

Preface

Anthropology today lives with a paradox: although continually seeking to rethink its future, it is still grappling with its colonial legacy and its entanglement with enduring global asymmetries and dependencies. Anthropologists from the Global North, through research in the Global South, both unavoidably reproduce these imbalances – while at the same time attempting, often with frustratingly limited success, to counteract them. In this space of contradiction, presenting more-than-Western realities and conceptions is both risky – liable to be read as exoticising – and vital, as it unsettles Western universals and makes other lived realities visible, socially actionable, epistemically valid and politically consequential. In this context, the present book represents an attempt to strike a balance between three different imperatives: firstly, fulfilling the requirements of a doctoral project by contributing to current anthropological debates and theory formation; secondly, challenging epistemic inequalities by recognising and legitimising alternative lifeworlds; and, thirdly, responding to the Yukpa's efforts to preserve and strengthen their territory, ways of life, and self-determination. In doing so, I seek to illuminate complexities and embrace contradictions rather than smooth them over, while honouring both the enduring heritage and vitality of the Yukpa communities and the individuals within them – particularly those in the Yukpa territory of Sokorhpa, which forms the focus of this study.

The cover design of this book itself is a balancing act between a visually engaging presentation and a depiction of the ethnographic setting that avoids both exoticism and arbitrariness. It shows the cloud-draped mountains of the Serranía del Perijá and a donkey saddled for riding. Together with the title and in reference to posthumanist debates – debates that extend social agency to more-than-human beings – the image purposefully creates a dissonance. As will become evident throughout this book, people in Sokorhpa rarely engage in social communication with animals – and, to my knowledge, not at all with donkeys. Instead, social interactions are directed toward the deceased and an agricultural deity, whose communicative agency often manifests in weather phenomena, including clouds. Such social actors are often neglected in natural-scientific inspired posthumanist discourses, as they cannot be reduced to either Western-rooted biological or religious frameworks. Their relevance becomes legible only when other lifeworlds and conceptions of being are taken seriously – an endeavour that constitutes a central intel-

lectual undertaking of social and cultural anthropology, which is today most profoundly expressed within the framework of a posthumanist anthropology inspired by the 'ontological turn'.

In recognising the worlds inhabited and shaped by the people of Sokorhpa, I dedicate this book to the beauty of the Serranía del Perijá and, most importantly, to its people. May this work stand as a scholarly contribution to their ongoing efforts to foster recognition and respect for their ways of living.

Marburg, 12.09.2025