways and power plants spring up and glacial melt, ferocious storms, landslides, floods, droughts and deforestation continue to take their toll.

The Kogi maintain that their warning was rooted in their own scientific knowledge. Aware that their message changed nothing, they concluded that they needed to find a way to convey their message with scientific authority. They are aware of the problems - they have no writing, are educated in a very different way from us, their language is not understood by any anthropologist and their perception of the world is fundamentally different from ours. But they are sure that unless we can hear and learn from what they know, we are on the road to disaster.

They decide to shoot a cinema film in which they make an extraordinary journey along the Colombian coast laying 400km of gold thread. The journey begins with 70 year old Mama Shibulata, a Kogi leader coming to England to collect the thread. On a visit to an observatory, Shibulata is soon discussing dark energy with the Professor of Astronomy at the California Institute of Technology, and correctly identifying objects seen by the Hubble telescope.

Back in Colombia they begin laying out the thread to illustrate their understanding of the hidden connectedness in nature. They baffle the film-maker and encounter scientific skepticism which they see as being rooted in willful blindness to nature. They are driven to break away from their planned journey to demonstrate more visibly what they mean. By the time they resume the thread-laying they have begun to find a language which Western scientists understand and they encounter leading scientific authorities who discuss and corroborate the rational basis of the Kogis' ancient knowledge of nature and the universe. The repeated theme of these encounters is confirmation by distinguished scientists that we can learn from what the Kogi are saying. Eventually the Kogi show how the thread leads to an apocalyptic landscape but they still retain the hope that we can learn to care for the world properly.

Filmed over three years, this ambitious feature-length documentary project initiated by the Kogi - and including footage filmed by them - is an authentic voice of an indigenous people. The Kogi and the Tairona Heritage Trust that supports them will receive 24% of the net income of the film.

Credits and Contact Details

Director /Producer: Alan Ereira
Executive Producer: Ben Woolford
Associate Producer: Stefania Buonajuti
Director of Photography: Paulo Perez
Editor: Andrew Philip
Music: Alejandro Ramirez Rojas
Production Manager: Jean-Paul Mertinez
Production Co-ordinator: Janet Wilson

Produced by Aluna the Movie Ltd. in association with Organizacion Gonawindua Tairona

For further information contact alunathemovie@aol.com

The Kogi - Facts and figures

- The Kogi do not have writing or the wheel. They have preserved an ancient understanding of the natural world. They believe that knowledge is lost with each successive generation.
- 'Aluna' refers to a cosmic consciousness, in which all things exist as ideas. 'Aluna' is the mind inside nature - it means idea, consciousness, thought and essence.

- The Kogi population is around 18,000 – it has increased by approx. 6,000 since Ereira’s first film in 1990.
- The Kogi are the heirs to an ancient civilisation that lived in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Colombia. Their ancestors were a pre-Colombian Tairona civilization which survived the Spanish conquests by retreating into the mountains.
- These ancestors existed alongside and traded with the Mayans and Aztecs.
- The Kogi follow a traditional way of life stretching back over 1500 years. They construct small towns but live mostly on individual farms. By keeping themselves apart from the modern world they have preserved their ancient lifestyle and culture.
- The Kogi consider the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta to be the ‘heart of the world’.
- The Sierra Nevada is the highest coastal mountain range in the world rising to nearly 19,000 feet. Its unique structure means that it encompasses a wealth of different climates and ecosystems from snow-capped mountain peaks down to the Caribbean coast. The 36 rivers that flow from it provide water for 1.2 million people.
- The Kogi call themselves the ‘Elder Brothers’ and believe that we, the ‘younger brothers’ are destroying the planet.
- No anthropologist can speak the Kogi language and only a handful of Kogi speak Spanish. Kogi means ‘jaguar’ in the Kogi language.
- Kogi society is divided into three tiers: Mamas are the traditional authority who connect daily with Aluna to learn how things are to be done. Cabos are constables, who deal with the practical aspects of the village, and Commisarios are political leaders. Both Cabos and Commisarios are appointed by Mamas.
- Mamas are chosen in infancy and then educated almost entirely in darkness until the age of 18 or so.
- *From The Heart of the World: The Elder Brothers’ Warning* helped shape the 1991 Rio Conference, prompted the King of Spain to visit the Kogi, and led to a complete transformation of the Colombian attitude towards the Kogi.
- Since this first documentary, every subsequent Colombian president has visited the Kogi to receive a blessing.
- After making the first film Alan Ereira created the Tairona Heritage Trust to assist the Kogi in the process of decolonisation of the Sierra. Donations to the Trust have enabled the indigenous people to buy and restore their land.
- Because gold does not decay or change in any way it is linked in Europe, Africa and America to transcendence and immortality. The Kogi connect it with the fertility of the earth.
- Tairona gold work was the finest in the Americas. It used an alloy with a very low gold content but a very fine gold surface and required a technology which has been lost.

Director Biography - Alan Ereira

Alan Ereira is an award-winning documentary British filmmaker and author. Educated at Queens’ College Cambridge, he joined the BBC in 1965, producing radio and TV documentaries for 30 years and contributing films to the Timewatch strand amongst others.

Ereira’s 1990 film *From The Heart of the World: The Elder Brothers’ Warning* and accompanying book *The Elder Brothers’ Warning* charted his visits to the Kogi.

Ereira collaborated with Terry Jones (Monty Python) on the documentary series *Crusades* (1995), *Terry Jones’ Medieval Lives* (2004) and *Terry Jones’ Barbarians* (2006), with whom he also co-authored the respective companion books.

Since making his first documentary on the Kogi, Alan Ereira has created a small NGO called the Tairona Heritage Trust. The Trust works on behalf of Gonavindua Tairona, the political organisation founded by the Mamas to represent the interests of the indigenous peoples of the Sierra in the face of increasing Western pressure. www.taironatrust.org

Awards:

1978 Japan Prize for Radio *The Battle of the Somme* (BBC) (bi-annual international award)
1988 RTS Best Documentary Series for *Armada* (BBC) (wrote/produced/directed/narrated)
1995 Golden Apple Award Ohio, Certificate of Merit San Francisco Golden Gate Award, Bronze Award "Best Achievement", Monitor Awards, NY for *Crusades* (BBC)
1996 Missoula International Wildlife Film Festival, Best Script *Spirits of the Jaguar* (BBC)
2002 RTS South Best Single Documentary, *The Hidden History of Sex and Love* (Discovery)

Bibliography:

1981 *The People's England*
1981 *The Invergordon Mutiny*
1990 *The Heart of the World* (now available as *The Elder Brothers' Warning*)
1994 *Crusades* (with Terry Jones)
2004 *Medieval Lives* (with Terry Jones)
2005 *Barbarians* (with Terry Jones)

Language

'Shi' means thread

'bul' means knowledge or wisdom

'ata' means father

Mama Shibulata

70-year-old Mama Shibulata like the other Mamas in the film is a traditional man who grew up in an isolated territory. None of the Kogi Mamas in *Aluna* speaks Spanish.

Before the three Kogi travelled to London they had no legal identity, hence the film beginning with them having to register as Colombian citizens. Mama Shibulata's daughter Francisca, is probably the first Kogi woman to have left Colombia since the conquest.

Professor Alex Rogers

Professor in Conservation Biology, Fellow of Somerville College Oxford, he is a Commissioner for the International Commission on Land Use, Change and Ecosystems for the Global Legislators Organisation for a Balanced Environment (GLOBE International). He is also the Scientific Director of the International Programme on the State of the Ocean (IPSO).

Professor Jonathan Baillie

Conservation Programmes Director at the Zoological Society of London, Jonathan is the driving force behind the EDGE of Existence programme and a global authority on the status and trends of threatened species.

Professor Richard Ellis

Steele Professor of Astronomy, Caltech he was awarded the Gold Medal of the Royal Astronomical Society in 2011. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society, the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the Institute of Physics.

So what do we do now? The initiative to Eradicate Ecocide

Ecocide is the extensive damage to, destruction of or loss of ecosystem(s) of a given territory, whether by human agency or by other causes, to such an extent that peaceful enjoyment by the inhabitants of that territory has been or will be severely diminished.

ALUNA is meant to be an impetus for change.

The Kogi understand the earth as a living being, and it needs to be cared for as a living being. It also needs legal protection. So far as they are concerned, this is at the heart of the “original law” which governs us. So they urge the world to adopt the proposal to designate Ecocide as a crime against world peace under the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court.

The first steps in this process are for governments to commit themselves to this objective and for citizens to make their support known, by signing Wish20, the global petition.

<http://wish20.upriser.com/>